Christian Distinctives:

The Trinity (II)

Testing the Trinitarian 'hypothesis'...in the Old Testament

[Last update: Nov 2003]

Below are three 'kinds' of data that would support a trinitarian hypothesis. If we can find reasonably clear data (hopefully in a wide range of settings) in EACH of these, and IF that data is NOT easily subject to alternate interpretations, then we can conclude that the Scripture teaches the basic doctrine of the plurality of personalities within the One God (not Athanasian trinitarian yet, but definitely the 'core' of the problem!).

Let's assemble the data:

Criterion One: The statements and creedal formulae that there is only ONE God, will have enough specificity to eliminate false gods, but enough ambiguity to 'allow' for multiple personalities within the ONE God. Obviously, the best place to look for this data will be in the arguments of the Unitarians (Christian, Jewish, Muslim).

Data element One: The use of a "composite unity" word for 'one' in the Shema of Deut 6.4-5.

This is the older translation of the famous Shema: *"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one."* There are two words for 'one' in Biblical Hebrew: 'ehad ('one', 'alone', 'unity from parts') and 'yahid' (always means uniqueness/solitary-only one of its kind [cf. used of only son and only daughter, Gen 22.2,12,16; Jer 6.26; Judges 11.34]...*not* the same word as 'yahad' that often means 'in complete unity, together,united' cf. Deut 33.5, Ps 133.1). This verse is *sometimes* used by a few groups within the Jewish tradition to assert the numerical unity of God's nature, over against what they perceive as a 'Christian' notion of plurality-in-unity. But this verse either doesn't support their position (i.e., it doesn't talk about God's nature at all); or actually does the opposite (i.e., by leaving a door open to 'composite unity'). Instead of using YAHID, which MIGHT be of some support to their position, it uses 'EHAD, which *lends* itself to the plurality position (or certainly *allows* it). Consider some other passages in which 'EHAD is used:

- Gen 2.24--the man and his wife will be one (ehad) flesh--clearly a composite unity.

- Ex 26:6, 11--the fifty gold clasps are used to hold the curtains together so that the tent would be a unit (ehad).

- 2 Samuel 2:25--many soldiers made themselves into 'one group' (ehad)

- Gen 34:16 --the men of Shechem suggest intermarriage with Jacob's children in order to become 'one(ehad) people'.

- Joshua 9.2 -- the western kings agree to fight Joshua as "one (ehad) force"

- Josh 10.42-- "And Joshua captured all these kings and their lands at one (ehad) time" (NAS) or "All these kings and their lands Joshua conquered in one (ehad) campaign" (NIV)

- Ex 24.3 --"Then Moses came and recounted to the people all the words of the Lord and all the ordinances; and all the people answered with one (ehad) voice, and said"

- 2 Chr 5.12--"and all the Levitical singers, Asaph, Heman, Jeduthun, and their sons and kinsmen, clothed in fine linen, with cymbals, harps, and lyres, standing east of the altar, and with them one hundred and twenty priests blowing trumpets 13 in unison when the trumpeters and the singers were to make themselves heard with one (ehad) voice to praise and to glorify the Lord"

- Gen 11.6--"And the Lord said, "Behold, they are one (ehad) people, and they all have the same language."

So, from the usage data ALONE, 'ehad could at least ALLOW a plurality-within-a-strict-unity (i.e. Trinity).

Let me explain this a bit further.

1. The Shema probably didn't' have anything to do with asserting monotheism--be it Trinitarian monotheism or 'Unitarian' monotheism.

> So, the Jewish Publication Society's commentary on the Shema [[JPStorah], Sarna, Potok (gen eds)/Tigay on Deut] says:

>> ""The LORD is our God, the LORD alone"…For all its familiarity, the precise meaning of the Shema is uncertain and it permits several possible renderings. The present translation indicates that the verse is a description of the proper relationship between YHVH and Israel: He alone is Israel's God. **This is not a declaration of monotheism, meaning that there is only one God**. That point was made in 4:35 and 39, which state that 'YHVH alone is God.'…This understanding of the Shema as describing a relationship with God, **rather than His nature**, has the support of Zechariah 14:9…In other words, **Deuteronomy and Zechariah both use 'one' in the sense of 'alone,' 'exclusively'.**" (p.76)

> And this is echoed by Christian scholarship, both liberal and evangelical.

> A simple statement of the liberal assessment can be found in the New Interpreter's Bible:

>> "The confessional affirmation of the Shema (v. 4) is very terse, so that ascertaining the precise meaning is fraught with uncertainties. "The LORD is our God, **the LORD alone**" (cf. NIV; REB). **The Hebrew affirmation falls short of expressing a clear-cut denial of the existence of other deities**, but is adamant that there is only one LORD God who is to be worshiped by Israel." [NIB]

> And an evangelical comment can be found in NIDDOTE:

>> "The Shema (Deut 6:4-9) is a central theological text in Deut. The syntax of the verbless sentence is disputed, but analogy with other uses of "the LORD our God" in Deut suggests that the traditional syntax should be retained ("The LORD our God, the LORD [is] One"). "One" is not a title or name of God, but an adjective of quality (*DCH*, 1:180). The correlation between the two halves of the sentence and the following verses suggests that **this is not so much an abstract monotheism as a claim to Israel's total obedience and the exclusion of any other** (cf. 5:7). The immediate context **does not suggest that it is directed against polytheism** or different ideas of Yahweh found in local cults (cf. the heterodox portrait of "Yahweh and his Asherah" at Kuntillet 'Ajrud). Nor is this idea used to support the deut. program of the centralization of worship. However, in the broader context of Deut and the OT **it can imply**

unity, uniqueness, and monotheism. There is some overlap with the idea of Yahweh "alone" (cf. 2 Kgs 19:19]). Israel shares in God's uniqueness (2 Sam 7:23), and Israel's eschatological hope looks to the realization of Yahweh being one and his name one (Zech 14:9), when all powers that have claimed divinity will be renounced or absorbed into the one true God." [NIDDOTE]

2. The fact that this verse doesn't really speak about monotheism (of any sort) hasn's stopped some groups within Judaism of using this verse as such, though!

As the JPS scholars point out:

"Although the Shema began as a declaration of allegiance rather than of monotheism, it became the preeminent expression of monotheism (yihud) in Judaism. This was undoubtedly fostered by its prominent location in Deuteronomy and its centrality in the liturgy, but it may have been due especially to the word 'ehad, which normally means 'one'. This word made the Shema a suitable response to the many theological challenges that Jewish monotheism confronted throughtout history: in the face of polytheism it meant that the Divine is one, not many; in the face of Zoroastrian and Gnostic dualism it meant one, not two; in the face of Christian trinitarianism it meant one, not three; and in the face of atheism, one and not none." (p.440)

And even one modern Jewish anti-missionary uses it so (in spite of his obvious awareness that the word does mean 'composite unity' in other contexts!):

"By careful examination of the use of lehad in the Hebrew Bible, we may ascertain its true meaning as it is applied to God in the Shema: "Hear, 0 Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One" (Deuteronomy 6:4). The occurrences of lehad are too numerous to be listed here in their entirety. It is true that in such verses as Genesis 1:5: "And there was evening and there was morning, one day," and Genesis 2:24: "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother and shall cleave to his wife, and they shall be one flesh, - the term "one" refers to a compound united one. However, :)ehad often also means an absolute one. This is illustrated by such verses as 2 Samuel 13:30: "Absalom has slain all the king's sons, and there is not one of them left"; 2 Samuel 17:12: "And of all the men that are with him we will not leave so much as one"; Exodus 9:7: "There did not die of the cattle of Israel even one"; 2 Samuel 17:22: "There lacked not one of them that was not gone over the Jordan." Of special interest is Ecclesiastes 4:8: "There is one [that is alone], and he has not a second; yea, he has neither son nor brother." Clearly, the word "one" used in these verses means an absolute one and is synonymous with the word yahid, "the only one," "alone." It is .in this sense, with even greater refinement, that lehad is used in Deuteronomy 6:4: "Hear, 0 Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One." Here, 3ehad is used as a single, absolute, unqualified one. " [Sigal, *The Jew and the Christian Missionary* (KTAV, 1981), p126; note: his last sentence is simple assertion, and offers no evidence, proof, or support for his position...]

3. But EVEN IF this echad is understood as meaning 'one', it is well documented that **this 'one' can be a composite unity**. Consider entries from some standard linguistic tools:

First from the Dictionary of Semantic Domains (nb: the use of the ME/Hebrew fonts requires me to post some of these as images and pdf files.):

285 אֶחָד (ʾechad): number [BDB: adj.num.]; ≡ Str 259; TWOT 61—**1.** LN 60.10 **one**, a, an, i.e., a cardinal number in contrast to more than one (Ge 2:21); **2.** LN 60.46 **first**, i.e., an ordinal number, as the first in a series involving time, space, or set (Ge 2:11); **3.** LN 60.67-60.74 **one time**, once, i.e., a single occurrence, possibly in some contexts to the exclusion of all other occurrences (Nu 14:15; Job 9:3; Ps 89:36[EB 35]); **4.** LN 63.1-63.4 **one, i.e., that which is united as one in contrast to separate parts (Ge 2:24**; Dt 6:4); **5.** LN 59.23-59.34 **each**, every, i.e., one as a part of a totality (Ex 36:30); **6.** LN 92.11-92.25 **certain one**, i.e., a reference to a person which is not explicit, but only one reference (1Sa 1:1); **7.** LN 58.47-58.53 **only**, i.e., one of a unique class or kind, and so distinctive (Jos 22:20; 1Ki 4:19; SS 6:9; Zec 14:9); **8.** LN 61 unit: אֶחָד לְ אֶחָד (ʾechad lᵉ- ʾechad) one by one, i.e., a sequence of single units (Isa 27:12), note: cf. also 2522; note: the NIV text in Eze 42:4, see 4395; **9.** LN 63.5-63.8 unit: שְׁכֶם אֶחָד (shᵉkem ʾechad) in unity, formally, one shoulder, i.e., pertaining to serving in a unified or unanimous manner (Zep 3:9+), note: NIV translates "shoulder to shoulder," see also domain LN 31.14–31.25

[1]Swanson, James. *Dictionary of Biblical Languages With Semantic Domains : Hebrew (Old Testament)*. electronic ed., HGK285. Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997.

Second, from the TWOT:

> 'Echad ***one, same, single, first, each, once***,.
>
> This word occurs 960 times as a noun, adjective, or adverb, as a cardinal or ordinal number, often used in a distributive sense. It is closely identified with yahid "to be united" and with rosh "first, head," especially in connection with the "first day" of the month (Gen 8:13). **It stresses unity while recognizing diversity within that oneness.**
>
> *[E]* can refer to a certain individual (Jud 13:2) or a single blessing (Gen 27:38). Solomon *alone* was chosen by the Lord (I Chr 29:1). The notion of uniqueness is also found in II Sam 7:23 and Ezk 33:24 (for this verse with reference to God, see below). The phrase "in a single day" can refer to the suddenness of judgment (Isa 10:17; 47:9) or blessing (Isa 66:8).
>
> Adverbially, *[E]* means "once" or "one time" (II Kgs 6:10). God solemnly swore to David "one time" that his descendants and throne would last forever (Ps 89:35 [H 36]). In Hag 2:6 the Lord warned that he would shake heaven and earth "once more in a little while." Yet this prediction of the overthrow of nations probably included a near as well as a far fulfilment (cf. Heb 12:26). The expression "in one day" denotes the swiftness of the Lord's acts (Isa 9:14 [H 13]; Zech 3:9).
>
> Sometimes the phrase "as one man" can mean "all at once" (Num 14:15), but when Gideon was told he would defeat Midian "as one man" it probably meant "as easily as a single man" (Jud 6:16). **The phrase can also refer**

to a nation aroused to take united action against gross injustice (Jud 20:8; I Sam 11:7). Zephaniah's mention of people serving God "with one shoulder" (3:9) likely means "shoulder to shoulder," solidly united. Likewise in Ex 24:3 "with one voice" expresses that all Israel was involved in entering into the Covenant with Yahweh.

The concept of unity is related to the tabernacle, whose curtains are fastened together to form one unit (Ex 26:6, 11; 36:13), Adam and Eve are described as "one flesh" (Gen 2:24), which includes more than sexual unity. In Gen 34:16 the men of Shechem suggest intermarriage with Jacob's children **in order to become "one people."**

Later, Ezekiel predicted that the **fragmented nation of Israel would someday be reunited**, as he symbolically joined two sticks (37:17). Once again Judah and Ephraim would be one nation with one king (37:22). Abraham was viewed as "the one" from whom all the people descended (Isa 51:2; Mal 2:15), the one father of the nation.

Diversity within unity is also seen from the fact that *[E]* has a plural form. It is translated "a few days" in Gen 27:44; 29:20, and Dan 11:20. In Gen 11:1 the plural modifies "words": "the whole earth used the same language and the same words." Apparently it refers to the same vocabulary, the same set of words spoken by everyone at the tower of Babel. The first "same" in Gen 11:1 is singular, analogous to "the same law" of the Passover applying to native-born and foreigner (Ex 12:49; cf. Num 15:16), or to the "one law" of sure death for approaching the Persian king without invitation (Est 4:11).

[1]Harris, R. Laird, Robert Laird Harris, Gleason Leonard Archer, and Bruce K. Waltke. *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*. electronic ed., Page 030. Chicago: Moody Press, 1999, c1980.

Third is: Koehler, Ludwig, Walter Baumgartner, M.E.J Richardson, and Johann Jakob Stamm. *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Volumes 1-4 Combined in One Electronic Edition. electronic ed. Leiden; New York: E.J. Brill, 1999, c1994-1996.] [Sorry, only in disconnected jpgs...sigh]

Echd: (960 ×), Sam.ᴹ¹ᴮ *ǣd.* < *ʾaḥḥād < *ʾaḥad (Arb., BL 219g, Beer-M. §59:1), → יַחַד; MHb., Ug. *aḥd,* f. *aḥt,* Ph. אחד, f. אחת, Arm. חד (→ BArm. MdD 116a), Eth. *ʾaḥadū,* Akk. *(w)ēdu.* abs. אֶחָד, and אַחַד Gn 48₂₂ + 5 × (BL 622b), cs. אַחַד, חַד Ezk 33₃₀ (Aramaism or text error ? Nöldeke Syr. Gr. §242), pl. אֲחָדִים; fem. אַחַת (< *ʾaḥadt) abs. and cs., אֶחָ֫ת Gn 11₁, 2S 23₈ Q: —1. numeral **one** a) מָקוֹם אֶ one (single) place Gn 1₉, בְּשָׁנָה אֶחָת Ex 23₂₉, בְּרָכָה אֶ Gn 27₃₈, נֶפֶשׁ אֶ one soul = one single person Lv 4₂₇, אֶ :: שְׁנַיִ two :: one Lv 14₁₀; מִשְׁפָּט אֶ the same law Nu 15₁₆, דָּתוֹ אֶ the same law is in force Est 4₁₁ מִדָּה אֶ the same measure Ex 26₂; אֶחָד ^ Dt 6₄ Y. is one (Sept., Pesh., Stade *Theologie* 1:84); alt.: the one Y., Y. alone, Y. only; אֶ one and only Zech 14₉, the same (?) Jb 31₁₅ alt. one; → TWNT 3:1079f; vRad *Theologie* 2:226; Eichrodt *Theologie* 1:145, Labuschagne 137f; b) part. (VG 2:273a) הָעָם אֶחָד one of the people 1S 26₁₅, אֶ הַנְּבָלִים 2S 13₁₃, אַחַת הַנְּבָלוֹת Jb 2₁₀ אֲחֵיכֶם אֶ one of you brothers Gn 42₁₉, אִישׁ אֶ מִכֶּם a single one of you Jos 23₁₀, מִמֶּנּוּ אֶ (GK §130a) one of us Gn 3₂₂; c) negative

form: אֶ׳ … לֹ א׳ Ex 8₂₇ and לֹ אֶ׳ עַד־אֶ׳ (אֶחָד abs., BL 622b) 2S 17₂₂ not one, גַּם אֶ׳ ̂yae not even one Ps 14₃ אֶ׳ עַד … לֹ א׳ not even one Ex 14₂₈; d) קוֹל אֶ׳ with one voice Ex 24₃, לֵב אֶ׳ 1C 12₃₉ cj. Ps 83₆ (rd. וְ אֶחָד) **unanimous**, שְׁכֶם אֶ׳ shoulder to shoulder Zeph 3₉; לְיוֹם אֶ׳ **for a single day**, daily 1K 5₂, cj. Neh 5₁₆ for אֶחָר; יוֹם אֶ׳ never-ending day Zech 14₇; אֶחָת (sc. אֶ׳ פַּעַם) once: בַּשָּׁנָה אֶ׳ Ex 30₁₀ Lv 16₃₄; אֶ׳ :: שְׁתַּיִם once … twice 2K 6₁₀ Ps 62₁₂ (?, → שְׁתַּיִם) Jb 40₅; בְּאַחַת Jr 10₈ and כְּאֶחָד Qoh 11₆ in one and the same time; (→ BArm. כַּחֲדָה, Aramaism Arm. lw. Wagner 124; Akk. kīma ištēn), אַחַת Ps 89₃₆ and בְּאַחַת Jb 33₁₄ once and for all; הוּא אֶ׳ only one Gn 41₂₅, וַיְהִי … אֶחָד **became one, a unit** Ex 36₁₃; וְהָיָה הַמִּשְׁכָּן אֶחָד **a single whole** Ex 26₆; in statistical records repeated after each name Jos 12₉₋₂₄ cj. 1K 4₈₋₁₈ (Sept.), Montgomery-G. 124; e) pl. אֲחָדִים: יָמִים אֶ׳ a few days Gn 27₄₄ 29₂₀ Da 11₂₀ אֶ׳ μyrlb;D“ the same (kind of) words Gn 11₁ Ezk 29₁₇ (:: Gordon UTGl. 126: like Ug. aḥdm du. “a pair”) וְהָיוּ לְאֶ׳ to become one Ezk 37₁₇; —2. אֶ׳ one another (VG 2:328f): מִזֶּה אֶ׳ וּמִזֶּה אֶ׳ one here and one there Ex 17₁₂, בְּאֶ׳ אֶ׳ one to **another** Jb 41₈, cj. אֶחָד אֶת־אֶחָד v.s. Ezk 33₃₀ one to another, with gloss אִישׁ אֶת־אָחִיו; וְאֶ׳ … וְאֶ׳ … אֶ׳ one … another … a third 1S 10₃ 13₁₇ﬔ, וְהָאֶ׳ … ò a,h; one … and the other 1K 12₂₉, אַחַת הֵנָּה וְאַ׳ הֵנָּה once here and once there = to and fro 2K 4₃₅ אַחַת לְאַ׳ one after the other Qoh 7₂₇, וְהַדּוּד … dj;a, הַדּוּד Jr 24₂ the one basket … and the other (Brockelmann Heb. Syn. §60b, 1S 13₁₇ וְהָאֶ׳ אשׁ׳ הָר); —3. אֶ׳ indefinite article (GK §125b) אִישׁ אֶ׳ 1S 1₁, נָבִיא אֶ׳ 1K 13₁₁, אַיִל אֶ׳ Da 8₃, יוֹם אֶ׳ one day 1S 27₁, אַחַד שִׁבְטֵי יִשׂ׳ anyone of the tribes 2S 15₂, מֵאַחַת מֵהֵנָּה (GK §119w') any one of them Lv 4₂; put in front קָדוֹשׁ אֶ׳ a holy one Da 8₁₃, אַחַת הַשְּׁנִית :: מְעַט הִיא for a little while Hg 2₆ (מְעַט הִיא ≳ Sept.); —4. ordinal, first: הַשְּׁנִית :: אַחַת 1S 1₂, יוֹם אֶ׳ the first day Gn 1₅ (:: יוֹם שֵׁנִי 1₈ etc.); in dates בְּיוֹם אֶ׳ לַח׳ דֶ שׁ on the first day of the month Ezr 10₁₆ ≳ בְּאֶ׳ לַח׳ דֶ שׁ Gn 8₅, בִּשְׁנַת אַחַת לְ in the first year of Da 9₁, בְּאַחַת וְשֵׁשׁ מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה in the 601st year Gn 8₁₃; —5. distributive: אֶ׳ לַשֵּׁ֫בֶט one

in each tribe Dt 1₂₃, אֶל־אִישׁ from each man 2K 15₂₀, אֶחָד אֶחָד one after the other Is

27₁₂, לָאֶחָד, each single one Ezk 1₆, הָאֶחָת each 1C 27₁; —Gn 32₉ rd. אֶחָד,ָה; 2S 2₂₆b

dl.; 7₂₃ and Ezk 17₇ (:: Zimmerli 374) rd. אַחֵר, Ezk 11₁₉ rd. אַחֵר or חָ,דָשׁ; Jb 23₁₃ rd.

בָחַר for בְּאֶחָד (:: Dahood Fschr. Gruenthauer 67), Pr 28₁₈ rd. בְּ,שַׁ,חַת; Qoh 12₁₁ cj.

אֲחֻוֹֹר (Galling BASOR 119:18); Da 8₉ rd. אַחֶרֶת.

Koehler, Ludwig, Walter Baumgartner, M.E.J Richardson, and Johann Jakob Stamm. *The Hebrew and
Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament.* Volumes 1-4 Combined in One Electronic Edition.
electronic ed. Leiden; New York: E.J. Brill, 1999, c1994-1996.

So, the Shema—which is quoted, btw, by both Jesus and Paul in the New Testament—probably doesnt even address the issue of monotheism, but if it does, then a composite unity is clearly allowed by the word 'echad. (But note that echad can mean composite unity *as well as* 'indivisible' unity, but even an indivisible meaning in the verse doesn't really preclude the Trinitarian hypothesis, since the Christian still affirms that God is 'indivisibly one' also. They just affirm that this indivisible entity called 'God' "contains" three inseparable Persons/Agents.) So, this might allow a trinitarian reading, but neither demands it nor precludes it.

But the data on elohim not only allows trinitarian understandings of God, but also *might* actually *suggest* it...

Data element Two: the use of the plural 'Elohim' for God, INSTEAD of 'Eloah' (the singular form)--WITH singular verbs and pronouns. [Note: Elohim is NOT the plural form of El, but of Eloah. El has its OWN plural Elim, which is used a couple of times in the OT/Tanach for 'gods']

This has been generally explained as a 'plural of majesty' or 'plural of intensity' (both of which, btw, *could* intimate a trinity) .

So, ISBE:

> "This word is plural in form, and although it most frequently means "God" it can be used in a plural sense. Thus it can refer to other gods (Ex. 20:3; Josh. 24:16), foreign gods (Jer. 5:7), gods of the nations (Isa. 36:18), etc. Sometimes it appears to mean beings with divine qualities or authority — either angelic or human (Ps. 8:5; 82:1, 6; 138:1)…The use of the plural form with singular meaning is not unique to Israel. Similar forms occur in pre-Israelite Babylonian and Canaanite texts in which a worshiper wishes to exalt a particular god above others. This form has been called the "**plural of majesty" or the "intensive plural"** because it implies that **all the fulness of deity** is concentrated in the one god. *Elohim* being the most common word for God in the OT thus conveys this idea. Some have also thought that the frequent use of *Elohim* emphasizes that God is not intrinsically monistic but includes within Himself plurality of powers, attributes, and personhood." [Bromiley, Geoffrey W. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Revised*, Vol. 2, Page 505-506. Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1988; 2002.]

or ABD:

> "The **striking feature of the OT** texts lies in the use of this plural form "Elohîm" in
> order to designate the one God of Israel. One could think of **a "plural of majesty";**
> **however, it is most probable that this plural should be understood in the sense of an**
> **intensification and eventually as an absolutization:** "God of gods," "the highest God,"
> "quintessence of all divine powers," "the only God who represents the divine in a
> comprehensive and absolute way." In this function the term "Elohîm" can stand as a
> surrogate for the name of the biblical God; e.g., Gen 1:1 (P): "In the beginning Elohîm
> created the heaven and the earth." [Freedman, David Noel. *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*.
> electronic ed. New York: Doubleday, 1996, c1992.]

and NIDOTTE:

> "**Elohim is not attested outside of the OT**...Eloah (57x), which may be the sing. of
> Elohim, is used mostly in Job (41x), perhaps to avoid specifically Israelite associations.
> Elohim (2570x), a pl. form, is sometimes used for gods other than Yahweh (Exod 20:3),
> when it also may take the definite art. (Exod 18:11), pl. adj., and pl. vbs. (Ps 97:7). Its pl.
> form may mean it had polytheistic (or at least less than fully monotheistic) overtones at
> one time. Yet its use in the OT for Israel's God (always with sing. vbs.) probably means
> that the pl. has reference to i**ntensification or absolutization or exclusivity** (say, God of
> gods); it is **less commonly considered a pl. of majesty**. While Trinitarian perspectives
> are probably **not** in view, the OT witnesses to **a richness and complexity in the divine**
> **realm** (Gen 1:26; Isa 6:8) s**uch that later Trinitarian developments seem quite**
> **natural.** [NIDOTTE, s.v. "elohim"]

The astute reader will notice an '*apparent contradiction*' between ISBE ("The use of the plural form with
singular meaning is not unique to Israel. Similar forms occur in pre-Israelite Babylonian and Canaanite texts in
which a worshiper wishes to exalt a particular god above others.") and NIDOTTE (" Elohim is not attested
outside of the OT").

Both are correct and this is important for our obsevation. ISBE is affirming NOT that 'elohim' occurs outside
Israel, but that 'similar forms' (i.e., other deities) may have been addressed with a plural of majesty. So, we see in
Egypt, for example,

> "Typically West-Semitic, though not exclusively so, is the use of the divine plural where a single
> entity is concerned. In texts that use the aphabetic script such plurals of excellence are not readily
> recognizable. Where the Akkadian writing system is used, combining a syllabic script with various
> logograms, plural forms are less ambiguous. A good illustration of the plural of divinity is found in
> the Amarna letters, **where the Pharaoh is repeatedly addres by his Canaanite vassals as**
> **DINGIR.MES-ia, literally 'my gods', but planely referring to one person only.**..It also occurs as
> a designation of the personal god in combination with a verb in the singular; this phenomenon
> parallels the Hebrew use of 'elohim...There are some rare examples of a *pluralis divinitatis* in
> Akkadian texts; most of them betray West-Semitic influence. Judging by the Babylonian *Theodicy*

however, it was not uncommon in Standard Babylonian to refer to the personal god with the plural form 'gods'." [DDD:683]

But NIDOTTE affirms that elohim itself neither occurs outside the OT/Tanach nor (obviously) is it used as a 'plural of respect' or whatever. TWOT is even more direct in the affirmation:

> "This word, which is generally viewed as the plural of *eloah* is found far more frequently in Scripture than either *el* or *eloah* for the true God. The plural ending is usually described as a plural of majesty and not intended as a true plural when used of God. This is seen in the fact that the noun *elohim* is consistently used with singular verb forms and with adjectives and pronouns in the singular…Albright has suggested that the use of this majestic plural comes from the tendency in the ancient near east toward a universalism: "We find in Canaanite an increasing tendency to employ the plural *storot startes*, and *natot naths*, in the clear sense of totality of manifestations of a deity' " (William F. Albright, From the Stone Age to Christianity, 2d ed., p. 213). But a better reason can be seen in Scripture itself where, in the very first chapter of Gen, the necessity of a term conveying both the unity of the one God and yet allowing for a plurality of persons is found (Gen 1:2,26). **This is further borne out by the fact that the form *elohim* occurs only in Hebrew and in no other Semitic language, not even in Biblical Aramaic** (Gustav F. Oehler, *Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 88)." [Harris, R. L., Harris, R. L., Archer, G. L., & Waltke, B. K. (1999, c1980). *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (electronic ed.) (Page 044). Chicago: Moody Press.]

If this is true—that elohim is NOT attested outside of the Hebrew bible, while El and ELOAH are—then something's obviously going on...

But let's assemble the data about this 'exclusivity claim' first:

The most prominent name of God in the ANE is EL, not ELOAH (or its plural ELOHIM):

> "Cognates of **'el indicate the divine in most Semitic languages throughout the different periods of language development** (*ilu* in Akkadian; *il* in Ugaritic; *'l(1)* in Aramaic, Palmyrene,Phoenician and Punic; *'lh(1)* in Aramaic, Hatra, Nabatean, Palmyrene and Samal; Ethiopic is the only exception). The derivation or etymology of '*el* and its related forms is unclear. There is even debate whether '*eloah* and '*elohim*, which are clearly related, are from the same root as '*el*...**In numerous texts** reflecting the Ugaritic Canaanite culture, **El was the proper name of the titulary head** of the hierarchy of deities (**as in numerous other Semitic cultures)**." [[OT:DictOT5,](#) s.v. "God, names of"]

> "The term '*eloah* is **rarer** among the Semitic languages (occurring in Ugaritic, Aramaic dialects,Old South Arabic and Arabic), as it is in Hebrew...The grammatically plural form 'elohim is best seen to derive from this form, due to the included h and also **the existence of a separate, distinct plural form of '*el*, namely '*elim*** (Ex 15.11, of pagan gods)." [[OT:DictOT5,](#) s.v., "God, names of"]

This applies to Israel's closest neighbors too—the Canaanites (as reflected in Ugaritic):

"**In Canannite religion** (this term is commonly used to refer to Ugaritic religions as well) **the usual word for 'god' is Ug *il*, plural *ilm*,** corresponding with Phoen '*l* and '*lm*. The form *ilh* seems to be used only as a proper name, **though there is a plural form *ilhm* usually translated as 'gods'**; perhaps the term refers specifically to the gods of the netherworld. A similar form may be attested at Emar, if *wabil i-la-i* should be interpreted as *wabil ilahi*, 'bearer of the gods [=statues]". Morphologically, this is the equivalent of the Hebrew plural '*elohim*." [DDD:681f]

If this statement is true, then there ARE instances of *elohim* outside the bible. And indeed there are—there are **three** documents in the Ugaritic corpus (out of *hundreds*) which use the term *ilhm*. The documents each have a couple of mentions, and here is a list and the translations offered by modern translators:

> CAT 1.39 lines 3, 5 (2x), 9 (aka RS 1.001):
>
> > "**the divine ones**" ([OT:CRLTU])
>
> CAT 1.41 lines 12, 14(2x), 18, 28 (aka RS 1.003):
>
> > "**gods**" ([HI:RTFU]), "**the gods**" ([TCS1]), "**the Ilahuma**" (plural form, [OT:CRLTU] and [HI:RACU])
>
> CAT 1.87 (aka RS 18.059)--a duplicate of 1.39/1.41 (same translations)

These are all liturgical texts, relating to sacrificial ceremonies. A sample of this would be from Wyatt [HI:RTFU]:

> > 1.41 line 14: "two ewes (as sacrifice) to his god [*ilh*], an ox and a ram to the gods [*ilhm*], a heifer to the gods [*ilhm*]"

and another from Del Olmo Lete [OT:CRLTU]:

> > 1.39 line 5: "two ewes, the 'divine one' (*ilh*); one head of cattle and on ram, the 'divine ones' (*ilhm*); one cow, the 'divine ones' (*ilhm*)"

These three texts are essentially duplicates of one another, with minor variants in the deity lists. **These few mentions are the *only* instances of 'elohim' outside the 2,750 times it occurs in the Hebrew Bible!!!** So, the assessment that it is 'unparalleled' is virtually true.

Before we get on to the issue of *plural of majesty*, we should make a few observations about the above:

First of all, all of these cases are translated as 'full plurals' and NOT as 'plurals of majesty'--they are therefore *in no way reflective* of the Hebrew usage. This alone would essentially validate the 'no parallels' position.

Secondly, *ilh* **seems** to be differentiated from *ilhm* in these passages. *Ilh* is offered one gift, then some group of *ilhm* are offered something different, and then (some other group of?) *ilhm* are offered something different still. This would argue against the position that *ilhm* was actually a plural of majest of *ilh* (i.e., they refer to the same deity, albeit one time as 'plural of majesty' and one time as 'singular of not-so-majestic'...?)—they seem like two (three?) different recipients of sacrifices in the text.

Thirdly, there are so many 'greater than *ilh*' gods in these liturgies, that to assert that the 'plural of majesty' implied some kind of 'superiority' or 'more intensity' over the other gods—ESPECIALLY EL/IL, his consort, and/or Baal!--would be counter to everything we know about the Ugaritic pantheon. Del Olmo Lete gives several 'principal' pantheons (within the broader set of up to 240 divine names and epithets, reflecting probably 100-110 individual deities) and *ilh/ilhm* are not among them. It/they are minor deities (Lete thinks they are deceased deified kings) [OT:CRLTU, chapter one].

In short, the *ihlm* form is **not** taken as being a *plural of anything* by the translators, nor would it make any sense in the historical/liturical context.

Let's just note the stats on this quickly and you can see how **massively different** the OT/Tanach usage is:

- Ugaritic: Number of times *ilh* is used: **6x**; number of times *ilhm* is used: **12x**

- Hebrew: Number of time *eloah* is used: **57x** (42 in Job); *elohim*: **2,750x**!

So, the exclusivity of Israel's use of *elohim* is firmly established.

But this doesn't end the discussion, obviously, because Israel could still have been copying other '*plural of majesty*' usages (from the surrounding ANE) and just applying them to their God.

So, let's see if the Hebrew usage of "more-plural-than-singular-forms" matches the rest of the ANE:

To begin with, we should note again (from the above quotes) that modern scholars steer away from the 'plural of majesty' towards some 'plural of intensification' or 'plural of absolutization'--although the distinction is a fine one, IMO. So, ABD:

"The striking feature of the OT texts lies in the use of this plural form "Elohim" in order to designate the one God of Israel. **One could think of a "plural of majesty"; however, it is most probable that this plural should be understood in the sense of an intensification and eventually as an absolutization**: "God of gods," "the highest God," "quintessence of all divine powers," "the only God who represents the divine in a comprehensive and absolute way"." [ABD, s.v. "Names of God"

Secondly, we should note that such plurals are **not very common at all** in the ANE. The most common cases are honorific plurals, when *addressing* someone. So, DDD:

"Typically West-Semitic, though not exclusively so, is the use of the divine plural where a single entity is concerned. In texts that use the alphabetic script such plurals of excellence are not readily recognizable. Where the **Akkadian** writing system is used, combining a syllabic script with various logograms, plural forms are less ambiguous. A good illustration of the plural of divinity is found in the Amarna letters, where the **Pharaoh is repeatedly** addressed by his Canaanite vassals as DINGIR.MES-ia, literally 'my gods', but plainly referring to one person only...It also occurs as a designation of the personal god in combination with a verb in the singular; this phenomenon parallels the Hebrew use of 'elohim...There are some **rare examples** of a *pluralis divinitatis* in **Akkadian** texts; most of them betray West-Semitic influence. Judging by the Babylonian Theodicy however, it was not uncommon in Standard Babylonian to refer to the personal god with the plural form 'gods'." [DDD:683]

Note that (1) the most common uses were in government reports, addressing the Pharoah [cf. "If it please the court..."--referring sometimes just to *one* judge- or "The Bush administration (a plurality of people acting as a unit) blames (singular verb form, in USA English) X for Y..."]. In contrast, Elohim occurs in a wide range of uses—not just 'addresses'; (2) its usage in Akkadian texts is 'rare'; and (3) even if they are 'not uncommon' in Standard Babylonian (but I will have to return later to this issue), they are **certainly not the dominant usage** by any stretch of the imagination (as, in contrast, we saw with the usage of elohim in the OT/Tanach—it is the *most* common word for God in the Hebrew bible)--the parallels are not very close at all.

Third, even the 'closest parallels' in Ugaritic reflect the opposite phenomena: the *vast majority* of divine references to a plural form are translated as plurals by the translators. Even honorific plurals as applied to their deities are still very, very rare—making the Hebrew practice even that much more pronounced.

Let me make a comment about the Babylonian Theodicy remark, made above. If you look at the work being cited [Lambert's Babylonian Wisdom Literature], the data still seems to support the difference in usage. Consider the paragraph which discusses this:

"One curiosity which the text displays is that the scribes commonly write 'gods' when the context, singular suffixes, or a parallel 'godess' leave no doubt that the personal god is meant (49,82,219,246,295). In some cases not all the manuscripts have been affected. Scribes in Ludlul [note: another work in the Babylonian wisdom tradition] do the same (II.12,25,33)." [p.67]

But '*commonly*' does **not** mean it is done '*generally*' (as it is in the OT/Tanaach). For example, in the *Theodicy*, the 5 samples advanced by Lambert can be contrasted with *4x as many* 'regular' uses (20) of non-plurals for the personal god (21, 54, 63, 66, 70, 72, 75, 79, 131, 135, 239, 240, 244, 251, 255, 256, 264, 270, 276, 297). And the three cases in *Ludlul* (II.12, 25, 33) can be contrasted—again--with *4x as many* 'regular' uses (13) of non-plurals for the personal god (4, 17, 19, 22, 29, 31, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 45, 112).

[I might mention also that a recent scholarly work discussing the name Elohim, stated that *ilanu* was, in Akkadian, a 'perfect parallel' to *elohim*, and based an entire investigation upon this parallel. This seems to be methodologically flawed from the start, because we don't need a 'parallel' in Akkadian, **when we already have the exact word**—*ilh*—in the Ugaritic language! In other words, the data of the **same work pair** (*elohim/ilhm*) is considerably more relevant to the issue than would be a simple cross-language (and a non-Western Semitic one at that) 'parallel'.]

So, once again, the Hebrew practice does **NOT** follow the pattern of the neighbors around them, and we still have to account for this very, very odd form and its usage. This pattern simply cannot be explained as coming from outside influences or from natural assimilatiom or borrowing mechanisms.

And even within the bible, the number of honorific plurals is TINY compared to this Elohim thing--

> "These animal uses [i.e., Behemoth and Leviathan] are overshadowed by similar plurals used in reference or address to **humans or to God**, the honorific uses. **Most honorific plurals in the Bible involve the God of Israel, and the most common of these is elohim**, used about twenty-five hundred times. When used of the God of Israel, this term usually takes singular agreement; when used of various gods, it takes plural agreement (Exod 20.3)." [OT:IBHS, 7.4.3b]

....

Pushback: "*You've been looking at the computer sceen too long, bud...the E word is used of Moses (Ex 4.16), Dagon (1 Sam 5.7), Chemosh (Judg 11.24), Baal (1 Kings 18.24), the ghost of Samuel (1 Sam 28.13) all with singular verbs—are THESE dudes 'trinities' too?!*

Not, they are not trinities, but the verses here don't really count against the position being argued here. Let's briefly look at these passages, noting first that they are the fringe exceptions of literally *scores of passages in which foreign gods are referred to with plural forms*. That is the overwhelmingly **normal** usage (and one cannot argue from 1-2 % exceptions, with any confidence!):

> The **Moses** passage is fairly straightforward ["*Moreover, he shall speak for you to the people; and it shall come about that he shall be as a mouth for you, and you shall be as God to him.*"]—even the Lexicons understand this to refer to "godlike", "relative to Pharoah" (so BDB). The quality of God under discussion there was not God's attributes (e.g., invisibility, indwelling the temple, trinitarian, etc), it was on authority, power, and perhaps moral force. That Moses was to become a "God onto Pharoah" didnt mean he would become 'Invisible" , or "a consuming fire"--!--but a much more specific aspect of divinity. This passage just doesnt speak about God's nature at all.

The texts about **Dagon** ("*The ark of the God of Israel must not remain with us, for His hand is severe on us and on Dagon our god.*") and **Chemosh** ("*Do you not possess what Chemosh your god gives you to possess?*") or examples of where the Israelite author is reporting first-person discourse among/with foreigners. The author is simply casting the dialogue in a familiar frame for his/her Israelite audience. What better way to explain to an Israelite who Dagon w*as supposed to be* than to call him their 'Elohim'? This doesnt mean the Dagon was the Creator in the Canaanite Pantheon (nb. He wasnt), as Elohim was. This usage is not an equating of all-that-is-Elohim with Dagon at all. The Chemosh citation is the same pattern.

The Baal text is even clearer. Listen to the 'combative contrast' in Elijah's discourse:

> *"Then you call on the name of your god ("elohim"), and I will call on the name of the Lord (YHWH), and the God ('the' Elohim) who answers by fire, He is God ('the' Elohim)."*

He is appealing to Israelites who KNOW that YHWH is the true ELOHIM (they knew the Shema and traditions, at least to some extent), and the word choices are designed to confront them with this. This is about supremacy, not 'trinity' (or other attributes of God—invisibility, etc). [Baal is *never* referred to with a plural of majesty in the OT/Tanach, as far as I can tell from my tools.]

And the ghost of **Samuel** is NOT about the Israelite *elohim*, but about the canaanite *ilhm*—Del Olmo Lete's position that the *ilhm* were deceased, deified rulers fits this passage perfectly. The woman (living in Canaanite territory, semi-occupied by Israel) sees a ghost, and identifies it as an *ilhm*. Again, this is not reflective of **Israelite** usage—its just too exceptional.

In short, these passages just cannot carry any contrary weight—they are either 'too fringe', statistically insignificant, or are too narrow in focus to even bear *any* relevance to our question.

....

Pushback: *"Seeing that Glenn had answered his previous pushbacker prudently, another fellow cautiously advanced a milder objection: 'Glenn, I think your analysis of the Ugaritic data is accurate—that ilhm could NOT have been a 'plural of anything' because there were too many other 'better' gods hanging around in the pantheons lists. But couldn't **Israel** have done that? Couldn't they have deliberately picked an under-used 'plural of absoluteness' and used it **extensively**—as a polemical dig at all the would-be-gods around them ("My god is bigger than YOUR god—see this plural?...nah, nan-nah, nan, nah?") In that case, the plural WAS a deliberate 'dig' at the un-pluralized foreign deities, and this would make a perfect anti-pagan literary device to include. And it could also have been just an 'inside dig', to communicate this to the Israelite flock, who often went after these non-pluralized gods...Wouldn't this understanding preclude any 'hidden meaning' in the plural?"*

Awesome question! Proud of you! (smile), although I was hoping no one would ask me this...(smile).

As plausible as this seems on the surface, this doesn't end up making a whole lot of sense, in the situations for which it is proposed. Consider the two cases:

> **Intended for pagan readership**: Would they have interpreted this any differently than the few cases of '*honorary* absoluteness' they already had? In other words, they had *some* isolated cases of such plural/singulars, but they were always 'relative'--in a polytheistic world, you just cannot have a 'real' plural of absoluteness, so anytime you came across one in some literature, you would instantly do a **serious** 'scale reduction' on the claim. (Consider also the case of using it on 'little' Pharoah) No god could be 'absolute' in a pantheon of 100+ deities; the claim would just be trivialized/watered down to something 'honorary' (cf. honorary "Mayor of Boston for the Day"). This means that the intended polemical force would have been wasted on an serious polytheist.

Intended for Israelite readership: Apart from the true worshippers of YHWH who would have *already* experienced the 'depth' implied in elohim, I am not sure the average Israelite would have been sophisticated (or even interested) enough to have understood or appreciated this level of subtlety. Normally Moses and the prophets had to spell this out very, very explicitly: "I am the Lord, there is no other", "To whom will you compare me", "all the idols are wooden blockheads—literally" etc. In other words, that message WAS an important one and WAS one that was the focus of communication, but the data seems to indicate that it was being taught in other, more explicit, more forceful ways.

So, I don't think the form/usage would actually support such a position, especially not at the 2600+ case level.

....

Now, although this position might be suggestive (we DO have to come up with some reason for the pattern), I cannot give it too much weight—it doesn't have the precision I would like (smile)... But it still remains suggestive, because of its VERY "odd" use *relative to* other deities...

And the oddness is compounded by the **existence of alternative word forms for expressing power**. The biblical writers had *several* ways to express 'BIGness', the most common one being using words for '(the) Almighty'. There are plenty of good (unconfusing) ways to express majesty, absolutization, exclusivity, etc—but they picked a potentially 'misleading' form of a plural...when someone sees a plural form, the *first* thing they think about is PLURALITY, *not* power, absoluteness, etc. This fact—that when an author began a sentence with (the) Elohim, the audience would EXPECT a reference to plurality—strongly suggests (IMO) that this form SUGGESTS, and not merely ALLOWS, for a plurality of persons within the ONE God of the Shema.

If this incipient plurality-in-unity was either an implication of religious experience (e.g. "we experience Him as multiple-agents in One God") or simply a revelation, THEN there would be no better way to 'say it' in the text than Elohim(plural)+verb(singular)!

Again, this is HIGHLY ambiguous and SOMEWHAT suggestive, in favor of a 'Pluri-tarian' view.

Data element Three: the strange 'us' passages in Gen 1.26, 3:22, 11.7; Is 6.8.

- Gen 1.26: Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness,

- Gen 3.22: And the LORD God said, "The man has now become like one of us,

- Gen 11.7: Come, let us go down and confuse their language

- Is 6.8: Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?"

These passages have been the subject of TONS of writings and analysis. The standard non-plurality understandings of these passages use the angelic 'hosts of heaven' as the 'us'. God includes the angelic court in His use of the word 'us' (perhaps like the 1 Kgs 22 passage--which DOESN'T USE the 'us' word though!)--cf. Oswalt, NICOT in loc.

The main reason I reject this view is that God nowhere 'shares' this work with others. So Grogran (EBC, Is 6.8):

There are, of course, many biblical passages that picture God surrounded by the heavenly hosts. Not one of these, however (unless the present passage is an exception), suggest that he, the omniscient and all-wise God,

called on them for advice or even identified them with him in some way in his utterance...In a context that speaks both of waters and mountains (and so of nature) and of nations (and so, by implication, of history), the Lord refutes the notion that he consulted others (Is 40:13-14). The plural, therefore, suggests either the divine majesty or that fullness of his being that was to find its ultimate theological expression in the doctrine of the Trinity.

It is interesting that even the Rabbi's recognized that Gen 1.26 was support for the triunity of God. In the Midrash Rabbah on Genesis:

Rabbi Samuel bar Nahman in the name of Rabbi Jonathan said, that at the time when Moses wrote the Torah; writing a portion of it daily, when he came to this verse which says, "And Elohim said let us make man in our image after our likeness," Moses said, Master of the Universe why do you give herewith an excuse to the sectarians (who believe in the triunity of God)? God answered Moses, You write and whoever wants to err let him err.

Also, there is a long passage in the Talmud (Jers., Ber. 12d, 13a) dealing with the problems of the singular-plural combinations in single texts; most explanations of which are really non-answers. The participants in the discussion point out several such verses, including Josh 24.19--"for He is a holy (plural) God"!

Summary: The three data elements above show that there ARE passages in which the UNITY of God is affirmed BUT WITH the requisite ambiguity to suggest plurality-in-unity. In other words, the character of the data--making word and grammatical choices suggestive of plurality--indicates a probability of the trinitarian 'hypothesis".

Criterion Two: Statements of manifestations of God will include a set of events in which the manifestation of God INTERACTS with God (in a way suggestive of separate personality) AND a set of events (with perhaps some overlap) in which the manifestation of God is CALLED 'God' (or unambiguously IDENTIFIED as divine and not simply angelic).

In these case, there are two major manifestations (i.e. Angel of YHWH, Spirit of YHWH) and one eschatological figure (i.e. King Messiah) that interact with YHWH and yet are still IDENTIFIED/CALLED 'YHWH'.

Data Element One: The Angel of YHWH is consistently portrayed as an agent FOR YHWH, portrayed as YHWH, and portrayed as INTERACTING WITH YHWH.

Gen 16:

The angel of the LORD found Hagar near a spring in the desert; it was the spring that is beside the road to Shur. And he said, "Hagar, servant of Sarai, where have you come from, and where are you going?" I'm running away from my mistress Sarai," she answered. Then the angel of the LORD told her, "Go back to your mistress and submit to her." The angel added, "I will so increase your descendants that they will be too numerous to count." The angel of the LORD also said to her: You are now with child and you will have a son. You shall name him Ishmael, for the LORD has heard of your misery. He will be a wild donkey of a man; his hand will be against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and he will live in hostility toward all his brothers." She gave this name to the LORD who spoke to her: "You are the God who sees me," for she said, "I have now seen the One who sees me."

Notice:

- This angel promises to 'increase the descendants'--a promise only GOD makes

- This angel is called YHWH by the writer.

- This angel is called God by Hagar.

- This angel refers to the LORD in the 3rd person

NOTE: Before I go to the next passage, ask yourself this question--"How ELSE could I explain this passage WITHOUT recourse to a notion of plurality-within-God (assuming you believe the text to be authoritative revelation)?". This is the CRUX of the issue for me. In this passage and MANY, MANY others, you will be confronted with the phenomena of one Person who is called/acts like GOD and yet who refers to GOD in the 3rd person as someone Else. In a monotheistic worldview WITHOUT the plurality of persons in God, THESE PASSAGES will be unexplainable and MORE problematic that the whole notion of 'trinity'! You need to sort through this now. What are the alternative understandings of the ABOVE passage that would do AS GOOD A JOB at explaining the details of the passage?

Pushback ONE: Consider the writings of a modern Rabbi on a later passage:

"The angel in Scripture is not to be identified with God. The angel is the messenger of Gd and speaks in His name, and is often called by the Name of Him who sent him. The speech and action are the work of the angel, but the thought or will is God's... The angel is here spoken of as God, because he represents the Almighty."

The rabbi here asserts that since the angel is (1) a messenger of God and (2) represents Him, then it is proper for scripture/humans in the story to call the angel 'YHWH'.

[Although the source I cite above did not give any supporting data, this general position can also be found in the ancient rabbinical literature. In the Talmud (Sanh 38b) there is a record of a discussion between a rabbi and a heretic (probably a Christian), over the Angel in Ex 24.1. The argument there is that since the angel (Metatron) had God's name IN him (cf. Ex 23.21) it was okay to call him "YHWH". When the heretic asks why we don't then worship the angel (since he APPEARS to be able to pardon sin--verse 21), the rabbi ends up with an obscure answer that (1) strains the text and (2) no one understands. The end result, however, is that in conclusion the rabbi DENIES that the angel went with Israel (as promised in vss.20-23)! (see CTM: 285ff) I have to reject this 'answer' in light of the CLEAR statement in Num 20:16 that He did use an Angel in this process, and Judges 2.1: "The angel of the LORD went up from Gilgal to Bokim and said, "I brought you up out of Egypt and led you into the land that I swore to give to your forefathers."]

[The argument about God's name being IN him, is too ambiguous to be useful. I can use that for MY argument-- that it UNIQUELY applies to the Angel of YHWH, and others could use it to argue as above. It is simply too 'loose' of a statement to have impact on our issue.]

Now, when I start to evaluate this position, the first thing I note is that it is simply an assertion--there is NO evidence given for it whatsoever. The second thing I note is that it is TESTABLE--we have many, many occurrences elsewhere in scripture where someone speaks for YHWH and represents Him--both angels and humans (e.g. prophets and priests). So it should be testable by looking at some of those passages. If we find passages in which a human (for example) is called 'YHWH' or 'God' in an address, or in a recounting of the event, THEN the Rabbi's point is obviously demonstrated. On the other hand, if we cannot find any such passage, then the natural sense of the text must NOT be discarded because of a religious presupposition--it is a matter of exegesis FIRST, and theology SECOND. Likewise, in passages in which 'regular' angels speak for God/represent God, if we find any of THEM called 'God' or 'YHWH' then the Rabbi's point is defensible-- otherwise, it is merely unfounded conjecture.

Any humans called 'YHWH' in the act of representing/speaking for Him? This category would contain priests, prophets (especially), and kings. None that I can find.

Any 'regular' angels called 'YHWH' in the act of representing/speaking for Him? None that I can find. (There are surprisingly few OT verses that deal with 'regular' angels--most are of THE Angel of the LORD.)

The closest parallels I can find to these Angel of YHWH passages in the OT are the references to the disclosures of Gabriel to Daniel in Dan 8-12. In this passage, Gabriel delivers a lengthy message from God, without ONCE giving an indication that he is 'identified with' YHWH. For example, all references to God are in the 3rd person (no 1st person slips), and the references to Israel all are of 'your people' not 'MY people'. (On the other hand, the visions of Zech involving the Angel of YHWH, with similar types and amounts of material DO include an occasional 'slip' of that type--cf. 3:4--"I have taken your iniquity away" and 6:8--"appeased my wrath")

So, from a hypothesis 'testing' approach, the data seems to confirm the special character of the Angel of YHWH passages.

Pushback Two: "Just because the Lord speaks about Himself in the 3rd person doesn't NECESSARILY mean He is referring to someone else--we have OTHER passages in scripture where that happens and it CANNOT mean what you are making that mean, Glenn". For example, the Talmud in Sanh 38b dealing with Gen 19.24--"And the LORD rained upon Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the LORD"--points out Gen 4.23--"And Lamech said to his wives, Adah and Zillah, hear my voice, ye wives of Lamech". Lamech refers to himself in the 3rd person, but that doesn't prove that HE was a bi-unity!

This argument was further strengthened later by additional verses from I Kings 1.33 (he/David/ said to them: "Take your lord's servants with you and set Solomon my son on my own mule" and Esther 8.8. [To this we might also add 2 Sam 20.6]

Some of you have already seen the weakness of this argument...that it doesn't really match many of the passages we are discussing. Notice the pattern of the 'counter' examples:

1. They are all EXCLUSIVELY and TOTALLY 1st person disclosures (most of my examples have a mixture of 1st, 2nd, 3rd person elements in them).

2. They would ONLY be relevant when YHWH (the Father) was speaking and used both 1st and 3rd persons (ALL but one of my examples are the opposite--the Angel of the LORD is speaking).

3. The ONE case where it MIGHT apply is the Genesis 18 passage--but ONLY IF deny the contextual identification of the speaker as the Angel of YHWH--see below).

4. And, actually, in NONE of the counter-examples does the speaker actually refer to a PERSON, but only to possessions of the person. In other words, the king doesn't refer to "the king" but rather the king refers to "the king's ring".

Given all these indications of non-applicability to my texts, I cannot see any good reason to abandon my position.

Gen 21

But God said to him, "Do not be so distressed about the boy and your maidservant. Listen to whatever Sarah tells you, because it is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned. I will make the son of the maidservant into a nation also, because he is your offspring." Early the next morning Abraham took some food and a skin of water and gave them to Hagar. He set them on her shoulders and then sent her off with the boy. She went on her way and wandered in the desert of Beersheba. When the water in the skin was gone, she put the boy under one of the bushes. Then she went off and sat down nearby, about a bowshot away, for she thought, "I cannot watch the boy die." And as she sat there nearby, she began to sob. God heard the boy crying, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, "What is the matter, Hagar? Do not be afraid; God has heard the boy crying as he lies there. Lift the boy up and take him by the hand, for I will make him into a great nation."

Notice:

- God repeats the promise of This angel in the Gen 16 passage

- The Angel repeats the promise of God as HIS OWN promise

- This angel refers to God in the 3rd person.

- The angel speaks 'from heaven'--there is no need for a 'representative' in this case. (If the angel is NOT YHWH, then this scene is certainly misleading!)

Gen 22

But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!" Here I am," he replied. "Do not lay a hand on the boy," he said. "Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son." Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called that place The LORD Will Provide. And to this day it is said, "On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided." The angel of the LORD called to Abraham from heaven a second time and said, "I swear by myself, declares the LORD, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me."

Notice:

- The Angel says Abraham did not withhold his son from Himself, even though it was God who ordered it (22.2)

- This "non-withholding" clause identifies the Angel with the YHWH of the "I swear by myself" passage

- This angel refers to 'God' and 'YHWH' in the 3rd person.

- The angel repeats the blessing that had been previously uttered by YHWH and by the Angel (Gen 16, 21)

- The angel speaks 'from heaven'--there is no need for a 'representative' in this case. (If the angel is NOT YHWH, then this scene is certainly misleading!)

Gen 18

Then the LORD said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do? Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him. For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just, so that the LORD will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him."

Notice:

- This figure is NOT explicitly called the "Angel", but appears as one of three 'men' (vs. 2)--two of them are later called 'angels' --in all probability it is the Angel of YHWH(19.1)

- This figure is called YHWH

- This figure refers to 'YHWH' in the 3rd person

- This figure has 'chosen' Abraham--election is purely a divine action .

- [This passage, and the ensuing acts of the 'two men' in 19, are fraught with the mixture of singular and plural. There is a strong possibility that all three of these angels/men were YHWH--cf. esp. 19.24: "Then the LORD rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah -- from the LORD out of the heavens."

You have a YHWH on the ground, and one in heaven?! Strange stuff, but either the regular exegesis supports my position, OR a much stronger trinitarian position!]

Gen 31

The angel of God said to me in the dream, 'Jacob.' I answered, 'Here I am.' And he said, 'Look up and see that all the male goats mating with the flock are streaked, speckled or spotted, for I have seen all that Laban has been doing to you. I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed a pillar and where you made a vow to me. Now leave this land at once and go back to your native land.' "

Notice:

- The Angel of God calls HIMSELF the "God of Bethel"

- The Angel of God calls himself the recipient of Jacob's vow--which was made to YHWH in Gen 28

Exodus 3

There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. So Moses thought, "I will go over and see this strange sight --why the bush does not burn up." When the LORD saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, "Moses! Moses!" And Moses said, "Here I am." "Do not come any closer," God said. "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." Then he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.

Notice:

- The Angel of God calls HIMSELF the "God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob"

- The writer calls the Angel "God"

Exodus 13:21-22 with 14:19-20

By day the LORD went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night. Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people.

Then the angel of God, who had been traveling in front of Israel's army, withdrew and went behind them. The pillar of cloud also moved from in front and stood behind them, coming between the armies of Egypt and Israel. Throughout the night the cloud brought darkness to the one side and light to the other side; so neither went near the other all night long.

Notice:

- The same events are ascribed to BOTH YHWH and the Angel of God

Numbers 22:34-35 with 22:38 and 23:12

Balaam said to the angel of the LORD, "I have sinned. I did not realize you were standing in the road to oppose me. Now if you are displeased, I will go back." The angel of the LORD said to Balaam, "Go with the men, but speak only what I tell you." So Balaam went with the princes of Balak.

"Well, I have come to you now," Balaam replied. "But can I say just anything? I must speak only what God puts in my mouth."

He answered, "Must I not speak what the LORD puts in my mouth?"

Notice:

- The Angel is called both God and YHWH

Judges 2.1-4

The angel of the LORD went up from Gilgal to Bokim and said, "I brought you up out of Egypt and led you into the land that I swore to give to your forefathers. I said, 'I will never break my covenant with you, and you shall not make a covenant with the people of this land, but you shall break down their altars.' Yet you have disobeyed me. Why have you done this? Now therefore I tell you that I will not drive them out before you; they will be thorns in your sides and their gods will be a snare to you." When the angel of the LORD had spoken these things to all the Israelites, the people wept aloud, and they called that place Bokim. There they offered sacrifices to the LORD.

Notice:

- The Angel claims to be the one who achieved the exodus and the one the Mosaic Covenant was with!

I Chron 21

And God sent an angel to destroy Jerusalem. But as the angel was doing so, the LORD saw it and was grieved because of the calamity and said to the angel who was destroying the people, "Enough! Withdraw your hand." The angel of the LORD was then standing at the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite.

Notice:

- The Angel was sent by GOD

Other Passages:

(1) In the Gideon story (Judg 6), one reads "and the angel of the Lord appeared to him" (v12), and a little later , "and YAHWEH turned to him and said" (v14). In v.22 Gideon equates the two.

(2) Ten times "the angel of YHWH" appears in Judges 13 (and "the angel of God" two times, v6,9) to announce the birth of Samson. Toward the end of the narrative Manoah exclaims, "we shall surely die, for we have seen God" (v22).

Pushback: "Glenn, the word for ANGEL is the same word translated 'messenger' elsewhere. So all those passages in which the ANGEL speaks as YHWH (in the 1st person) could simply be short forms of a message from Yhwh, WITHOUT the "thus says the Lord" clause.

For example, Glenn, the passage in Gen 22 that you cite has the Angel saying the LONG form:

The angel of the LORD called to Abraham from heaven a second time and said, "I swear by myself, declares the LORD, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous..*

Here we have the Angel speaking with an "I swear" but adding quickly "declares the Lord". This would form the general pattern of all the later OT prophets, who consistently spoke as YHWH in the 1st person, but ALWAYS qualified it by "declares the Lord". So why couldn't the Angel's messages be simply shortened forms of prophetic utterances, and so not leading us to believe he was claiming to be/acting like YHWH?"

Response: The angel IS often a messenger, but the main reasons I don't find this objection strong enough to overturn the original arguments:

1. 'Short forms' in the OT are exceptionally rare (Is 11.9?) so why would we believe there was such a thing? The prophets were VERY CAREFUL to make it clear it was the word of THE LORD!

2. My argument in Gen 22 hinged upon the 'withheld' clause and not from the form of the blessing pronouncement.

3. The passages had OTHER means of identifying the Angel with YHWH than JUST the pronouncements--the response of the humans, the actions of the Angel, more explicit identifications (esp. Ex 3).

4. Whoever did the 'collapsing' (the editor/author/compiler) obviously was not that hyper-sensitive to what types of 'pluritarian' heresy he/she would generate! To a unitarian monotheism, these 'tensions' would have been glaring. [Compare the rabbinic story of how God rebuked Solomon for using a three-fold 'holy, holy, holy', and forced him to write Ecc 4.8, due to such sensitivities! (Debar r. ii. 33, also Bamm. r. xvi. 14)]

So the objection seems weaker and less substantial than does the original argument.

Summary: The Angel of the LORD is both God and yet refers to someone else as God. (If we don't believe there are TWO gods, I think we are 'locked into' developing some kind of plurality-within-unity concept.) This figure is beyond the normal angels and indeed is somehow SPECIALLY linked to the 'being' of God--He is called the angel of "His presence" (Is 63.9) , the angel with God's "Name" in Him (Ex 23:20-23), and is placed in a parallel construction with God's action in Zech 12.8 ("and the house of David will be like God, like the Angel of the LORD going before them.").

Data Element Two: The Spirit of God.

Let's look at some passages that manifest **some sort of 'distinction'** between God and His Spirit (e.g. sending, putting, withdrawing, giving)

Gen 1

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

Num 11:29

But Moses replied, "Are you jealous for my sake? I wish that all the LORD's people were prophets and that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!"

Neh. 9:20

You gave your good Spirit to instruct them. You did not withhold your manna from their mouths, and you gave them water for their thirst.

Ps. 51:11

Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me.

Ps. 104:30

When you send your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the earth.

Isa. 32:15

till the Spirit is poured upon us from on high, and the desert becomes a fertile field, and the fertile field seems like a forest.

Isa. 42:1

"Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations.

Isa. 48:16

"Come near me and listen to this: From the first announcement I have not spoken in secret; at the time it happens, I am there." And now the Sovereign LORD has sent me, with his Spirit.

Isa. 63:11

Then his people recalled the days of old, the days of Moses and his people -- where is he who brought them through the sea, with the shepherd of his flock? Where is he who set his Holy Spirit among them,

Ezek. 36:27

And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.

Hag. 2:5

'This is what I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt. And my Spirit remains among you. Do not fear.'

Now, we look at some passages that demonstrate **the personal characteristics** of this 'remote Agent' of God

Neh. 9:20

You gave your good Spirit to instruct them. You did not withhold your manna from their mouths, and you gave them water for their thirst.

Ps. 106:33

for they rebelled against the Spirit of God, and rash words came from Moses' lips.

Ps. 143:10

Teach me to do your will, for you are my God; may your good Spirit lead me on level ground.

Isa. 34:16

Look in the scroll of the LORD and read: None of these will be missing, not one will lack her mate. For it is his mouth that has given the order, and his Spirit will gather them together.

Isa. 63:10

Yet they rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit.

Isa. 63:14

like cattle that go down to the plain, they were given rest by the Spirit of the LORD. This is how you guided your people to make for yourself a glorious name.

Micah 2:7

Should it be said, O house of Jacob: Is the Spirit of the LORD angry? Does he do such things?" "Do not my words do good to him whose ways are upright?

Pushback: "Glenn, let me ask the same question about the Rabbinic understanding of the Holy Spirit--did they believe it was God? Did they treat it like a separate person in the Godhead?"

Response: The talmudic data discusses the Holy Spirit (their term) as a manifestation of God's presence on earth. As such, it is clearly divine--since it is simply a 'manifestation' of God. However, it is also given personal characteristics/actions (e.g. weeping--Lament R. I.45; being 'driven away' --Gen R. LXV. 4). But again, the implications are not drawn.

Pushback: "Glenn, SURELY you are pressing the data on the Spirit of God a little too far. It seems to be nothing more than a manifestation or theophany of God on earth. How strong do you think your data is to support a SEPARATE PERSON in God?"

Response: Now, overall, it seems obvious to me that the arguments about the Holy Spirit are not as 'strong' as those about the Angel of YHWH, simply because the relation of Spirit to individual is somewhat more fuzzy. In other words, if the Holy Spirit is an 'internal part' of God, then we would EXPECT the Spirit to be called YHWH; we would expect God to refer to it by 'my spirit' (just as I will refer to "my heart is heavy"), but we might NOT expect God to refer to it as "THE Spirit"--a seemingly independent title or reference. But this is JUST what we find in a couple of passages (Ex 31.3; 35.31) and this title becomes a standard way of referring to God's Spirit throughout OT history. "The Spirit" can somehow be referred to as 'distinct from' God (within bounds).

At the same time, I am not sure we eliminate the 'problem' by calling it a 'manifestation'. This particular manifestation has all the attributes of God's presence, as well as personal characteristics. God 'dispatches' this Spirit, just like He 'dispatched' the Angel. As being in God, they both could be called 'manifestations' but they both seem to be 'more'.

Summary: The Spirit of God seems to be a 'dispatch-able' Agent (like the messenger Angel), who can grieve, teach, give rest, be angry, be rebelled against, etc. He is at the same time a 'part of' God and 'distinct from' God. Plurality-in-unity.

Data Element Three: King Messiah

Since it is commonly understood that the Messiah was sent from God and ruled FOR God on earth, and therefore was QUITE 'distinct from' God, all that needs to be shown in this section is that the Messiah was ALSO declared to be divine himself. There are two points I want to demonstrate here in this regard:

First, that many of the messianic passages were understood by non-Christian Jewish interpreters (and therefore not even remotely suspect of high-Christological bias!) as teaching of a super-human, super-angelic Messiah;

Second, that at least two OT prophesies make explicit statements about the Messiah being YHWH.

First: that ONE of the MANY messianic expectations of non-Christian Jewry was of a super-human, super-angel Messiah. (For full documentation of this, see my [Messianic Expectations in 1st Century Judaism-- Documentation from Non-Christian Sources](http://christianthinktank.com))

The data for this position divides into three types: pre-Christian Jewish writings, data gleaned from the NT about Jewish expectations at the time of Christ (which we will NOT consider, since these are in the NT), and then from post-Christian writings (e.g. the Rabbinix).

*Pre-Christian Jewish writings.*The normal sources that one consults here are: The Septuagint (LXX) translation of the Hebrew OT, early portions of the Jewish Apocrypha and Pseudepigraphix, and the documents from Quman.

The LXX renderings:

(1) Gen 49.10 and Num 24:7, 17 points out that the kingdom of the Messiah was higher than any kingdom that is earthly
(2) Ps 72: 5,7: The existence of the Messiah was pre-mundane: before the Moon and Eternal
(3) Ps 110:3: The Messiah existed before the morning star
(4) Is 9.6: This passage shows that the Messiah was superior to men and angels...The 'Angel of the Great Council' is also the 'Angel of the Face' (as the Targum on the passage demonstrates)

The Jewish Apocrypha is generally silent on the entire Messianic issue (their concerns seemed to lie elsewhere).

The Jewish Pseudepigraphix gives us several strong statements:

(1) Sibylline Oracles 3.285,286: the Messiah is the 'king sent from heaven' who would 'judge every man in blood and splendor of fire'.
(2) Sibylline Oracles 3.652: the Messiah is called the "King whom God will send from the sun".
(3) The Book of Enoch: Variously describes the Messiah as "The Woman's Son" (62.5), "The Son of Man" (48.2;62.7; 69.29), God's "my son"(105.2)
(4) The Psalms of Solomon (17-18) describe a highly developed Royal Messianic figure, bordering on perfection of qualities.

Qumran: The group at Qumran consistently expected a future Messiah, with 'advanced qualities', but put much more emphasis on the human, Davidic aspects of the Messiah. So 4QFlor 1:10-13 on 2 Sam 7.13-14 describes the Messiah as Son of David, Son of God.

So, the pre-Christian Jewish writings show that the belief in a pre-mundane, eternal, super-angelic, super-human Messiah was held at least by certain influential and literate Jewish leaders. [It is generally accepted by scholars today that NO SINGLE understanding of the Messiah was normative in Israel. Different groups held different conceptions of Him, and at least ONE group did not believe in one at all--the Sadduccees, who also denied the existence of angels and the resurrection.]

Consider some of the scholarly assessments of this data today:

- [Note: from the introduction to *I Enoch* in OTP: vol 1, 9: "The Messiah in *1 Enoch*, called the Righteous One, and the Son of Man, is depicted as a pre-existent heavenly being who is resplendent and majestic, possesses all dominion, and sits on his throne of glory passing judgment upon all mortal and spiritual beings"--a human political leader, eh?!]

- Even the Jewish scholar Jacob Neusner (who attempts to minimize 'traditional' notions of the messiah) readily ADMITS that the messianic expectations of pre-Mishnahhic Jewry WERE those of an exalted super-human figure! Neusner believes that the compilers of the Mishnah were attempting to resolve the same issues, but in a different way. In describing this attempt, Neusner gives a telling description of what the 'older' traditions were (in "Mishnah and Messiah", JTM:275): "We focus upon how the system laid out in the Mishnah takes up and disposes of those critical issues of teleology worked out through messianic eschatology in **other, earlier versions of Judaism** (emphasis mine). These earlier systems resorted to the myth of the Messiah as savior and redeemer of Israel, a supernatural figure engaged in political-historical

tasks as king of the Jews, even **a God-man**(emphasis mine) facing the crucial historical questions of Israel's life and resolving them: the Christ as king of the world, of the ages, of death itself."

....

Strangely, the post-Christian Jewish writings also have an 'super-Messiah' strain. Edersheim ([LTJM:](#)123) finds this surprising:

If we now turn to works dating after the Christian era, we would naturally expect them, either simply to reproduce earlier opinions, or, from opposition to Christ, to present the Messiah in a less exalted manner. But since, strange to say, they even more strongly assert the high dignity of the Messiah, we are warranted in regarding this as the rooted belief of the Synagogue."

There is an immense amount of Rabbinic data on the super-human, super-angelic character of the Messiah, of which I can only mention a few items:

(1) The Messiah was eternal, created before the world, appearing in the world during the times of Jacob, Pharaoh, Imperial Rome, etc. (Targum on Is 9.6 and Micah 5.2; Midrash on Prov 8:9; Talmud--Jer. Ber. 2.4, p.5a; Sanh 98a; Ber. R. 85; Yalkut on Is 60)

(2) The Messiah would be greater than the patriarchs, higher than Moses, and loftier than the ministering angels (Tanch, Par. Toledoth 14; Midr. on Ps 18:36) and indeed even be given God's OWN 'crown and glory' (Midrash on Ps 21:3!).

(3) The messiah is even given credit for the work of God in creation! (the passage "the Spirit of God moved upon the deep"--Gen 1--is paraphrased in three places as "This is the Spirit of King Messiah": Ber r.2, and 8; Vayyikra R. 14)

(4) The messiah is actually called YHWH in two passages(!)--Midrash on Lam 1.16 and on Ps 21)

The rabbinic data leads clearly to the understanding that one MAIN belief of Israel was that "the Messiah expected was far above the conditions of the most exalted of God's servants, even His angels; in short, so closely bordering on the Divine, that it was almost impossible to distinguish Him therefrom" ([LTJM:](#)1.179).

Second, that at least two OT prophesies make explicit statements about the Messiah being YHWH. [The above material was cited and discussed to show that the concept of a super-human, super-angelic Messiah was NOT FOREIGN to non-Christian Jewish understanding of the messianic passages. IN LIGHT OF THIS "HIGH-VIEW" of the Messiah, I now want to examine 2 OT passages that appear to distinctly call the Messiah YHWH. I cannot be accused of making a "human-only" Messiah into some Divine figure (as Christians are sometimes accused). That OTHERS accepted the Messiah as 'more than man' is adequate defense from any such criticism in my direction.]

I wish to briefly look at two messianic passages: Zech 12 and Mal 3.

Zech 12.10: "And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on ME(emphasis mine), the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for HIM (emphasis mine) as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son.

Note:

- YHWH is speaking (He pours out the Spirit).

- YHWH is 'looked upon' by the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

- YHWH is 'pierced' by the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

- It switches to a 3rd person, in the middle of the sentence(!) "mourn for HIM"

- Remember, God the Father has NEVER been seen, nor can be 'pierced'!

- The verse is understood of Messiah Son of Joseph (the suffering messiah) in the Talmud (Sukk. 52a).

This passage has both unity AND distinction.

Mal 3.1 (coupled with Is 40.3-5):

"See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before ME (emphasis mine). Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come," says the LORD Almighty. (Mal)

A voice of one calling: "In the desert prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God. 4 Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. 5 And the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it. (Is)

These passages were considered by the Rabbinical writers as part of a messianic-passage-complex that included Is 35.1-10; Hosea 2.14; and Ex 23.20.

The main thing to note here is that the forerunner (Elijah-->John the Baptist) preceded both YHWH and the Messiah...

These two passages illustrate that the admittedly super-human/super-angelic nature of the Messiah was that of YHWH (even though the Messiah was SENT BY YHWH). Also, please note that in biblical cosmology, the ONLY 'being' higher than the angels is GOD HIMSELF. To ascribe status to the Messiah 'greater than that of angels' pushes one either to (1) a plurality within God; or (2) postulating some completely unknown, unrevealed, undiscussed, undisclosed higher status of creature!.

Summary. Even the data about the King Messiah strongly suggests a necessary plurality within God--or these texts are highly misleading! [Remember, these kinds of passages are FULLY predicted by trinitarianism (not explained by it, however!), but not by ANY of the rival theories.]

Pushback: "Glenn, if the data demonstrates this 'tension' between the concept of One God and the evidence of multiple agents being called 'God', then how did Rabbinical Judaism deal with these passages? Surely they had an exegetical understanding of these verses that avoided this conclusion?"

Response: The interesting thing about this is that you CAN find this 'problem' in the Talmudic literature! Whereas most of the above passages are assigned to Gabriel and Michael, there was also a higher angel named Metatron, who was the angel that went before the Israelites in the wilderness (see talmudic discussions at Exodus 23.20). A. Cohen, in Everyman's Talmud (Dutton Books), discusses the 'heretical identification of Metatron with God' in passages such as San 38b and Chag 15a (p. 52-53). These discussions center around the texts we have cited above--the 'problem' IS THERE in Jewish thought and remains unresolved to this day.

[God had specifically told His people that He would 'dwell among them', and the Jews of the time of Christ (and later) still saw this as future. For a list of other non-Christian Jewish writings that illustrate that this "plurality problem" was present in pre-Christian Judaism, consider these scholarly summaries and these passages].

OVERALL SUMMARY of CRITERION TWO:

There seems to be abundance of data that fits this criterion, with reference to the Angel of YHWH, the Spirit of YHWH, and to a lesser extent, the King Messiah.

Criterion Three: Attempts on the part of humans to worship/invoke different Divine agents will be allowed, AND attempts to worship superhuman/angelic beings will be denounced.

The data for the first part of this should be obvious from the passages above. In them the Angel of YHWH was treated as deity WITHOUT 'rebuke' in the Scripture. So in Gen 31.13, Jacob's vow to YHWH was actually a vow to the Angel of YHWH. Gideon makes an offering to the Angel (Jud 6.18ff). In the Judges 13 passage we get 'close to' a rebuke. The husband wants to offer a sacrifice to the Angel BEFORE he is aware that it is the Angel of the Lord (he apparently assumes that he is a 'regular' angel). The Angel of YHWH stops him from this, by insisting that he only offer it to YHWH (the implication being that only YHWH is an appropriate object of offering). In the process of making the offering, the husband recognizes the Angel of YHWH and responds by assertions of deity to the angel. The ending is instructive:

Then Manoah took a young goat, together with the grain offering, and sacrificed it on a rock to the LORD. And the LORD did an amazing thing while Manoah and his wife watched: As the flame blazed up from the altar toward heaven, the angel of the LORD ascended in the flame. Seeing this, Manoah and his wife fell with their faces to the ground. When the angel of the LORD did not show himself again to Manoah and his wife, Manoah realized that it was the angel of the LORD. "We are doomed to die!" he said to his wife. "We have seen God!"

There is not a lot of data in the OT about the second part--one way or the other. There just weren't that many encounters with regular angels. When they ARE referred to, they are never worshipped (so we cannot find any 'rebuke' passages).

So we do have a small amount of confirming data in this category, even with such a small sample size.

Observation: WHAT IS STRIKING about all this data is that there is NO attempt to 'synthesize' this into a coherent whole--the tension within a strictly monotheistic system is simply NOT addressed. The Israelites don't try to 'wrestle' the concept to the ground, establish a logical schema for it, or even to probe the implications--they simply recognize YHWH in each of those experiences.

It is interesting to me that the awe of encountering the Angel of YHWH did NOT stop them from engaging in some reflective work. For example, when Jacob wrestles with the Angel of YHWH in Gen 32, he is amazed that he saw 'God face to face, yet my life was spared'. And in Exodus, Moses is consistently warned that if anyone sees YHWH's face, he will die--yet Moses speaks face-to-face with YHWH frequently (cf 33.20 with 33.11). The Angel of YHWH seems to be the One who is always seen face-to-face in history, whereas YHWH Himself is never seen. A plurality-in-unity understanding makes this a little easier to understand, but their early efforts in this area stayed very pragmatic--they were still alive after confronting God!

Yet the Old Testament writers--from the end to the beginning--did not think it blasphemous to accord this special Angel the very SAME honor, glory, and status of God--often, in the EXACT same statement! So, early in the OT we have Israel, upon his deathbed, blessing the children of Joseph:

Then he blessed Joseph and said, "May the God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day, the Angel who has delivered me from all harm -- may he bless these boys. (Gen 48:15f)

This Angel was the God of Abraham and Issac, and was Israel's shepard. Could anything be plainer than that statement?

And Hosea, recounting the experience of Jacob's wrestling with the Angel, attaches the highest title of deity in all of Scripture to this angel:

In the womb he grasped his brother's heel; as a man he struggled with God. He struggled with the angel and overcame him; he wept and begged for his favor. He found him at Bethel and talked with him there --the LORD God Almighty, the LORD is his name of renown! (Hos 12.3-5)

This Angel was the "LORD God Almighty"?! Could anything be plainer than that statement?

. . . .

What emerges from this cursory study of some OT passages is a concept of a plurality of agents, that are very much God, but still somehow separate agents WITHIN God. So the Angel of YHWH seems to be the main 'external interface' with humans and the Spirit of God seems to be the main 'internal interface' with us. In other words, an Israelite would meet God 'face-to-face' in the Angel, but would be confronted with God INSIDE his thoughts by the Spirit of God.

Conclusion:

There seems to be an abundance of 'stubborn' data that there are multiple agents who can be appropriately called 'YHWH', and although there are STRONG prohibitions against idolatry in the OT, NOT ONCE is there any indication in the text that ascribing deity to the Angel of YHWH or Spirit of YHWH is considered blasphemous. Indeed, the grammatical and lexical data gives reasonable indication that plurality may be a basic aspect of the One God of Israel.

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