

# The Harvester



## Preparing Souls

## To Serve The Lord



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# THE GODHEAD (PART 1)

By Brian R. Kenyon

When most people hear or read the word “God,” they think of God the Father. However, the Biblical term “God,” first and foremost, refers to the divine nature, which includes the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Context must determine whether a particular member of the Godhead is meant. A study of the Godhead is actually a study of the nature of God, for the Godhead has to do with the personality of God. In the two parts of this lesson, we will accomplish the following: (1) examine significant Old Testament names for God; (2) prove the Godhead consists of three persons (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) with one divine nature; and (3) study the essence and attributes of God, showing that each member of the Godhead shares in the same essence and attributes.

## SIGNIFICANT OLD TESTAMENT NAMES OF GOD

There were basically three names used in the Old Testament to designate God: *Elohim*, usually translated “God;” *Jehovah* (or *Yahweh*), usually translated “Lord” (with all upper case letters); and *Adonai*, usually translated “Lord.” The first two of these words are extremely relevant to a study of the Godhead. The first because of its plural nature in reference to God; the second because it is applied to more than one member of the Godhead. Let us consider these two names for God.

First, the Hebrew word *Elohim* is most often behind the translation “God.” It is a plural form of *Eloah* (which, incidentally, in Arabic is *Allah*). *Elohim* is significant to a study of the Godhead from the very first verse in the Bible: “In the beginning God created the heaven and the

earth” (Gen. 1:1, KJV). “God” (from *Elohim*) is plural, yet the verb “created” is singular. Consider also the creation of man and woman.

And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness...So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. (Gen. 1:26-27)

Note that “let us” and “our image” is plural along with “God [from *elohim*]” (Gen. 1:26), yet “he” in “created he him” and “created he them” is singular (Gen. 1:27)! Though some have attempted to explain the plurality as God and the angels, there is no rational way to explain the plural in these contexts except that there be plural persons in the one nature of God.

The etymology of *Elohim* is uncertain, though it is generally agreed that the primary idea is that of strength and “power to effect.” It properly describes the character God exhibited to all people through His works as creator, sustainer, and Supreme Being of the universe. There are also compound forms of *Elohim* used in the Old Testament. *El-shaddai* (“God Almighty”), for example, is the name by which God was particularly known by the patriarchs (Gen. 17:1; 18:3; Ex. 6:3).

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It should also be observed, however, that *Elohim* was not exclusively used for the true “God.” The word was also used to refer to heathen deities (Ex. 18:11; 1 Kgs. 11:4-5). *Elohim* is in fact used of any being, real or imagined, believed to be divine and the object of worship. In the sense of a heathen deity, the singular is most often employed. When used as plural in reference to false gods the idea of number is always considered for the collective objects of polytheistic worship (i.e., “the gods,” or “the gods of the heathen”) (Smith and Fields 16). Other uses of the word include any being that strikes the observer as godlike (1 Sam. 28:13); kings, judges, or others endowed with authority from God (Ex. 21:6; 22:7-8; Ps. 82:1, 6; 13:6; 97:7); and the short form, *El*, is used for a hero or mighty man (Ezk. 31:11).

The implications of *Elohim* to the Godhead are obvious. The plural form with a singular verb (cf. Gen. 1:26-27) indicates more than one person in the Godhead!

Second, *Jehovah*, or *Yahweh*, is behind the translation “LORD,” or “LORD GOD.” This word is specifically used for the one true God (sometimes referred to as “the covenant God”) who chose the descendants of Jacob as His people and to whom He gave His Law. *Jehovah* is never applied to a false god, nor to any other being, except one—the “angel of the LORD” (angel-*Jehovah*) (Gen. 16:7, 9-11; Num. 22:22; Judg. 2:1).

At a time very early in their history, the Jews refused to pronounce the name lest they use it irreverently. The rabbis instead would often use the phrase “the name” (cf. Lev. 24:16), or “the name of four letters” (YHWH, or *tetragrammaton*). In reading the Scriptures, they substituted

for it the word *Adonai*. From this the Septuagint (LXX) rendered it *kurios*, from whence the KJV “Lord” comes. The KJV does use *Jehovah* in four passages (Ex. 6:3; Ps. 83:18; Is. 12:2; 26:4). In compound names, the KJV uses *Jehovah-Jireh* (“Jehovah shall see”) (Gen. 22:14); *Jehovah-Nissi* (“Jehovah is my banner”) (Ex. 17:5); *Jehovah-Shalom* (“Jehovah is peace”) (Judg. 6:24); “the Lord our righteousness” (translated from *Jehovah-Tsidkenu*) (Jer. 23:6; 33:16); and “the Lord is there” (translated from *Jehovah-Shammah*) (Ezk. 48:35). The abbreviated form *Jah* (or *Yah*) occurs forty-four times in the Hebrew Bible and is retained in Psalm 68:4 (KJV). Because of the early fear to pronounce the word, the exact pronunciation has been lost to us, but based upon the most up to date research, “Yahweh” is probably closer than “Jehovah” to the original pronunciation.

The key meaning of “Jehovah” is found in God’s revelation of Himself to Moses by the statement, “I AM THAT I AM” (Ex. 3:14; 6:3). The name *Jehovah* appears to be related to the Hebrew verb *hayah*, which means “to be” or “become.” Thus, *Jehovah* means “the existing one, the eternal one; or, perhaps even better, the becoming one, the one who causes things to become and exist” (Smith and Fields 17). Though *Jehovah* is primarily used for the covenant God of Israel, as early as Seth, people called on the name of *Jehovah* (Gen. 4:25), and the patriarchs also used the name (Gen. 18:14; 24:40; 26:28; 28:21).

*Jehovah* sheds significant light on the Godhead in that the divine nature, and each person thereof, is self-existing. Also, in the Father’s exaltation of the Son, He gave “him a name [the name, NKJ] which is above every name” (Phil. 2:9). That “name” is “the Lord” (Phil. 2:11), the New Testament equivalent of *Jehovah*. In fact, Paul often applies Old Testament passages exclusively about *Jehovah* to Jesus the Christ (1 Cor. 1:31 cf. Jer. 9:23-24; 2 Cor. 3:17 cf. Ex. 34:29; Phil. 2:9-11 cf. Isa. 45:22-23).

**PROVING THE TRIUNE GOD**

God is a unity consisting of three distinct persons, or personalities, in one divine essence (Thiessen 135). Such terms as “Trinity” or “Triunity” seek to capture this idea. Though these terms are not explicitly mentioned in the Bible, they do convey the concept (much like “Great Commission” or “prodigal son,” none of which is explicitly mentioned in the Bible). There is only one God and the divine nature is undivided and indivisible (Deut. 4:35, 39; 1 Kgs. 8:60; Mk. 12:29-32; 1 Tim. 2:5). However, “unity” is not the same as “unit.” There are three distinct personalities in this one essence of deity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). This is not a three-fold nature of God, but three persons each having the essence of deity and making up the one Godhead. Although no earthly illustration is fully adequate, pluralities spoken of as one are not unheard of. Consider the following: (1) believers are one (Jn. 17:21-22; Acts 4:32; 1 Cor. 12:20); (2) husband and wife are one (Gen. 2:24; Mt. 19:5; Eph. 5:31); and (3) Paul and Apollos are one (1 Cor. 3:6, 8).

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The closest explicit term that captures the triune nature of God is “Godhead,” which occurs three times in the KJV, each time from a different but closely related Greek word. The first of these occurrences is in Acts 17:29,

Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead [Divine Nature, NKJ; divine being, ESV] is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man’s device.

The word “Godhead” comes from the Greek word *theion* (θειον), which means “divine being, divinity,” also “of the godhead and everything that belongs to it” (cf. 2 Pet. 1:3-4) (Bauer 353). This word seems to emphasize the quality of the divine nature.

The second occurrence of “Godhead” (KJV) is in Romans 1:20,

For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead [divinity, ASV; divine nature, ESV]; so that they are without excuse.

Here, “Godhead” is from the Greek word *theiotes* (θειότης), which means “divinity, divine nature” (Bauer 354). This word emphasizes the attributes of deity that are perceived through the things that are made.

The third occurrence of the word “Godhead” (KJV) is in Colossians 2:9, “For in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead [Divinity, ESV] bodily.” Here, the word “Godhead” is from the Greek word *theotes* (θεότης), which means “Deity, divinity; the fullness of Deity; power of Deity” (Bauer 358). This word emphasizes the totality of all that enters into the concept of the Divine nature, which, incidentally, was a reality the incarnate Son of God. All that God is was embodied in Christ!

These three Greek words and their English translations show that the Godhead is something more than just the Father, just the Son, or just the Holy Spirit. Rather, the Godhead consists of one divine nature, yet three persons sharing that same nature. This fact can also be proven by the logical argument below (which is not original with this writer; forms of this argument have been used by others as well).

If the Bible teaches there is one God; and if the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit are each said to be God and yet are distinct persons; then the Bible teaches that there are three distinct persons in the one Godhead.

Certainly, the heart of monotheism is that there is only one God. Both Old and New Testaments teach such to be the case (Deut. 4:35, 39; 6:4; Isa. 43:10-11; Mk. 12:29; Rom. 3:30; 1 Cor. 8:4, 6; 1 Tim. 2:5). However, the Bible also refers the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit as God, yet Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinct, separate persons. Note that the Father is said to be God (1 Cor. 1:3), but the Father is not the Son (1 Cor. 1:3) nor is the Father the Holy Spirit (Mt. 3:16-17). Each is distinct! The Son is said to be God (Jn. 1:1-2, 14), but the Son is not the Father (Heb. 1:5) nor is the Son the Holy Spirit (Jn. 14:26). Each is distinct! The Holy Spirit is said to be God (Acts 5:3-4), but the Holy Spirit is not the Father (Mt. 3:16-17) nor is the Holy Spirit the Son (Jn. 15:26). Therefore, since the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are each referred to as God, yet each are distinct from the others, there must be three distinct persons in the one true nature of God, or Godhead (Mt. 28:19; Jn. 14:16; 2 Cor. 13:14; Eph. 4:4-6; 1 Pet. 1:2)!

*(to be continued in next month’s Harvester)*

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