

Defining God (Part 1)

God & His Companion in Creation according to: Moses, David, Solomon, the Apostles, & the Earliest Christians

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The One God of Creation according to Moses (Gen. 1:1)

For many years Trinitarians have defended the idea of a plural God by appealing to the first words of the Bible, *“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”* The Hebrew word “Elohim” (God) is always plural in grammatical form. This was widely used by Trinitarians to validate (or at least accommodate) the idea that one God can consist of three Persons. However, Hebrew scholars have proven conclusively that this word has a singular meaning unless it is referring to more than one god in the context.¹ There are also several examples where the plural “elohim” refers to an individual pagan god.² When Elohim is used with this singular sense, it is called a “majestic plural.” Hebrew sometimes uses the plural spelling to make certain nouns superlative. It is a way of making the meaning much greater or magnificent than the usual sense. It would serve the same function as when we capitalize “God” for the superlative sense, but use the lower case “god” when referring to pagan deities. There are other Hebrew words that follow this pattern as well. For our purposes, “elohim” is spelled the same regardless of whether it is referring to the one true “Elohim” or many “elohim.” Therefore, no argument can be made successfully either way concerning whether God is a plurality of Persons or a single Person based solely on this term.

In addition, the third-century BC Jewish translators of the Septuagint used the singular masculine Greek noun θεός (Theos) where the Hebrew has “Elohim” referring to the God of Israel. When referring to pagan “gods,” they used the plural form θεοί. This shows that those most familiar with the Hebrew Scriptures and the Hebrew language of the day did not believe “Elohim” was ever meant to be understood as a plurality of Persons when referring to the God of Israel. It was always singular in sense.

If “Elohim” was meant to have a plural sense in Genesis 1 (that “God” refers to the entire Trinity which was involved in creating the heavens and the earth), then the correct translation would not be *“God created the heavens and the earth,”* but rather *“Gods created the heavens and the earth.”* No Trinitarian, however, would dare refer to the Trinity as “Gods” (plural), because this runs smack into the many passages of Scripture

¹ Gesenius, Wilhelm, Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar, Ch. II:124,g p. 399

² Ex. Judges 6:31; Judges 11:24; 1 Samuel 5:7; 2 Kings 1:2-3

that say God is one, the only God, and there is no other God but He. In order to overcome the logical problem of three Persons being one Person, Trinitarians often imply that the noun "God" is impersonal, referring to a "kind," "essence," or "substance," rather than a personal noun, referring to a Person. Thus, all of the "one God" statements are reconciled with the Trinity concept by claiming that the "one God" statements refer to a single "God-kind" or "God-family" in which individual members shared the same God-essence, God-substance, God-nature, or God-kind. To Trinitarians, "one God" does not mean one Person called "God," but rather one God race or non-personal essence shared by three Persons.

However, Scripture specifically identifies "one God" as one Person, always using singular personal pronouns. The New Testament states that "one God" or the "only God" is a single Person, the Father. For example:

John 17:1-3

1 Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: "Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You,

2 "as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him.

3 "And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.

With the clause, σὲ τὸν μόνον ἀληθινὸν θεὸν ("You, the only true God"), Jesus necessarily excluded Himself. He is then identified as the one the Father sent.

1 Cor. 8:4-6

4 Therefore concerning the eating of things offered to idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one.

5 For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as there are many gods and many lords),

6 yet for us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live.

Again, the Father alone is called the "one God," and Jesus is distinguished by being called our "one Master" (Lord).

Ephesians 4:4-6

4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling;

5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism;

6 one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

The “one God” is “Father of all,” and is distinguished from “one Lord,” who is the Son.

1 Timothy 2:5

5 For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus,

The one Mediator, who is Jesus Christ, is distinguished from the one God. In all of these verses, “God” cannot refer to a non-personal God-kind, substance, essence, or a nature. It must refer to a single Person because He is specifically named – the Father. And such statements exclude all others from the personal title “God” in these passages.

Consequently, Trinitarians are forced to obscure the meaning of the term “God” by having multiple definitions that can be drawn upon whenever convenient in order to maintain a plural Trinity. Sometimes “God” is defined as a personal noun, referring either to the Father or the Son. When faced with problems of God’s singularity in many passages like those above, definitions are switched to the non-personal “God-kind.” In addition, there are many passages that refer to pagan “gods” (which Scripture identifies as demons – created beings), for which neither definition can fit or be explained. Pagan gods are neither the Persons of the Father or Son or of the “God-kind” allegedly common to the Trinity. Therefore, a third definition is needed. Adding insult to injury, Psalm 82 twice refers to the rebellious leaders of Israel as “gods” (elohim), requiring a fourth definition! The definition of the word “God” for Trinitarians becomes whatever is needed at the time in order to maintain the idea of one God consisting of three Persons. Yet, this is not an objective hermeneutic. It is entirely subjective. Having to switch among multiple definitions in order to overcome problems is a sure sign of wrong presuppositions.

God’s Companion in Creation, according to Moses (Gen. 1:26-27)

The primary justification for having multiple definitions of “God” comes from the account of God creating mankind.

Genesis 1:26-27 NKJV

26 Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

27 So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

The switch from the plural to the singular is claimed as evidence that the plurality of Persons mentioned in verse 26 can rightly be referred to using the singular. However,

this argument is based on a faulty assumption that the word “God” in verse 26 refers to a plurality of Persons. But this has already been demonstrated to be incorrect. “God” is singular in sense. And since “God” is the Person who was speaking, “God” does not refer to a “God-kind” or “divine essence. Therefore, “God” is the single Person who spoke the words. The Septuagint makes this abundantly clear by using the singular ὁ θεός with the singular masculine definite article ὁ. Therefore, it was not a trio or duet speaking, but a singular Person who is called “God,” who alone was speaking.

The plural pronouns (Us, Our) do indeed require at least a second Person to be present. The “Majestic Plural” does not cover pronouns, only a few very specific nouns. Thus, a second Person is required by the plural personal pronouns (Us, Our). That these pronouns were indeed intended to be plural in meaning is also affirmed by the Septuagint, which renders “ποιήσωμεν” (aorist active first-person plural – “Let Us make”) and ἡμετέραν (“Our”). But the second Person(s) is not called “God,” or included in the term “God.” Therefore, since “God” must be singular in verse 26, the switch to singular pronouns in verse 27 does not provide any basis or precedent at all for claiming that “God” in other passages has a plural meaning.

The switch from plural pronouns in verse 26 to singular pronouns in verse 27 adds an extremely important aspect to this passage that is destroyed by the Trinitarian interpretation. Since God was speaking to another Person, and He indicated that both Himself (God) and the second Person would participate in the creation of man, and that both of them would be the exemplar for man to be made in their “image,” it is clear that both Persons created man together, and that man was made in the image of both Persons present – God and the second unidentified Person.

Some, including Jews, Muslims, and Unitarians, claim that the plural pronouns refer to angels. However, angels are created beings, of a kind that is foreign to both God and mankind. If verse 26 refers to God and His angels, then man was created in a blended image of two different “kinds” – God-kind plus angel-kind. However, verse 27 states twice that man was created in the image of God – singular. Therefore, it was not a blend of God and angels as the exemplar, but God alone who is necessarily one Person. How do we reconcile the fact that man was created in the image of God alone, yet he was created in the image of God plus another unnamed Person(s)? The answer can be only one thing: The second Person(s) who assisted in the creation of man was of the same “kind” as God Himself. As such, there is no difference if man was made in the image of God, or made in the image of God plus another Person who was of the same “kind.” That is, both God and the second Person shared the God-kind!

The concept of “kind” – meaning creatures that procreate only according to what they actually are – is stated in this very chapter. Both plants and animals were created to reproduce after their “kind.”³ The word translated “kind” in the LXX is γένος (genos), from the verb γεννᾶω “generate/beget.” Thus, when animals or plants reproduce according to “kind” (γένος), it implies a reproducing of the original, with the descendants being of exactly the same kind, nature, essence. Within this very clear concept introduced during the first six days of creation, we have the creation of man after the image of God plus another Person, yet also created in the image of God alone. The necessary inference from the switch from plural to singular in verses 26-27 is that the second Person(s) is of the same “kind” as the one called “God.” And if being of the same “kind” necessarily stems from the concept of procreation in Genesis 1, **the logical inference is that the second Person is the Son of God.** Therefore, to an uncorrupted and unbiased Jewish mind contemplating Moses’ words, God must have had a literal “Son” present with Him at creation. And this fact is established in the very first chapter of the Torah!

But there is another logical and necessary inference from these two critical verses: Not only are both Persons in verse 26 the exemplar after which man is the image, but both participated in the creation of man. Yet, verse 27 attributed the creation of man to a single Person, God! This is where the concept of “agency” first appears in the creation account. When someone employs a second person to perform a task under his authority, the second person is the agent of the first. Yet it remains proper to say that the first person did the task. For example, if I hire a realtor to sell my house, and the house is sold, it is still proper to say that “I sold my house.” This is because I initiated the action, provided the house to sell, signed the contracts, and personally participated in the closing. Yet, the realtor is the one who actually sold the house as my agent. So, depending on context, we could either say that I sold my house or the realtor sold my house. Either way the statement is true because we understand the concept of “agency.” Actually, the best way to say this is that I sold my house **through** an agent.

God’s Companion in Creation according to David (Psalm 102:23-28)

In Hebrews 1, Paul quoted several Old Testament passages that spoke of the Son, contrasting these with the angels. One of these passages that Paul said was spoken by David to the Son of God was Psalm 102.

Hebrews 1:8-12

*8 But **to the Son He says:***

³ Gen. 1:11, 12, 24, 25, etc.

“Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your Kingdom. 9 You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You With the oil of gladness more than Your companions.” [Psalm 45:6-7 LXX]

10 And:

***“You, LORD, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, And the heavens are the work of Your hands.** 11 They will perish, but You remain; And they will all grow old like a garment; 12 Like a cloak You will fold them up, And they will be changed. But You are the same, And Your years will not fail.” [Psalm 102:25-27 LXX]*

Paul claimed that two of David’s Psalms were addressed to the Son of God. The first was Psalm 45, which is very obviously a Messianic Psalm, referring to the anointing of the Messiah to reign as “God” in the Kingdom by Messiah’s own “God” – the supreme God. However, the second quote comes from Psalm 102, which contains a prayer of David **to the Son of God**. In this prayer, David asks the Son to spare his life a little longer. He contrasted his own mortality and short lifespan with the Messiah’s own origin (from His role in creation itself), then with His reigning forever upon the Throne of David as God promised him.⁴

Psalm 102:23-28

23 He weakened my strength in the way; He shortened my days.

24 I said, “O my God, Do not take me away in the midst of my days; Your years are throughout all generations.

*25 **Of old You laid the foundation of the earth, And the heavens are the work of Your hands.***

26 They will perish, but You will endure; Yes, they will all grow old like a garment; Like a cloak You will change them, And they will be changed.

27 But You are the same, And Your years will have no end.

28 The children of Your servants will continue, And their descendants will be established before You.”

According to Paul, the words in quotations beginning in vs. 24 were spoken by David to the Son. David claimed that the foundations of the earth and the heavens were the work of the Messiah’s hands! Thus, the second Person present in Gen. 1:26-27 was the Son. Immediately after this quotation from Psalm 102, Paul added: Yet, in the very next verse Paul contrasted the Son’s role with that of the angels, showing just how inferior they were to the Son whose hands fashioned the creation.

⁴ 1 Chron. 17:10-15 (cf. the application of verse 13 to Christ in Heb. 1:5)

3 When has He ever said to any of the messengers, "Sit on my right side until I should place Your enemies under your feet"?

In this very passage Paul countered the Jewish argument concerning angels participating in creation.

God's Companion in Creation according to Solomon (Prov. 8:22-30)

The second Person present in Genesis 1:26 was also identified by Solomon as God's Son, the one whom God "begat," who accompanied God in creating all things.

Proverbs 8:22-31 LXX⁵

22 κύριος ἔκτισέν με ἀρχὴν ὁδῶν αὐτοῦ εἰς ἔργα αὐτοῦ

*"**The Lord made Me THE BEGINNING** of His ways for His works."*

23 πρὸ τοῦ αἰῶνος ἐθεμελίωσέν με ἐν ἀρχῇ

*"Before the age **He established Me in the beginning.**"*

24 πρὸ τοῦ τὴν γῆν ποιῆσαι καὶ πρὸ τοῦ τὰς ἀβύσσους ποιῆσαι πρὸ τοῦ
προελθεῖν τὰς πηγὰς τῶν ὑδάτων

"Before the creating of the land, and before the creating of the deep, before the fountains of water came forth,"

25 πρὸ τοῦ ὄρη ἐδρασθῆναι πρὸ δὲ πάντων βουνῶν γεννᾶ με

*"before the mountains were settled, before all hills, **HE BEGETS ME.**"*

26 κύριος ἐποίησεν χώρας καὶ ἀοικήτους καὶ ἄκρα οἰκούμενα τῆς ὑπὲρ
οὐρανόν

"The Lord made countries and wilds, and the top inhabited [places] under heaven."

27 ἠνίκα ἠτοίμαζεν τὸν οὐρανὸν συμπαρήμην αὐτῷ καὶ ὅτε ἀφώριζεν τὸν
ἑαυτοῦ θρόνον ἐπ' ἀνέμων

*"When He was preparing the heaven, **I was present with Him,** and when He was setting His throne over the wind,"*

28 ἠνίκα ἰσχυρὰ ἐποίει τὰ ἄνω νέφη καὶ ὡς ἀσφαλεῖς ἐτίθει πηγὰς τῆς ὑπὲρ
οὐρανόν

"when He was strengthening the clouds above, and as He secured the fountains under heaven,"

29 καὶ ἰσχυρὰ ἐποίει τὰ θεμέλια τῆς γῆς

"when He established the foundations of the earth,"

30 ἤμην παρ' αὐτῷ ἀρμόζουσα ἐγὼ ἤμην ἣ προσέχαιρεν καθ' ἡμέραν δὲ
εὐφραϊνόμενη ἐν προσώπῳ αὐτοῦ ἐν παντὶ καιρῷ

*"**I was beside Him, master-crafting,** I was the one He was delighting in, daily rejoicing in His presence, in all appointed times."*

⁵ The Greek text of the Septuagint is Alfred Rahlfs edition; the English literal translation is mine.

This is the epitome of the concept of agency. It is the reason for the change from plural to singular concerning who created man in Genesis 1:26-27. The one whom God “begat” must be His Son, to be His companion in creation.

God’s Companion in Creation according to the Apostles

In the New Testament, the same concept of “agency” regarding the Son’s role in creation is consistent by the use of the appropriate prepositions for God as the “source” (ἐκ), but the Son as “agent” (διὰ).

John 1:3,10

*3 All things were made **through** (διὰ) Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. ...*

*10 He was in the world, and the world was made **through** (διὰ) Him, and the world did not know Him.*

Logos was not the source of creation, but God’s Agent. The preposition διὰ refers to agency when its object is in the genitive case, as it is in all of the following passages.

1 Corinthians 8:6

*6 yet for us there is one God, the Father, **of whom** [ἐξ οὗ] are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, **through whom** [δι’ οὗ] are all things, and through whom we live.*

The preposition ἐξ (or ἐκ) literally means “out of,” and is used when speaking of the absolute, primary source of something. This is what is attributed to the Father. The preposition δι’ (διὰ) refers to agency. Thus, Paul attributed the ultimate source of all things to the Father, but the role of God’s Agent in creation is assigned to the Son.

Ephesians 3:9

*9 and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things **through** (διὰ) Jesus Christ.⁶*

Colossians 1:16

*16 For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created **through** (διὰ) Him and for Him.*

⁶ The last clause does not appear in some of the early manuscripts. However, whether or not this clause was original, it still follows the pattern of assigning agency (διὰ), not source, to the Son’s role in creation.

Hebrews 1:2

2 has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, **through** (διὰ) whom also He made the worlds;

Hebrews 2:10

10 For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and **by** (διὰ) whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.

Consequently, we have perfect harmony between Moses, David, Solomon, John, and Paul. The Son of God was the second Person present with God during creation week, His Agent to whom He said, "Let Us make man in Our image, and after Our likeness."

God's Companion in Creation according to the earliest Christians

From the earliest testimonies of post-apostolic Christianity, the plural pronouns (Us/Our) in Genesis 1:27 referred to God and His Son. The following are a few of the earliest witnesses to this fact. Many more could be produced from later writers.

Barnabas of Alexandria (AD 100?):

"And further, my brethren: if the Lord endured to suffer for our soul, He being Lord of all the world, to whom God said at the foundation of the world, 'Let Us make man after Our image, and after Our likeness,' understand how it was that He endured to suffer at the hand of men."

Justin Martyr of Rome (AD 110-165):

*"And the same sentiment was expressed, my friends, by the word of God [written] by Moses, when it indicated to us, with regard to Him whom it has pointed out, that God speaks in the creation of man with the very same design, in the following words: 'Let **Us** make man after **Our** image and likeness. ... I shall quote again the words narrated by Moses himself, from which we can indisputably learn that [God] conversed with someone who was numerically distinct from Himself, and also a rational Being. These are the words: 'And God said, Behold, Adam has become as one of **Us**, to know good and evil.' In saying, therefore, 'as one of **Us**,' [Moses] has declared that [there is a certain] number of persons associated with one another, and that they are at least two. For I would not say that the dogma of that heresy which is said to be among you is true, or that the teachers of it can prove that [God] spoke to angels, or that the human frame was the workmanship of angels. But this Offspring, which was truly brought forth*

from the Father, was with the Father before all the creatures, and the Father communed with Him; even as the Scripture by Solomon has made clear, that **He whom Solomon calls Wisdom, was begotten as a Beginning before all His creatures and as Offspring by God...**"⁷

Theophilus of Antioch (AD 115-181):

"God, then, having His own Word internal within His own bowels, **begat Him, emitting Him along with His own wisdom before all things. He had this Word as a helper in the things that were created by Him, and by Him He made all things.** He is called "governing principle," because He rules, and is Lord of all things fashioned by Him. He, then, being Spirit of God, and governing principle, **and Wisdom,** and power of the highest, came down upon the prophets, and through them spoke of the creation of the world and of all other things. For the prophets were not when the world came into existence, but the Wisdom of God which was in Him, and His holy Word which was always present with Him. Wherefore He speaks thus by the prophet Solomon: **"When He prepared the heavens I was there, and when He appointed the foundations of the earth I was by Him as one brought up with Him."**⁸

"But as to what relates to the creation of man, his own creation cannot be explained by man, though it is a succinct account of it which holy Scripture gives. **For when God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness,"** He first intimates the dignity of man. **For God having made all things by His Word,** and having reckoned them all mere by-works, reckons the creation of man to be the only work worthy of His own hands. Moreover, God is found, as if needing help, to say, **"Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness."** **But to no one else than to His own Word and Wisdom did He say, "Let Us make."**⁹

Irenaeus of Lyons (AD 120-202):

"As it has been clearly demonstrated that **the Word, who existed in the beginning with God, by whom all things were made, who was also always present with mankind,** was in these last days, according to the time appointed by the Father, united to His own workmanship, inasmuch as **He became a man** liable to suffering, [it follows] that every objection is set aside of those who say, "If our Lord was born at that time, Christ had therefore no previous existence." **For I have shown that the Son of God**

⁷ Justin, Dialogue with Trypho, ch. lxii

⁸ Theophilus, To Autolycus, Bk. I, ch. x

⁹ Theophilus, To Autolycus, Bk. II, ch. xviii

did not then begin to exist, being with the Father from the beginning; but when He became incarnate, and was made man, He commenced afresh the long line of human beings, and furnished us, in a brief, comprehensive manner, with salvation; so that what we had lost in Adam — namely, to be according to the image and likeness of God — that we might recover in Christ Jesus. ...”¹⁰

Tertullian of Carthage (AD 145-220):

“‘The head of every man is Christ.’ What Christ, if He is not the author of man? The head he has here put for authority; now ‘authority’ will accrue to none else than the ‘author.’ Of what man indeed is He the head? Surely of him concerning whom he adds soon afterwards: ‘The man ought not to cover his head, forasmuch as he is the image of God.’ Since then he is the image of the Creator (for He, when looking on Christ His Word, who was to become man, said, ‘Let us make man in our own image, after our likeness’), how can I possibly have another head but Him whose image I am? For if I am the image of the Creator there is no room in me for another head.”¹¹

“For so did the Father previously say to the Son: ‘Let us make man in Our own image, after Our likeness.’ And God made man, that is to say, the creature which He molded and fashioned; after the image of God (in other words, of Christ) did He make him.”¹²

Without exception the earliest Christians believed and taught that the Son of God was the only one present with God in the beginning, through whom God created all things. In making these claims, they distinguished also between the one called “God” and His Son, called “Word” and “Wisdom.” The Son was indeed of the God-kind, begotten by Him, proceeding out of God. But the term “God” was almost always reserved for the Father alone.¹³ In no case is the term “God” ever used in Scripture as a reference to a plural Trinity or a plural entity, consisting of Father and Son.

The harmony regarding grammar and logical inferences between the Old and New Testaments can only be maintained when we continue to define “God” exactly as the LXX translators did, using the masculine, singular, personal noun for “God.” The word “God” always describes a single Person.

¹⁰ Irenaeus, Against Heresies, Bk. III, ch. ix

¹¹ Tertullian, Against Marcion, Bk. V, ch. viii

¹² Tertullian, On the Resurrection of the Flesh, ch. vi

¹³ There are a few exceptions, which will be explained in forthcoming articles.