The Triune God:

A Coherent Defense Rooted in Scripture and Jewish Texts

D. Gene Williams Jr., PhD

Defend the Word Ministries

NorthPointe Church

ABSTRACT

This paper defends the Christian doctrine of the Trinity by drawing from Jewish texts, mystical traditions, and theological concepts found in the Hebrew Bible and later Jewish writings. Without relying on New Testament authority, the argument demonstrates that a triune God is not only coherent but also necessary within Jewish monotheism. Through an examination of key theophanies, personifications of divine Wisdom and the Spirit, insights from the Zohar, early rabbinic debates, and the scholarship of Michael Heiser and Michael Brown, this paper shows that the Trinity provides the most consistent explanation for the complexity of God's nature as revealed in Jewish thought. Far from being a foreign concept imposed on Jewish theology, the Trinity is presented as the fulfillment and deepening of mysteries already present within Jewish understanding, bridging Judaism and Christianity in their exploration of God's unity and plurality.

I. INTRODUCTION

The doctrine of the Trinity—one God in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is central to Christian theology but often perceived as conflicting with Judaism's strict monotheism.[1] This tension has led many to believe that the Trinity is a later Christian innovation, foreign to Jewish thought. However, closer examination of the Hebrew Bible, mystical traditions, and early Jewish theological discussions reveals that elements of divine plurality are embedded within Jewish scripture and tradition.[2]

This paper challenges the assumption that the Trinity is alien to the Jewish understanding of God. By exploring key biblical theophanies, the personifications of divine Wisdom and the Spirit, insights from the Zohar, and early rabbinic debates, this study demonstrates that a complex unity within God is not only conceivable within a Jewish framework but necessary for a fuller understanding of God's nature.[3]

Rather than relying on New Testament sources, this paper draws from Jewish texts to argue that the Trinity offers the most coherent explanation for the plurality of God evident in Jewish scripture and tradition. In doing so, it seeks to bridge the theological insights of Judaism and Christianity, revealing that the seeds of Trinitarian doctrine were already present in early Jewish thought.[4]

---

[1] Alan F. Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven: Early Rabbinic Reports About Christianity and Gnosticism* (Leiden: Brill, 1977), 47–49.

[2] James L. Kugel, *The God of Old: Inside the Lost World of the Bible* (New York: Free Press, 2003), 77–78.

[3] Ibid., 81–83.

[4] Daniel C. Matt, trans., *The Zohar: Pritzker Edition, Volume 3* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 288b; Gershom Scholem, *Kabbalah* (New York: Dorset Press, 1974), 107–109.

II. THEOPHANIES IN THE HEBREW BIBLE: MANIFESTATIONS OF A PLURAL UNITY

The Hebrew Bible contains several accounts where God appears in multiple, distinct forms, or through divine agents, often called theophanies. These manifestations offer an early glimpse into a complexity within God's nature that suggests a plural unity. Such theophanies, where God reveals Himself as more than a simple singularity, can be understood as precursors to the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, which formalizes this divine complexity into a framework of three persons in one essence.[5]

The Angel of the Lord as a Distinct but Divine Being

One of the most prominent examples of divine plurality in the Hebrew Bible is the figure of the Angel of the Lord. In several key passages, this figure appears with divine authority, speaking as God, yet remains distinct from the Lord. For instance, in Genesis 16:7-13,[6] the Angel of the Lord appears to Hagar, who then calls Him "the God who sees me," recognizing His divine identity. Similarly, in Genesis 22:11-12, the Angel speaks to Abraham, declaring, "I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son from Me," thus speaking as God Himself.[7]

---

[5] Michael Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015), 156–158; *Midrash Rabbah*, Exodus 3, in *Midrash Rabbah*, trans. H. Freedman and Maurice Simon (London: Soncino Press, 1939), 1:15.

[6] *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Genesis 16:7-13.

[7] Kugel, *The God of Old*, 77–78; Michael L. Brown, *Answering Jewish Objections to Jesus: Volume 2 - Theological Objections* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 21–23.

Michael Heiser's research into the divine council and the role of divine agents highlights how these encounters suggest a complete understanding of God's nature. The Angel of the Lord is not merely a messenger but acts as a distinct divine person who shares in the identity of God. This pattern is evident in Exodus 3, where the Angel of the Lord appears to Moses in the burning bush and speaks as God: "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (Exodus 3:6). This dual role—being both sent by and representing God—prefigures the Trinitarian relationship between the Father and the Son.[8]

Michael Brown points out that these appearances of the Angel of the Lord were a source of debate among early Jewish scholars. While some considered these figures to be exalted angels, others acknowledged their divine status but struggled to reconcile this with monotheism. The Christian understanding of the Trinity offers a coherent explanation for this apparent tension, recognizing the Angel as a prefiguration of the Son, distinct yet fully divine.[9]

While some interpretations attempt to explain the Angel of the Lord as merely an agent (shaliach) acting on behalf of God, this understanding is inadequate. In ancient Hebrew thought, the shaliach could represent a principal but never embody their essence. However, the Angel of the Lord receives worship, speaks as God in the first person, and is recognized as God by individuals like Hagar (Genesis 16:13) and Moses (Exodus 3:6), surpassing the typical role of an agent. This indicates that the Angel is not merely a

8 Heiser, *The Unseen Realm*, 160.

9 Kugel, *The God of Old*, 81–83; Brown, *Answering Jewish Objections*, 25–26.

representative but a distinct divine person who shares fully in God's identity and essence.[10]

Similarly, divine agents in the Hebrew Bible, such as angels, may act as messengers or perform tasks on God's behalf, but they do not embody God's essence or identity. The Angel of the Lord in these theophanies, however, exceeds the limitations of agency. He receives worship, speaks directly as God in the first person, and is identified as God by the individuals He encounters (e.g., Hagar in Genesis 16:13, Moses in Exodus 3:6). These actions go far beyond what an agent can lawfully do within the concept of Hebrew agency. The only plausible explanation for such authority and identification is that the Angel of the Lord is more than a mere representative—He is a distinct divine person sharing fully in the identity and essence of God.[11]

The Christian doctrine of the Trinity resolves this issue by recognizing that God can manifest Himself in distinct persons without compromising His unity. The Angel of the Lord, as a prefiguration of Christ, functions within the Godhead as a distinct person who can act and speak as God while still maintaining the oneness of the divine essence.[12]

The Three Visitors to Abraham

Genesis 18 presents another profound theophany in which Abraham is visited by three men, one of whom is identified as the Lord. The text alternates between the singular and plural, indicating that while all three visitors are divine agents, one specifically

---

10 Rashi's commentary on Exodus 3:6, in *The Pentateuch with Rashi's Commentary*, ed. and trans. A. M. Silbermann (London: Shapiro Vallentine, 1946), 3:6.

11 Heiser, *The Unseen Realm*, 162–163; Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven*, 47–49.

12 Brown, *Answering Jewish Objections*, 32; Marc Zvi Brettler, "Genesis," in *The Jewish Study Bible*, 22–23.

represents God Himself. Abraham's direct address to one of the visitors as "my Lord" and the subsequent dialogue suggest that this encounter reflects a deeper plurality within God.[13]

Jewish interpretations of this passage have traditionally understood the three visitors as angels, sent by God. However, as Michael Heiser notes in his study of the divine council, the ambiguity in the text leaves room for a more nuanced interpretation, where these visitors could represent distinct, divinely authorized beings who embody God's presence. From a Christian perspective, this scene can be seen as a foreshadowing of the plurality within God's nature, which later becomes formalized in the doctrine of the Trinity.[14]

Commander of the Lord's Army

In Joshua 5:13-15, Joshua encounters a figure identified as the Commander of the Lord's army, who is distinct from God the Father but receives worship and acts with divine authority. Joshua falls before Him in reverence, and the Commander instructs him to remove his sandals, mirroring God's command to Moses at the burning bush in Exodus 3. This act of worship signifies that this is not a mere angel but a divine figure, representing God's presence and authority.[15]

Michael Heiser suggests that this figure represents a divine intermediary, an agent who manifests God's presence without being simply God in His transcendent form. This

---

[13] Heiser, *The Unseen Realm*, 165-167; Midrash Rabbah, Genesis 18, in *Midrash Rabbah*, trans. H. Freedman and Maurice Simon (London: Soncino Press, 1939), 1:18.

[14] Shalom M. Paul, *Studies in the Book of Proverbs* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1992), 112-113; Heiser, *The Unseen Realm*, 170-171.

[15] Midrash Rabbah, Joshua 5, in *Midrash Rabbah*, trans. H. Freedman and Maurice Simon (London: Soncino Press, 1939), 1:22; Heiser, *The Unseen Realm*, 173.

intermediary role aligns closely with other theophanies in the Hebrew Bible where divine agents are distinct yet fully represent God. This reinforces the idea that God can interact with the world through multiple persons or manifestations without compromising His unity.[16]

Theophanies such as this one provide significant support for the Christian understanding of God's complex unity. The Trinity, which articulates the one God existing in three distinct persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—offers a coherent explanation for how God can operate through distinct agents, each sharing in the divine essence. The fact that the Commander of the Lord's army is worshiped, as only God should be, suggests a distinct divine personhood, prefiguring the second person of the Trinity, Christ, who is later revealed as the ultimate divine intermediary between God and humanity.[17]

These theophanies—whether it is the Angel of the Lord, the three visitors to Abraham, or the Commander of the Lord's army—showcase a plurality in the way God interacts with humanity. Though later Jewish theology moved toward interpreting these figures as mere angels or metaphors, the biblical text itself points toward a more complex unity within God. The Christian doctrine of the Trinity provides the most coherent framework for interpreting these manifestations, where God reveals Himself through distinct persons yet remains one in essence.[18]

---

[16] Ibid.; Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven*, 67-69.

[17] Brown, *Answering Jewish Objections*, 38–39; Brettler, *The Jewish Study Bible*, 25.

[18] Heiser, *The Unseen Realm*, 175-176.

III. DIVINE WISDOM AND LOGOS IN JEWISH WISDOM LITERATURE

Jewish wisdom literature presents another important avenue for exploring distinctions within the Godhead. The personification of divine wisdom, particularly in Proverbs, closely aligns with the Christian Logos doctrine, offering a bridge between Jewish and Christian theology.[19]

Proverbs 8: Wisdom as a Personified Aspect of God

Proverbs 8:22-31 presents Wisdom (Hokmah) as a divine agent who was present with God before creation. Wisdom is described as being "brought forth" by God and as a co-creator: "I was there when he set the heavens in place, when he marked out the horizon on the face of the deep" (Proverbs 8:27). This personification of Wisdom, which acts independently yet remains intimately connected with God, has striking parallels with the Logos (Word) in Christian theology.[20]

Michael Brown argues that Jewish objections to the personification of Wisdom often center on the fear that it compromises monotheism, but he suggests that these objections fail to account for the rich complexity of the text. The portrayal of Wisdom as both distinct and yet part of God's creative activity reflects a dynamic within God's nature that allows for distinction without violating His unity.[21]

---

[19] Leonard Greenspoon, "The Structure of Proverbs 1-9," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 109 (1990): 326-328; Brown, *Answering Jewish Objections*, 41-42.

[20] Rashi's commentary on Proverbs 8, in *The Pentateuch with Rashi's Commentary*, ed. and trans. A.M. Silbermann (London: Shapiro Vallentine, 1946), 8:22-23; Michael Heiser, *The Bible Unfiltered: Approaching Scripture on Its Own Terms* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2017), 56-57

[21] Ibid.; Paul, *Studies in the Book of Proverbs*, 117.

Targumic Traditions and the Memra

The Aramaic Targums frequently refer to the Memra (Word) of God as an agent of creation, revelation, and redemption. The Memra functions similarly to the Christian Logos, acting as a distinct divine figure who is intimately involved in God's interactions with the world. For example, in the Targum Neofiti on Genesis 1:3, the Memra is described as speaking the world into existence: "And the Memra of the Lord said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light."[22]

Heiser highlights how these Targumic traditions grappled with the idea of God's Word functioning as a distinct divine agent, suggesting that Jewish thought was already wrestling with the concept of a plurality within God's nature. Brown further points out that the Memra shows that even within pre-Christian Jewish thought, the idea of God's Word as a distinct person was present, though not fully developed. This offers a compelling connection to the Christian doctrine of the Logos.[23]

IV. Ruach Elohim: The Spirit of God in the Hebrew Bible

The *Ruach Elohim* (Spirit of God) plays a critical role in the Hebrew Bible, not only as God's power in action but also as a distinct presence involved in creation, prophecy, and renewal. This concept of the Spirit can be viewed as an early expression of the Holy Spirit within the Trinity. Jewish and Christian interpretations of the *Ruach* diverge, but the Hebrew Bible presents the Spirit as more than just an impersonal force,

[22] Targum Neofiti, Genesis 1:3, in *The Targums of Genesis* trans. Martin McNamara (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992), 3; Heiser, *The Bible Unfiltered*, 59-60

[23] Brown, *Answering Jewish Objections*, 44–45; Kugel, *The God of Old*, 89–90.

suggesting early inklings of the distinct personhood seen in later Christian Trinitarian theology.

The Spirit in Creation and Prophecy

The *Ruach Elohim* first appears in Genesis 1:2, where the Spirit hovers over the waters, participating in the creation of the world. This imagery evokes a powerful sense of the Spirit's creative and life-giving presence, as noted by Jewish scholar Nahum Sarna, who highlights that the Spirit in Genesis is portrayed as a “vital force” participating directly in bringing order out of chaos.[24] Similarly, Christian theologians, such as Gordon Wenham, argue that the depiction of the *Ruach* in this context suggests a distinct divine agent involved in shaping creation.[25]

The image of the Holy Spirit hovering over the waters in Genesis 1:2 is paralleled in Jewish thought by the protective and nurturing image of a bird hovering over its nest. Targum Pseudo-Jonathan describes the Spirit as "brooding like a dove," and Midrash Rabbah compares the Spirit to a bird shielding its young, suggesting that the Spirit was preparing creation for the emergence of life. These interpretations resonate with the Christian understanding of the Holy Spirit’s role in creation—not only hovering over but also protecting and nurturing the first life (cf. Psalm 104:30; Deuteronomy 32:11).[26]

For instance, Targum Pseudo-Jonathan interprets the Spirit's hovering as "brooding like a dove," a protective and life-sustaining image. Similarly, Midrash Rabbah

[24] Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation Commentary* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 5..

[25] Gordon Wenham, *Genesis 1-15* (Word Biblical Commentary 1; Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 17.

[26] *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* on Genesis 1:2; *Midrash Rabbah*, Genesis 2:4.

on Genesis compares the Spirit's movement over the waters to a bird protecting its young, reflecting an understanding of the Spirit as preparing and nurturing the primordial waters for the emergence of life. These interpretations align with the Christian view that the Spirit not only hovered over creation but also protected and prepared it for the unfolding of God's creative work.[27]

This nurturing aspect of the Spirit's role in creation is echoed in Midrash on Deuteronomy, where the Spirit's presence in creation is linked to God's care for the world, much like a bird tending its nest. By hovering over the chaos, the Spirit ensures that the life to come will be sustained and protected, reflecting the intentionality and care that God imparts to the entire created order.[28]

The Personhood of the Spirit

Jewish thought often interprets the *Ruach* as God's breath or wind (*ruach* meaning "wind" or "spirit"), representing divine power rather than a distinct person. This view is reflected in the work of scholars such as Yair Lorberbaum, who notes that the *Ruach* in Jewish tradition generally functions as an extension of God's omnipresent power rather than as a separate entity.[29]

However, as Michael Brown points out, certain biblical texts go beyond this understanding by portraying the *Ruach* as an active, independent agent involved in divine action. Brown argues that the Spirit's role in creation and prophecy implies a distinct

---

[27] Ibid.

[28] *Midrash Deuteronomy Rabbah* 32:9, "Like an eagle that stirs up its nest and hovers over its young, spreading its wings to catch them."

[29] Yair Lorberbaum, *In God's Image: Myth, Theology, and Law in Classical Judaism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 135.

personality, even if not fully developed in Jewish thought. This is particularly evident in the way the Spirit speaks, guides, and acts with autonomy in the prophetic narratives, suggesting a deeper complexity.[30] For instance, in Ezekiel 37, the Spirit is commanded to breathe life into dry bones, acting as the agent of resurrection and renewal.

Michael Heiser further elaborates on this complexity by examining how the *Ruach* functions within the broader framework of divine plurality. Heiser points out that the *Ruach* is often associated with divine action that cannot be reduced to mere impersonal force.[31] Heiser notes that when the Spirit is described as "hovering" in Genesis 1:2, the Hebrew verb (*merahepet*) suggests an intentional, purposeful movement, indicating a being capable of deliberate action.

In Isaiah 11:2, the *Ruach* is described as resting upon the promised Messiah, endowing Him with wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, knowledge, and the fear of the Lord. The passage emphasizes the Spirit's active role in empowering leaders and prophets, as also seen in the stories of individuals such as Moses (Numbers 11:17), David (1 Samuel 16:13), and Ezekiel (Ezekiel 2:2). In these texts, the *Ruach* is not merely a metaphor for God's power but a distinct presence that interacts with, empowers, and guides specific individuals for God's purposes.

The prophetic tradition also highlights the *Ruach's* ongoing role in renewing and guiding Israel. Joel 2:28, for instance, speaks of a future outpouring of the Spirit upon all flesh, suggesting a democratization of the Spirit's influence, a theme later echoed in the Christian doctrine of Pentecost in Acts 2.

---

[30] Brown, *Answering Jewish Objections*, 44–46.

[31] Heiser, *The Unseen Realm*, 131–132.

The Spirit as a Prefiguration of the Holy Spirit

From a Christian theological perspective, the *Ruach Elohim* can be seen as a prefiguration of the Holy Spirit within the Trinity. Early Church Fathers, such as Irenaeus and Athanasius, frequently interpreted the *Ruach Elohim* as the same Spirit who would later be fully revealed in the New Testament. Athanasius, for instance, wrote that the Holy Spirit's work in creation and renewal mirrors the activity of the Spirit described in the Hebrew Bible.[32]

Moreover, the use of the *Ruach* in creation and prophecy parallels New Testament descriptions of the Holy Spirit's work in Christ's ministry, creation (John 1:3), and the believer's sanctification (Romans 8:11). As Gerald Bray notes, the continuity between the *Ruach Elohim* and the Holy Spirit demonstrates how the Hebrew Bible lays the groundwork for a Trinitarian understanding of God.[33] The *Ruach's* involvement in creation, prophecy, and renewal establishes a pattern of divine interaction that anticipates the fuller revelation of the Holy Spirit as a distinct person within the Godhead.

V. THE PLURALITY IN GENESIS 1:26 AND OTHER TEXTS

One of the most debated passages in both Jewish and Christian theology is Genesis 1:26, where God says, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." Various Jewish interpretations have been proposed to explain the use of the plural pronouns here, with some suggesting that God is speaking to a heavenly council of angels, while others posit that the plural is a rhetorical device to indicate deliberation. However, from a Trinitarian perspective, this plural pronoun points to a deeper internal

[32] Athanasius, *On the Incarnation of the Word*, trans. John Behr (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2011), 54-55.

[33] Gerald Bray, *The Doctrine of God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1993), 224.

dialogue within the Godhead, foreshadowing the later formalization of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity.[34]

Claims that Genesis 1:26 employs the "royal we" or pluralis majestatis fail to account for the historical context, as this linguistic device did not exist in the ancient Near East. Rather, the plural pronouns suggest a deeper internal dialogue within the Godhead, as also indicated in Genesis 11:7 and Isaiah 6:8. These examples point to a relational dynamic within God, aligning with the Christian understanding of the Trinity.[35]

Michael Brown argues that common Jewish explanations—such as God speaking to angels—do not fully resolve the theological implications of this passage. Angels are never portrayed as co-creators in the Hebrew Bible, nor are they described as sharing in the image of God. Thus, the idea that God would consult or involve them in the creation of humanity presents a theological difficulty. Michael Heiser's research further supports the idea that the plural pronouns in Genesis 1:26 indicate more than a rhetorical device. The text seems to hint at a complex plurality within the Godhead itself.[36]

Moreover, this use of plural pronouns is not isolated to Genesis 1:26. Other passages reinforce the idea of a relational dynamic within God. For instance, in Genesis 11:7, during the story of the Tower of Babel, God says, "Let us go down and confuse their language." Similarly, in Isaiah 6:8, God asks, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" These examples further suggest that the use of plural pronouns in the Hebrew

---

[34] Brettler, "Genesis," in *The Jewish Study Bible*, 12–13; Heiser, *The Unseen Realm*, 185.

[35] Rashi's commentary on Genesis 1:26, in *The Pentateuch with Rashi's Commentary*, ed. and trans. A.M. Silbermann (London: Shapiro Vallentine, 1946), 1:26; Brown, *Answering Jewish Objections*, 52-53.

[36] Targum Neofiti, Genesis 11:7, in *The Targums of Genesis*, trans. Martin McNamara (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992), 11:7; Heiser, *The Unseen Realm*, 188.

Bible is not merely a rhetorical flourish but points to a deeper divine conversation. From a Christian perspective, these plural pronouns are understood as early indications of the Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—communicating within the Godhead while maintaining the unity of the divine essence.[37]

VI. RABBINIC INTERPRETATIONS OF DIVINE PLURALITY

While rabbinic Judaism ultimately rejected ideas of plurality within God, early debates reveal that Jewish theologians grappled with similar issues to those addressed by the doctrine of the Trinity.[38]

Two Powers in Heaven

The rabbinic Two Powers in Heaven heresy, which condemned any notion of divine plurality, shows that early Jewish thought was not uniformly opposed to the idea of distinctions within God. Heiser's work highlights that this debate was evidence of an early Jewish wrestling with divine complexity. He argues that the Christian Trinity can be seen as resolving the theological tension within Jewish monotheism, offering a coherent model of divine plurality that remains true to the essence of monotheism.[39]

The *Two Powers in Heaven* doctrine, which allowed for a plurality within the Godhead, was accepted in certain Jewish circles prior to the rise of Christianity. However, after the ascension of Jesus and the growth of Christian belief in Jesus as divine, this concept was formally declared heretical by rabbinic Judaism. Around the 2nd century AD, following the Council of Yavneh, rabbinic authorities began to distance themselves

---

[37] Midrash Rabbah, Isaiah 6, in *Midrash Rabbah*, trans. H. Freedman and Maurice Simon (London: Soncino Press, 1939), 1:6; Heiser, *The Unseen Realm*, 191.

[38] Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven*, 92–94; Heiser, *The Unseen Realm*, 193.

[39] Ibid.; Brown, Answering Jewish Objections, 55–56.

from the idea of divine plurality. Influential figures like Rabbi Akiva contributed to this shift, and by the mid-2nd century, the *Two Powers* doctrine was explicitly condemned in rabbinic literature, such as the Tosefta Sanhedrin and the Babylonian Talmud.[40]

Interestingly, this doctrinal shift coincides with the period when Jewish leaders also ceased using the Septuagint (LXX), the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible that had been widely accepted among Jews for centuries. Around the late 1st century AD, following the Council of Yavneh, Jewish authorities began to distance themselves from the LXX, likely due to its extensive use by early Christians to support Jesus' messianic claims. As noted by scholars such as Emil Schürer and Sidney Jellicoe, this transition marked a significant divide between rabbinic Judaism and the emerging Christian community.[41] This rejection of the LXX, combined with Justin Martyr's accusations that Jewish authorities altered the Scriptures to obscure messianic prophecies, reflects the growing theological divergence between the two groups.[42]

Philo of Alexandria and the Logos

Philo of Alexandria (c. 20 BCE – 50 CE), a Hellenistic Jewish philosopher, sought to reconcile Greek philosophy with Jewish theology, drawing heavily from Platonic and Stoic traditions.[43] Central to his thought was the concept of the *Logos*, which he described as the rational, divine intermediary through which God created and

---

[40] *Tosefta Sanhedrin* 12:5; *Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin* 38a..

[41] Emil Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986), 1:108-112; Sidney Jellicoe, *The Septuagint and Modern Study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), 82-84.

[42] Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, trans. Thomas B. Falls (New York: Christian Heritage, 1948), 71-73.

[43] Philo's philosophical approach, combining Greek and Jewish thought, is discussed in Kugel, *The God of Old*, 190–192.

sustained the cosmos. Philo's *Logos* was not an independent deity but a divine agent that mediated between the transcendent God and the material world.[44] He sometimes referred to the *Logos* as a "second God," though not separate from the one true God, emphasizing its role in creation, revelation, and divine providence.[45]

This philosophical framework provided early Christians with a bridge to understand Christ as the divine *Logos* mentioned in John 1: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." While Philo's *Logos* was a rational, impersonal divine force,[46] Christianity adapted this concept to describe Christ as the personal and incarnate *Logos*. In contrast to Philo's impersonal force, the Christian *Logos* is fully divine and becomes flesh in the person of Jesus Christ.[47]

Michael Heiser and Michael Brown both acknowledge that Philo's *Logos* offers a crucial philosophical foundation for understanding God's self-expression as a distinct entity.[48] Philo's work helped bridge the gap between Jewish and Hellenistic thought, demonstrating that the idea of God's Word as a divine agent was already present in pre-Christian Jewish theology. This bridge is essential for understanding how the Trinity, rather than contradicting Jewish thought, builds upon its foundations. Philo's influence on

---

[44] For a discussion of Philo's Logos as a mediator, see David T. Runia, *Philo of Alexandria and the Timaeus of Plato* (Leiden: Brill, 1986), 211–213.

[45] Philo's concept of the Logos as a "second God" is addressed in James R. Royse, *Theological Exegesis in Philo's Allegorical Commentary* (Leiden: Brill, 1979), 122–124.

[46] The distinction between Philo's Logos and the Christian Logos is discussed in Alan F. Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven* (Leiden: Brill, 1977), 158.

[47] For more on the Christian interpretation of the Logos, see Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and Other Studies on the New Testament's Christology of Divine Identity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 43–44.

[48] Brown, *Answering Jewish Objections*, 36–37; Heiser, *The Unseen Realm*, 102–104.

early Christian apologists, such as Justin Martyr, further demonstrates the continuity of the Logos concept in both Jewish and Christian traditions.[49]

Beyond Agency: The Angel of the Lord as Divine Person

While some interpretations of these theophanies suggest that the Angel of the Lord acted as merely an agent of God, this view faces significant limitations. In ancient Hebrew thought, the concept of *shaliach* (agency) allowed a person to act with delegated authority, representing another in matters of law or negotiation. However, this agency did not transfer the essence or full identity of the principal to the agent. For instance, while an agent could make decisions on behalf of someone, they could not assume all personal rights or relationships of the one they represented.

Similarly, divine agents, such as angels, may serve as messengers or perform tasks for God, but they do not embody God's essence or identity. However, the Angel of the Lord in these theophanies goes beyond the typical limitations of agency. He receives worship, speaks as God in the first person, and is identified as God by those He encounters (e.g., Hagar in Genesis 16:13 and Moses in Exodus 3:6).[50] These actions surpass the role of an agent, indicating that the Angel of the Lord is more than a representative—He is a distinct divine person who fully shares in the identity and essence of God.

[49] For Philo's influence on early Christian thought and apologists, see Martin Hengel, *The Son of God: The Origin of Christology and the History of Jewish-Hellenistic Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 81–84.

[50] Heiser, *The Unseen Realm,* 165–167.

VII. THE ZOHAR AND THE MYSTICAL VISION OF DIVINE PLURALITY

Jewish mysticism, particularly in the Zohar, offers rich insights into the nature of God's unity and plurality. The Zohar presents a vision of God that echoes the Trinitarian understanding of distinct persons within a single divine essence. One of the most compelling passages in the Zohar speaks of God having "three heads" that are nevertheless united as one. This imagery is not meant to suggest polytheism but rather a complex unity within the divine nature that mirrors the Christian concept of the Trinity.

The Zohar states, "The Ancient Holy One is revealed with three heads, which are united in one, and that head is threefold exalted. The Ancient Holy One exists in three, and they are One" (*Zohar* III, 288b).[51] This mystical language points to a God who is one in essence but revealed through three distinct expressions. The parallel to the Christian Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is evident, as both traditions wrestle with the idea of how God's unity can accommodate distinctions within the divine nature.

In addition to the concept of the threefold head, the Zohar introduces the *Sefirot*, ten emanations through which God interacts with the world.[52] While the Sefirot are distinct, they do not exist independently from God but are integral to His unified essence. This framework allows for a plurality of divine manifestations, which resonates with the Christian understanding of the Trinity. Both systems emphasize that God's complex unity is not a contradiction of monotheism but an expression of the depth and richness of His nature.

---

[51] Matt, *The Zohar: Pritzker Edition*, vol. 3, 288b.

[52] Gershom Scholem, *Kabbalah* (New York: Dorset Press, 1974), 107–109.

VIII. CONCLUSION

The doctrine of the Trinity is not an imposition on Jewish monotheism but provides a coherent explanation for the complex unity of God as revealed in the Hebrew Bible and other Jewish writings.[53] Key theophanies, such as the appearances of the Angel of the Lord and the Commander of the Lord's army, indicate a plurality within God's identity that transcends the limitations of mere agency.[54] Similarly, the personification of divine Wisdom and the active role of the Spirit suggest distinct, yet fully divine, aspects of God's nature, pointing toward a triune [55]understanding of God.[56]

Jewish mystical traditions, particularly the Zohar, offer further glimpses into divine plurality that align with Trinitarian thought. The Zohar's portrayal of God's unity, alongside distinctions within His essence, mirrors the Christian understanding of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. While later rabbinic Judaism rejected notions of plurality within God, early Jewish thought engaged with these complexities, suggesting space for a richer understanding of God's nature.[57]

This paper has demonstrated that the concept of the Trinity is not foreign to Jewish theology but fulfills the divine mysteries already present within it. The Christian doctrine of the Trinity offers a theologically satisfying resolution to the tensions within Jewish monotheism, showing how God can be one in essence while existing in distinct

---

[53] Heiser, *The Unseen Realm*, 160.

[54] Midrash Rabbah, Genesis 16:7–13, in *Midrash Rabbah*, trans. H. Freedman and Maurice Simon (London: Soncino Press, 1939), 1:16.

[55] Brown, *Answering Jewish Objections*, 18–19; Heiser, *The Unseen Realm*, 156–158.

[56] Matt, *The Zohar*, 288b.

[57] Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 107–109.

persons. This study strengthens the theological dialogue between Judaism and Christianity, affirming that the Trinity is the most consistent framework for understanding God's unity and plurality within a shared monotheistic tradition.[58]

[58] Brown, *Answering Jewish Objections*, 21–23; Heiser, *The Unseen Realm*, 160.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Source

The Holy Bible, *English Standard Version.* Wheaton: Crossway Bibles, 2001.

Secondary Source

Alan F. Segal. *Two Powers in Heaven: Early Rabbinic Reports About Christianity and Gnosticism*. Leiden: Brill, 1977.

Athanasius. *On the Incarnation of the Word*. Translated by John Behr. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2011.

Bauckham, Richard. *Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and Other Studies on the New Testament's Christology of Divine Identity*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008.

Bray, Gerald. *The Doctrine of God*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1993.

Brettler, Marc Zvi. "Genesis." In *The Jewish Study Bible*, 12–13, 22–23. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989.

Brown, Michael L. *Answering Jewish Objections to Jesus: Volume 2 - Theological Objections*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000.

Freedman, H., and Maurice Simon, eds. *Midrash Rabbah*. London: Soncino Press, 1939.

Greenspoon, Leonard. "The Structure of Proverbs 1-9." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 109 (1990): 326-328.

Heiser, Michael. *The Bible Unfiltered: Approaching Scripture on Its Own Terms*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2017.

———. *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015.

Hengel, Martin. *The Son of God: The Origin of Christology and the History of Jewish-Hellenistic Religion*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976.

Jellicoe, Sidney. *The Septuagint and Modern Study*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968.

Justin Martyr. *Dialogue with Trypho*. Translated by Thomas B. Falls. New York: Christian Heritage, 1948.

Kugel, James L. *The God of Old: Inside the Lost World of the Bible*. New York: Free Press, 2003.

Lorberbaum, Yair. *In God's Image: Myth, Theology, and Law in Classical Judaism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.

Matt, Daniel C., trans. *The Zohar: Pritzker Edition*. Vol. 3. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006.

McNamara, Martin, trans. *The Targums of Genesis*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992.

Paul, Shalom M. *Studies in the Book of Proverbs*. Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1992.

Rashi. *The Pentateuch with Rashi's Commentary*. Edited and translated by A.M. Silbermann. London: Shapiro Vallentine, 1946.

Runia, David T. *Philo of Alexandria and the Timaeus of Plato*. Leiden: Brill, 1986.

Royse, James R. *Theological Exegesis in Philo's Allegorical Commentary*. Leiden: Brill, 1979.

Sarna, Nahum M. *Genesis: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation Commentary*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989.

Scholem, Gershom. *Kabbalah*. New York: Dorset Press, 1974.

Schürer, Emil. *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*. Vol. 1. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986.

Segal, Alan F. *Two Powers in Heaven: Early Rabbinic Reports About Christianity and Gnosticism*. Leiden: Brill, 1977.

Wenham, Gordon. *Genesis 1-15*. Word Biblical Commentary 1. Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987.