

Trinitarian Interpretation in Light of the Identity of YHWH as the Triune God by A K Eldhose

The following excerpts are from:

Trinitarian Interpretation in Light of the Identity of YHWH as the Triune God – A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Approach – by Alias K. Eldhose <https://www.amazon.com/Trinitarian-Interpretation-Light-Identity-Triune-ebook/dp/B0CT18WHZH>

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Note: TIS stands for Theological Interpretation of Scripture.

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The thesis of this book is that Trinitarian interpretation must be founded upon the proper identification of YHWH as the triune God. Reconsidering the identity of YHWH in light of the relevant OT and NT passages along with the early church's understanding of the appellation "Father" for God leads to the conclusion that YHWH is the triune God. YHWH is Father, Son, and Spirit just as the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Spirit is God. The Nicene-Constantinopolitan creed makes it amply clear that this one God is the Father, Son, and Spirit. God's personal name יהוה in the Hebrew Bible is often translated κύριος in the LXX, which in the NT is used interchangeably for God (general term), God the Father, and Jesus Christ.¹⁶ Further, the NT argues that Jesus came to reveal YHWH (the one true God of the OT) and he reveals him as the Father, Son, and Spirit (John 1:18; 10:30; 14:7–11; 17:21; 1 Cor 8:6; Eph 4:4–6; Phil 2:9–11; cf. Isa 45:18–25; Exod 3:2–15; 6:3; Judg 6:11–24; 13:24–25; 14:6, 19; 15:14; 16:20).

There is a difference between the references to God as "Father" in the OT (Deut 32:6; Isa 9:6; 63:16; 64:8; Jer 3:4, 19; Mal 1:6; 2:10) and Jesus' reference to God as his Father (John 5:17–18; 10:30). In the former case, YHWH is called "Father" not in the intra-Trinitarian sense, but as the Father of the nation Israel (cf. Isa 9:6—Christian tradition takes Jesus as the referent of the phrase "everlasting Father"). In the latter case, Jesus calls God his "Father" in the intra-Trinitarian sense (John 5:17–19; 10:30; 17:5—here Father is the Father of the Son). Calling God "Father" does not mean that P1 is inferred in all such cases.

Paul, alluding to the Shema, writes that there is only one God and he identifies this one God with Father, Son, and Spirit (1 Cor 8:6; Eph 4:4–6; cf. Eph 3:14–19). The New Testament and the early church understood God to be one; yet they directed their worship of this one true God in the figure of Jesus by addressing prayer, thanksgiving, and worship to him, always assuming that in their worship of Jesus they were worshiping YHWH (Isa 45:22–24; cf. Phil 2:9–11).

A theological interpretation based on the identity of YHWH as the triune God is more comprehensive and biblically accurate. It has the potential to mitigate the overwhelming tendency for isolationism prevalent in the current proposals for Trinitarian interpretation. It will also help answer detractors' objections regarding the legitimacy of Trinitarian interpretation in the first place. As indicated earlier, the main reason for their objections stems from the fact that the current models on Trinitarian interpretation misidentify YHWH as P1. If the identity of YHWH as the triune God can be established on sound biblical reasoning, then it will help make better sense of Jesus' claims that the OT bears witness to him (John 5:38–57; Luke 24:44), just as the new way of understanding the same Scripture was ushered in once Jesus explained the OT Scriptures to the disciples (Luke 24:25–27, 44–47). Identifying YHWH as the triune God is necessary for biblical interpretation to overcome Marcion's straitjacket. Although the church has rejected his proposal of the OT God being different from the God in the NT, history of interpretation reveals that the church has not always overcome the tendency to differentiate between God in the OT and in the NT.

Not only is there an isolationist tendency in Trinitarian interpretation, but also a chasm between proposals and practice. To bridge that chasm, this book will present a distinctly Christian and thoroughly Trinitarian reading of Gen 3:22 and 1 Cor 10:4, which will also demonstrate the impact of the identification of YHWH as the triune God for TIS.

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(...approximately 205 pages...)

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YHWH as the Triune God

YHWH reveals his name to Moses in Exod 3:14–15 and 6:2–3. As presented in chapter 3, the identity of YHWH cannot be understood purely based on an etymological study. In order to understand his identity, we have to look at how he revealed himself throughout the OT. What

emerges from that study is that YHWH's revelation of his name to Moses was the beginning of a new epoch in the history of Israel. Until this time, God spoke to the patriarchs directly, but from now on he spoke to his people through the representatives he chose. This change in Moses' own understanding can be noted in his invocation of God's name as YHWH in Exod 32:11–13, where Moses addresses his God as YHWH and reminds YHWH of his covenant with the patriarchs. Moses was convinced of the name of the God of the patriarchs once he revealed himself in Exod 3:14–15 and 6:2–3. Included in that revelation is YHWH's unique claim that he alone is God and none beside him. The Shema reminds the people to give him their complete devotion because he alone is God (Deut 6:4b).

The modern concept of monotheism complicated the way the identity of YHWH was viewed. In light of Deut 4 and 32, and other passages, it was argued that a better way to translate the Shema is "YHWH is our God, YHWH alone." The emphasis was not on number (one), but on his uniqueness. However, an inquiry into the identity of YHWH is complicated by the reference to YHWH as Father and Jesus' reference to the first person of the Trinity as his Father. As was shown, there is a difference between calling God Father in the OT and Jesus' own reference to the first person of the Trinity as Father—the former is a title of endearment and the latter reveals an ontological relation (between Jesus and the first person of the Trinity). The Jews who wanted to kill Jesus understood that Jesus called God "Father" in the ontological sense (John 5:18; cf. 8:41–42; 17:5).

In addition, Jesus called God "Father" contrary to the claims of Joachim Jeremias and others. Jesus also told us that we have this knowledge only through him because he alone reveals the Father (John 14:3–23). Our knowledge of the Father is a new kind of knowledge that was not available before (John 14:7—"from now on you know him, and have seen him"), and this knowledge is possible only through Jesus. Jesus has revealed that his reference to the Father is different from our own. Because the Father and the Son are one (John 10:30), our prayer and thanksgiving addressed to Jesus is also addressed to the Father and vice versa (John 14:10, 13–14). That there is a difference between calling God Father in the OT and Jesus' address to God as his Father can be established from Scripture.

The church fathers used the appellation "Father" for God in a number of ways. They were not always consistent in their use. The apologists often used the name in the Platonic sense ("father of the Universe") because of their disputations with the non-Christians. However, from the time of Irenaeus we see a more nuanced use of the name to refer to the first person of the Trinity, especially in Athanasius. Again, his focus was not on establishing whether YHWH was P1, but rather proving the eternity of the Son—if God has always been Father, then he could not have been Father without the Son; there was no time when the Son was not. Augustine, referring to

the Shema, writes that “Hear, O, Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord” does not exclude the Son and the Spirit (Trin. 5.11.12). However, Gregory of Nazianzus mentions that the OT reveals the Father openly and the Son obscurely, but the NT proclaims the Son openly and indicates the Deity of the Spirit). The church fathers’ use of the appellation “Father” for God needs to be evaluated in light of the relevant biblical passages. It becomes obvious, as presented in chapter 3, that there is a difference between calling God “Father” in the OT and Jesus’ reference to God as his “Father.”

How do we understand the identity of YHWH? As asserted in chapter 3, a careful study of several OT passages reveals that multiple persons or entities are identified by the name YHWH. For example, יהוה and מלאך יהוה sometimes appear together (Judg 6:11–24), other times first the יהוה appears and then without any warning or hint מלאך יהוה becomes יהוה (Exod 3:2, 4). The Spirit of YHWH is sometimes equated with YHWH (Judg 13:25, 14:6, 19; 15:14; cf. 16:20). The OT also associates the exodus with יהוה (Exod 13:3, 9, 14, 16; 14:25; 16:6), מלאך יהוה (Judg 2:1–5), and רוח יהוה (Isa 63:14). Similarly, the Israelite sin during the wilderness journey was against יהוה (Exo 16:8; Num 11:1; Deut 1:26; 9:23; Jer 3:25), מלאך יהוה (Judg 2:2), and רוח יהוה (Isa 63:10). These OT passages reveal an important point—multiple persons are identified by the name YHWH and still it is not against YHWH’s claim that he alone is God.

The NT ascribes to Jesus what was once said of YHWH: his name (John 1:18; Rev 1:17; 22:13; cf. Exod 3:14 [LXX]; Rev 1:4, 8), receiving glory and honor (Phil 2:9–11; cf. Isa 45:21–23), and confessing his name for salvation (Rom 10:9–13; cf. Isa 28:16; Joel 2:32; and Acts 2:21; 4:12; cf. Joel 2:32). Similarly, the NT attributes the exodus to Jesus (Jude 5) and the Israelites sinning against him (1 Cor 10:9). The Spirit is also identified with YHWH in the NT (Heb 3:7–11; cf. Ps 95:7–11). Ultimately, Paul identifies the Shema with the Father, Son, and Spirit (1 Cor 8:6). In light of the many biblical evidence, we can deduce that multiple persons are identified by the name YHWH in the OT and the NT identifies the Shema with the Father, Son, and the Spirit and ascribes to him what was once exclusively ascribed to YHWH; therefore, YHWH is the Father, Son, and Spirit.

The creeds claim that the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Spirit is God, but there is one God. Similarly, it can be argued that the Father is YHWH, the Son is YHWH, and the Spirit is YHWH, but only one YHWH. Just as the Father receives his being from no one, but the Son and the Spirit eternally receive their being from the Father, so also the Father is YHWH by his own being, but the Son and the Spirit receive the name YHWH from the Father. The identification of YHWH as the triune God is biblically sustainable and creedally orthodox.

This identification of YHWH as the triune God is necessary for a robust view of Trinitarian interpretation. This may also offer a way to understand the NT quotations of the OT and open a window into the NT's and the early church's understanding of the Godhead. Taking YHWH as the triune God also helps overcome the isolationist tendency prevalent in the current models of Trinitarian interpretation.

The Impact of the Trinitarian Identity of YHWH

If YHWH is the triune God, then a Trinitarian interpretation of Scripture can be undertaken with virtue and verve. The Trinitarian identity of YHWH will help make better sense of Jesus' own claim that things concerning him were written in the Scriptures such as the OT Scriptures (Luke 24:25–27, 44; John 5:39–47). The identity of YHWH as the Father, Son, and Spirit facilitates a holistic reading of Scripture—it allows the whole Scripture (Genesis to Revelation) to be taken as witnessing to the triune God. It will also allow one to traverse the so-called Lessing's ditch (the gap between history and faith) in biblical interpretation by bringing history and revelation together to understand the whole Scripture as a single witness to the one true God—an end to which Barth labored so vigorously. What often prevents one from traversing the testamental and historical divide in Trinitarian interpretation is one's failure to recognize the triune identity of YHWH.

When Gen 3:22 is read in light of the identity of YHWH as the triune God, it will help make some connections that would otherwise be lacking. A link between YHWH who prevents man from eating from the tree of life so that he may not “eat and live forever” in his state of rebellion and Jesus who offers man the opportunity to “eat and live forever” in John 6:27–58 can be established if the identity of YHWH is taken as triune. It was God's gracious act that prevented Adam and Eve from taking from the tree of life and eat from it. It is also God's gracious act in inviting humans into this intimate and mysterious relationship with him in which they are allowed to eat once again so that they may live forever as a result of that eating.

Of course, in John 6 the eating is more than just mere eating of Jesus' flesh. It is symbolic of one's faith in Jesus and also symbolic of the mystery of the Eucharist in which the bread and wine mysteriously appropriated as the flesh and blood of Christ without it actually becoming one literally. YHWH always wanted humans to “eat and live forever,” not on human terms but on YHWH's terms. YHWH did not allow Adam and Eve to eat from the tree of life. He expelled them from the garden to teach them obedience (Gen 3:24). But the children of Adam are given the opportunity to eat as an act of obedience. YHWH has proven himself to be a good and compassionate God. That act of compassion can be seen in Jesus, in his life, death, and resurrection. He is YHWH's compassion personified.

The impact of the Trinitarian identity of YHWH in interpretation is also evident in the reading of 1 Cor 10:4. Paul uses the phrase “and the rock was Christ” just before the paraenetic section of 10:6–11. When this passage is read within the larger section of chapters 8–11, it can be seen that Paul is concerned about the proper use of Christian liberty by the Corinthians and their need to be careful about their spiritual journey because it is possible for them to displease the Lord just like the Israelites did during their wilderness journey. The Corinthians are in a position to offend the same Lord who provided the Israelites with their supply of water during the wilderness journey. The Lord provided them food and drink (10:3–4) and then Paul says that the rock Israelites drank from was Christ.

Naturally, one may wonder how Paul could make such a statement. Did Paul believe that Jesus was present during the wilderness journey? What to make of Paul’s statement in 10:4? These are good questions and quite natural for someone to ask. The answer to these questions can be found in Paul’s own statement in 10:9—the Israelites tested Christ in the wilderness. Moreover, Jesus himself claimed in John’s Gospel that he is the bread of life and the living water (John 4:13–14; 6:31–33; 7:37–39). So Paul could have easily connected Jesus’ statement and his own conviction that the Shema includes Christ (1 Cor 8:6).

For Paul, the identity of Jesus is included in the identity of YHWH. That is why he could make such statements. Unless they heed the warning, the disobedient Corinthians could share a similar fate to the disobedient Israelites. It is the same God who judges. Paul connects this section to his particular advice regarding the Lord’s Supper (10:16–22) where he again references OT materials to make his point. He sees no division within the Godhead in terms of their work. The Father, Son, and Spirit have always been active and at work since the beginning of creation. The YHWH who called Israel is the same YHWH who calls other to be his people. He both provides and punishes. It is up to Christians to decide whether they want to enjoy his provision or receive his punishment (cf. Jude 4–5). The same warning Paul presented to the Corinthians is before the present community of God as well because it is the same Lord who is at work in both communities. A connection can be seen here—the same Lord who provided for the Israelites and punished them during their wilderness journey was presented to the Corinthians as able and ready to both provide and punish. The same YHWH is presented in the Scriptures to the contemporary Christians as the one who is ready to provide for them and punish them if necessary. The question that remains is whether Christians take Paul’s warning about hardening their hearts against YHWH seriously (Heb 3:7–11—the Spirit is called YHWH here).

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