

clothing, "For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Matt. 6:32b-33).

7. God hears and answers prayer: God knows our needs even before we ask Him (Matt. 6:7-8). Because God is concerned with every detail of every person's life, Paul admonished believers to "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:6). God's providential care is demonstrated in how He hears, understands and answers our prayers.

## VII. The Trinity (Triunity) of God

The study of the Trinity should be undertaken with a deep sense of awe. All theology is limited in defining God. However, the triunity of God is one of the greatest divine mysteries. It's a sacred-ground reality. The nature of God cannot be translated into a simplistic formula any more than the Pacific Ocean can be transferred into a teacup. Even so, the study of the Trinity is vital as it is the center gem of divine revelation. To finite humans, understanding God as both one and triune appears to be a contradiction. However, both realities are clearly taught throughout the New Testament.

Throughout church history, whenever the doctrine of the Trinity is compromised, other major Bible tenets have also been compromised, corrupted and abandoned. Many church heresies are rooted in a misunderstanding of the persons of the Godhead. In the second century, two major heresies arose that denied the doctrine of the Trinity: Monarchianism and Sabellianism. Monarchianism denied the deity of Christ and the personality of the Holy Spirit. Sabellianism denied the separate identities of the three persons of the Godhead, declaring that Jesus and the Holy Spirit were only different modes of the one person, or different guises by which God manifested himself. Adherents of both of these groups thought they were guarding the unity



of God. Unitarianism and "Jesus Only" or "Oneness" doctrines are modern expressions of these heresies.

The mainstream of the church has persistently rejected these false teachings. Developed in the fourth century, the Nicene Creed is the earliest creed to articulate the orthodox understanding of the Trinity:

We believe in one God—And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father, light of light, very God of very God, begotten not made, being of one substance with the Father—And we believe in the Holy Ghost, who is the Lord and giver of life, who proceedeth from the Father, who with the Father and Son, is worshiped and glorified, who spake by the prophets.

The major Protestant bodies have closely followed this ancient creed of the fourth century. The best known of the Reformation creeds is the Westminster Confession:

There is but one living and true God. In the unity of the Godhead there are three persons, of one substance, power, and eternity—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The Father is one, neither begotten or proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father; the Holy Ghost eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son.

These creeds and confessions do not attempt to remove the mystery of the Trinity, nor do they try to reconcile the scriptural statements with finite reasoning. Rather, they attest to the stated scriptural record that there is one God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Although human-produced creeds are certainly not infallible, throughout history the majority of the church has held a Trinitarian view similar to the Nicene and Athanasian creeds.



### A. The concept of the Trinity in the Old Testament

It was absolutely essential that the unity of God was clearly articulated and emphasized in the Old Testament. Israel was surrounded by polytheistic nations that had departed from the original knowledge of the one true God. God revealed himself to Abraham as God Almighty (*El Shaddai*). To Moses and the Israelites God revealed Himself as *Yahweh* (I AM), "The LORD (*Yahweh*) our God, the LORD (*Yahweh*) is one!" (Deut. 6:4). The Old Testament gives us intimations of the triune nature of God, but they are clear only in the light of the New Testament's fuller revelation of Christ. Having received the deeper insight provided by the Incarnation and the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost, it is possible to see aspects of the Trinity in the Old Testament.

1. Plural Names for God: The Old Testament contains plural names and pronouns for God. *Elohim* and *Adonai* are plural forms of God. Even though *Elohim* is a plural noun, when used of the true God, it is accompanied by a singular form verb. Deuteronomy 6:4 which declares God's unity to all Jews, also contains God's plural name, *Elohim*. This display of grammatical plurality in unity seems to be an intimation of the Trinity.

2. References to the Angel/Messenger of *Yahweh*: The Angel of *Yahweh* is called God. This term appears a number of times in the book of Genesis and from time to time in other Old Testament passages. In these scriptures, a distinction is made between the Angel of *Yahweh* and *Yahweh*, yet they are one. In such events, when God appears as an angel or as a man, the appearance is called a theophany. Theophany comes from the Greek words *theos* (God) and *phaino* (to appear) (see Gen. 16:7-13). In Genesis 18, God appeared to Abraham as "three men," yet Abraham addressed them as Lord in the singular. Two of the men appeared to Lot in Sodom, but he addressed them as *Yahweh*. In Genesis 22:1-19, Abraham was ordered to sacrifice Isaac, but the Angel of the Lord spoke from heaven releasing him from the order. In Genesis 22:16, the angel called himself *Yahweh*. In Genesis 32:24-32, Jacob wrestled with "a man" and prevailed to receive a divine blessing. In Exodus 3, the Angel of the Lord appeared to Moses at the burning bush, giving him the promise that he would lead the Israelites out of Egypt. In this conversation with Moses, the terms "Angel" and "*Yahweh*"



were used interchangeably. Some theologians believe these encounters were appearances by the pre-existent Christ, otherwise known as "Christophanies." Christophany comes from the Greek *christos* (Christ) and *phaino* (to appear).

3. Jesus, the commander of the army of the Lord: In Joshua 5:13-6:2, a "man" with a drawn sword appeared to Joshua who called himself the "commander of the army of the Lord." Joshua was commanded to loose his shoes because he was on holy ground. In Joshua 6:2, the "man" is referred to as the LORD, or *Yahweh*. This seems to be another example of a Christophany or preincarnate appearance of Jesus.

4. Psalmic references to Jesus: The Psalms have many references to Jesus. The following scriptures are selected from among the Messianic Psalms fulfilled by Jesus:

a) Psalm 110:1 "The LORD said to my Lord, 'Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.'" Jesus applied this to Himself in Mark 12:35-37.

b) Psalm 2:7 "...The LORD has said to Me, 'You are My Son, Today I have begotten You...'" Paul applied this passage to Jesus in Acts 13:33.

c) Psalm 45:6 "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever..." The writer of Hebrews ascribed this to Jesus in Hebrews 1:8.

5. Jesus, the Promised Messiah: Isaiah prophesied that Messiah would be born of a virgin (Isa. 7:14). Isaiah 9:6-7 depicted Jesus as the Prince of Peace, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, Son of David. Micah prophesied that Jesus would be born in Bethlehem (Mic. 5:2). Isaiah 53 referred to Jesus as a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, bruised for our iniquities. Jesus is the only reasonable identification for this Servant of *Yahweh*. Further, Philip the evangelist applied Isaiah 53 to Jesus. Several addressed Jesus as the "Son of David" (Matt. 9:27; 21:9). After His resurrection, Jesus Himself attested to the fact that He is the Messiah referred to in the Old Testament Scriptures (Luke 24:27).



## B. The concept of the Trinity in the New Testament

After the resurrection of Jesus and the descent of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, the doctrine of the Trinity was crystal clear to the New Testament church. When the apostles began to preach the gospel and write epistles, they did not waver in declaring Jesus as God and the Holy Spirit as God. Yet they also viewed the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit as one God (1 Cor. 8:6). The following are proofs of the Trinity in the New Testament:

1. The baptism of Jesus: The three persons of the Godhead were present at the baptism of Jesus. Jesus ascended from the waters of baptism, the Holy Spirit descended from heaven in the visible form of a dove, and the Father spoke from heaven (Matt. 3:17; see also Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-22; John 1:32-34). All three manifested at the same time. The Father spoke of the Son as a separate identity, and the Spirit was present as an identity separate from the Son and the Father.

2. The proclamations of Jesus: John 14 provides clear proof of the three distinct persons of the Trinity. First, in John 14:9, Jesus said to Philip, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father." In this proclamation it is clear that Jesus and the Father are one yet have separate identities. Jesus said to the disciples, "And I will pray to the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever... But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you" (John 14:16, 26). Jesus spoke of the Father as "He," of the Holy Spirit as "He," and of Himself as "I." Jesus referred to the Holy Spirit as "another Helper," separate in identity. The Spirit would come when Jesus went away. Yet Jesus also said, "...And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age..." (Matt. 28:20). Herein is the mystery: There are three separate identities (not individuals), yet there is one God, not three.

3. The Great Commission: The baptismal formula given by Jesus in the Great Commission clearly reveals the Trinity as well as the oneness of God: "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:19). The



three identities are given as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, grouped together in equality. The word "name" is not repeated, indicating the unity.

4. Early church benedictions: The apostolic benediction in 2 Corinthians 13:14 clearly shows the trinitarian thinking of the early church. A similar trinitarian statement appears in Jude 20:21, "But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life." In these two benedictions, Jesus is placed first in one, and the Holy Spirit is first in the other. This indicates that the Son and Holy Spirit are not inferior but, indeed, equal to the Father and to each other. Other examples include: 1 Corinthians 12:4-6; Ephesians 4:4-6; 5:18-20, and 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14.

## VIII. God the Father