

The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament

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Let me begin by quoting Unitarian scholar John Wilson:

“Whatever holds back a spirit of inquiry is favorable to error, whatever promotes it, to truth. But nothing, it will be acknowledged, has a greater tendency to obstruct the spirit of inquiry, than the spirit and feeling of party. Let a doctrine, however erroneous, become a party distinction, and it is at once entrenched in interests and attachments which make it extremely difficult for the most powerful artillery of reason to dislodge it.”¹

Mainstream Christianity, 160 years after he wrote, is wholly caught up in what this Unitarian scholar describes. Notwithstanding all their scholarly research and “inquiry” into the true make up of the Godhead, they are so entrenched in the Trinitarian Doctrine that it truly has become a party distinction and is, by all odds, most difficult to dislodge from their minds and practices.

The Trinitarians, largely, fit the description found in 2 Timothy 3:7, “always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.” Because of their bias for things Trinitarian, they ignore the plain words of the Bible, which speaks of the One God of Israel (Deut. 6:4; Mk. 12:29). Jesus Christ, in John 17:3 and John 5:44, plainly asserts that the Father is the only true God. That makes Him unique and logically eliminates Jesus, as Christians so-called believe, from being God with a capital G. Logic also dictates that if God the Father is the only true God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit cannot be Gods in the sense of being distinct persons in the Godhead and be co-equal and co-eternal with the Father.

Where do the Trinitarians get the idea that their God consists of three persons that make up one God? We all know that they do not derive it from Scripture, but largely from Gnosticism. Anthony Buzzard points clearly to the Trinitarian’s problem:

“There is no passage of Scripture which asserts that God is three: no authentic verse claims that the One God is three persons, three spirits, three divine, infinite minds, or three anything. No verse or word of the Bible can be shown to carry the meaning ‘God in three persons.’ *Any claim that there are three who compose the Deity must be based on inference, rather than plain statements. The Trinitarian concept relies upon sophisticated and often tortured logic, which lacks solid support in the earliest Christian writings*” (Emphasis mine).²

How, in the face of such matter-of-fact, plain statements and a mountain of evidence to the contrary, can the Trinitarians continue to ignore the truth? “Jeremiah 17:9 says of the mind of man “The heart *is* deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?” The deceitfulness of man’s mind comes in many forms, but one of the worst is the abominably deceptive teaching that God is a Trinity. Despite a flood of evidence to the contrary, Trinitarians are adamant in their belief that the Godhead consists of three divine persons who are co-equal and co-eternal. Largely, when

¹ Anthony F. Buzzard and Charles F. Hunting, *The Doctrine of the Trinity: Christianity’s Self-inflicted Wound*, International Scholars Publications, Lanham: 1998, pp. 2, 3. “Terms of Communion,” Works, 1: 352, cited by John Wilson in *Unitarian Principles Confirmed by Trinitarian Testimonies*, Boston: American Unitarian Association, 1848, 156.

² Ibid. p. 4.

confronted with the truth, they seem to have the attitude described in Jeremiah 18:12 where God declares that He intends to bring calamity upon the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem because of their evil ways.

"So now then, speak to the men of Judah and against the inhabitants of Jerusalem saying, 'Thus says the LORD, "Behold, I am fashioning calamity against you and devising a plan against you. Oh turn back, each of you from his evil way, and reform your ways and your deeds.'" (Jer 18:11 NASB).

God gave them an out but they stubbornly refused. Look at their attitude in verse 12.

"But they will say, 'It's hopeless! For we are going to follow our own plans, and each of us will act according to the stubbornness of his evil heart'" (Jer 18:12 NASB).

Incredible! If only they would have turned from their evil ways, He would have changed His mind and the prophecy would have failed. Despite God's plea, they steeled their minds, gritted their teeth, and shook their fists in God's face. Largely, is this not the same attitude the Trinitarians have when they are shown the truth about the Godhead? Anytime a biblical Unitarian presents them the truth, how willing are they to listen? Mostly, they are not willing at all but rather, are content to argue the point from the orthodox position, which they claim obstinately, is the correct position. Seemingly, they have never considered that the orthodox position is the wrong position. Rather than consider the monotheistic position as an opportunity to turn from their mistaken beliefs to the plain, matter of fact words of Jesus, they prefer to emulate the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem. For the most part, those who stubbornly follow the Trinitarian Doctrine contrary to sound biblical teaching, the situation does become hopeless. No matter how many facts they encounter, it is hopeless to attempt to change their thinking, for they say by their actions, we will not follow God in this matter! We will follow our own beliefs and traditions and act according to our own stubborn hearts!

With that said, let me turn to the subject of this paper, the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament.

The Plurality—so-called—of the Godhead

Ask any Trinitarian to prove the existence of the Holy Trinity in the Bible and he may take you to the very first verse of Genesis. Having turned there and read it to you, he might well say to you, in the words of Eric S. Fife in his book *The Holy Spirit, Common Sense and the Bible*,

"It is of more than usual significance to note that the plurality of the Godhead is mentioned as early as the first two verses of the Bible."³

I think we all understand that Mr. Fife refers to the use of the word *Elohim* in the first verse of Genesis. Moreover, I think we all understand that the word *Elohim*, although it is plural, does not indicate a plurality in the Godhead, but, rather, the plural of majesty. It is significant that, according to Peloubet:

"*Elohim* denotes the *idea of power of effect or strength* concerning God as Creator, Governor, and upholder of the universe."

He also states:

"The plural form of *Elohim* has given rise to much discussion. *The fanciful idea that it referred to the trinity of persons in the godhead only finds supporters*

³ Eric S. Fife, *The Holy Spirit, Common Sense and the Bible*, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids: 1978, p. 25

among scholars. It is either what grammarians call *the plural of majesty*, or it denotes the *fullness* of divine strength, the *sum of the powers* displayed by God" (emphasis mine).⁴

However, because he is a Trinitarian, Mr. Fife would have you believe that the use of the plural to describe the Godhead refers not only to a plurality in the Godhead but more specifically, to a Trinity.

Let's look more closely at the concept of the "plurality" of the Godhead. In order to refute any concept of a plurality-so-called of the Godhead in the Old Testament, we must look at it from the viewpoint of the Old Testament writers, and let me emphasize strongly that here there is no evidence to support the concept of a plurality or a Trinity in the Godhead in the OT. The ISBE states:

"... there is no indication of a belief that the Spirit of God was a material particle or emanation from God. The point of view of Biblical writers is nearly always practical rather than speculative. They did not philosophize about the Divine Nature"⁵

The Old Testament writers did not philosophize about the Divine Nature because there was no need to. They knew that God was One. They adhered to the creed of monotheism -- "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one God."

And again:

"In a great number of passages . . . God and the Spirit are not thought of as identical . . . of course this does not mean that God and the Spirit were two distinct beings in the thought of the OT writers, but only that the Spirit had functions of His own in distinction from God. The Spirit *was* **GOD IN ACTION**, particularly when the action was specific, with a view to accomplishing some particular end or purpose of God" [such as creating] (brackets mine).⁶

Unlike the Old Testament writers, today's evangelicals spend a great deal of time philosophizing about the relationship of the Holy Spirit to the Godhead. The arguments are endless. It is amazing in the least that the Trinitarians cannot get a handle on the truth of the make-up of the Godhead when there is more than ample evidence, and there exists such practical statements concerning the Holy Spirit. But practicality be damned, they continue to defend their pet doctrine with all the fervency they can muster. Example? Most works about the Holy Spirit are replete with statements such as the following by Billy Graham:

"God unfolds His revelation of Himself in the Bible progressively. But there are indications from the very beginning of the book of Genesis that God subsists in three persons -- the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit -- and that these three persons constitute the One God. Christianity is *Trinitarian*, not unitarian. There is only one God, not three, so it is clear that the Christian faith is not polytheistic. The Bible begins with the majestic statement: 'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth'" [Genesis 1:1]⁷ (emphasis mine).

Has Mr. Graham been reading Mr. Fife's book, or has Mr. Fife been reading Mr. Graham's? The point is that evangelicalism in the main agrees *in toto* about the Trinity.

⁴ *Peloubet's Bible Dictionary*, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids: 1970, p. 224.

⁵ *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, "The Holy Spirit," The Howard Severance Company, Chicago: 1915, Vol. 3, p. 1406.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 1407.

⁷ Billy Graham, *The Holy Spirit*, Word books Publisher, Waco: 1980, p. 28.

To believe that there are "indications" that God subsists in three persons from the passage just quoted is to give credence to the Roman Catholic teaching about the Holy Trinity, and by extension, to condone the Trinitarian error of the Babylonian Mysteries! Mr. Graham's reasoning is based upon personal communications from Hebrew scholars and the concepts singular, dual, and plural (as it applies to more than two). It is the plural use of the word God (*Elohim*) that Mr. Graham (and thousands of others) claims is indicative of a Holy Trinity, three persons in one, inseparable, and of one essence. However, if we are to believe the Bible for what it actually says, this cannot possibly be true. The word "God" in Genesis 1:1, as we have already witnessed, is "Elohim," and is, as Mr. Graham states, plural. But is it more than just plural? It is, according to William F. Dankenbring, a former Worldwide Church of God minister, also uni-plural.

"The Bible reveals that the Creator of all things is the true God. In Genesis 1:1 we read: 'In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.' The Hebrew word for God here is "Elohim" and is a uni-plural word. It literally means 'The Mighty Ones.' It denotes more than one individual person -- even as our English words 'family,' 'church,' 'congregation' denote more than one individual."⁸

Of course, the uni-plural interpretation gets into the Binitarian concept espoused and taught by Herbert W. Armstrong and is just as erroneous as the Trinitarian concept.

Are the Elohim, as Mr. Graham and Mr. Fife claim, the Holy Trinity that consists of three distinct persons composed of one essence, or do they, at the present time, consist of a lesser number and subsist in the dual sense as Mr. Dankenbring claims? The Godhead, after all, is very clearly revealed in the Scriptures in such a manner that there should be no speculation involved as to its make-up. The Holy Spirit is never graphically described. The only evidence that we ever see of it appearing in material form is when it descends upon Jesus in the form of a dove immediately after His baptism (John 1:32), and on Pentecost when it descends upon the disciples as flames of fire. Although the Holy Spirit was active in the creation process, the Bible does not speak of it as the third "person" of the Godhead. According to Mr. Graham's Hebraic scholars, the plural sense of the word "Elohim" indicates more than two. Thus, he concludes automatically that there are three. But the Old Testament never speaks of the Godhead in terms of three. Thus:

"The term (Holy Spirit) in its latter sense (as a person) does not occur in the O.T. ...In Ps. 51:11 and Isa. 63:10ff, we find the expression 'Thy Holy Spirit' and 'His Holy Spirit,' but the meaning is not that of later Christian thought (of the Holy Spirit as a person). All that is meant is that God deals with men by His Spirit, and that this Spirit is holy because it is the Spirit of God who is Himself holy. This, indeed, is the characteristic thought of the O.T.; the distinction is made between God as a Spirit and the spirit of His Divine Spirit. The spirit of the divine spirit is his very life principle, whereby He can carry on all His diverse activities. . ." (parentheses and emphasis mine).⁹

But what about Genesis 1:26; 3:22; 11:16, and Isa. 6:8? Again, Evangelical Christianity applies the same interpretation -- that there are elements of a Trinity here. Consequently, they are used as "proof" texts. Let's see what Mr. Graham says about them. On page 29 of his book *The Holy Spirit*, he states:

⁸ William F. Dankenbring, *Beyond Star Wars*, Tyndale House Publishers Inc., Wheaton: 1978, p. 247

⁹ Paul J. Achtemeier, *Harper's Bible Dictionary*, "Holy Spirit," Harper and Row, San Francisco: 1985, p. 265

"As we have seen concerning creation, even from the beginning God gives us glimpses of the truth that the Godhead consists of more than one person."

It cannot be overly emphasized that the Godhead does not in fact consist of more than one person. That it consists of exactly three persons is based upon the biased assumption that the Holy Spirit is a person, not upon the clear revelation of God-breathed Scripture. Mr. Graham continues:

"I have italicized some of the key words. In Genesis 1:26, God said, 'Let *us* make man in *our* image, according to *our* likeness; and let them have rule over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the sky, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.' Further, in Genesis 3:22 the Lord God said, 'Behold, the man has become like one of *us*, knowing good and evil.' And in Genesis 11:6, 7, the Lord said, 'Behold, they are one people, and they all have the same language. And this is what they begin to do, and now nothing, which they purpose to do, will be impossible for them. Come, let *us* go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech!' When Isaiah heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for *us*?' he answered, 'Here am I. Send me.'"¹⁰

Again, because of a preconceived notion taught by Catholics and Protestants alike, the words "us" and "our," are construed as including three persons. Nevertheless, we have already seen that this was not the concept held by the Hebrews or the Israelites, and it is not the concept held by the Jews today. In fact, Isaac Asimov, noted Science fiction writer and physicist, and himself a Jew, observes,

"To Christians, who consider god to be a Trinity of three co-equal aspects – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – the "let us" might be viewed as the three aspects of the Trinity communing among themselves. This is an interesting thought, which would explain the verse neatly, but there is no sign anywhere in the Old Testament that the Jews accepted the notion of a Trinity . . . by the time the Bible was written down in its present form . . . the writers were staunch monotheists, and the history of Israel was retold from a monotheist point of view."¹¹

What holds true for Genesis 1:26 holds true for every other Old Testament Scripture, and for every New Testament Scripture concerning the Holy Spirit. In God, there is no variance. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Heb. 13:8). Nevertheless, for all this, the history behind the concept of the Trinity, the Hebraic and Jewish denial of a triune God, and ample evidence, secular and Biblical, which speaks loudly and clearly against the Trinitarian Doctrine, Evangelical Christianity persists in believing a fable.

Let's go back to the second verse of Genesis 1 for a moment. It talks about the Spirit of God "moving" upon the face of the waters.

"And the earth was (became) without form and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters."

Here is yet another "proof" text used to illustrate that the Holy Spirit is a person based upon its activity. This is what Mr. Graham says about it.

"The Hebrew word for 'moving' means 'brooding' or 'hovering'. Just as a hen broods over her eggs for the purpose of hatching them and bringing forth new life, so the Holy Spirit brooded over the original creation of God for the purpose

¹⁰ Billy Graham, *The Holy Spirit*, Word Books Publisher, Waco: 1978, p. 29

¹¹ Isaac Asimov, *In the Beginning, Science Faces God in the book of Genesis*, Crown Publishers, Inc. New York: 1981, p.59.

of filling its void with life in various forms. The creation recorded in the rest of Genesis 1, together with Genesis 2, resulted. Thus, from the beginning the Holy Spirit was active in creation along with the Father and the Son."¹²

There is no doubt that the Holy Spirit was active in the creation process, but the Bible does not say that It was active as a person! Mr. Graham simply does not understand the position or function of the Holy Spirit in the Godhead. Moreover, Mr. Graham, along with thousands of other Evangelicals and "orthodox" Trinitarians, implies personhood through activity in Genesis 1:2. However, mere activity does not assign personhood to that which is active. The word "Spirit" is the Hebrew *Ruwach* (roo-akh) and means -- wind, or by resemblance, breath, i.e. a sensible (or even violent) exhalation. *Hastings' Bible Dictionary* declares:

"The Spirit of God, as revealed in the OT, is 'God exerting power' . . . On this account it is invested with personal qualities and personal acts are ascribed to it. If the truth, mercy and light of God are partly hypostatized by the Psalmist . . . the Spirit of God, the principle of which resides in the depth of the Divine Nature, and represents the Divine presence in the world and in man, is necessarily regarded as quasi-personal; it broods, rules, speaks, guides quickens, because it is the living energy of a personal God"¹³ (emphasis mine).

The living energy of the personal God spoken of here is not invested in Holy Spirit as a Person but the One God as Creator of all that is. He alone created the universe and stretches the heavens out like a net (Job 9:8; Isa. 45:5, 18, 22; 46:9, etc). In fact, there are over 6000 references in the Old Testament where a singular personal pronoun is used for the One God. Unless the English language has been changed, this cannot mean three distinct persons making up a single God. I am reminded of the words of a song that say, "One is one and all alone, and evermore shall be it so." It is a perfect description of the One God of monotheism.

As to the anthropomorphosis connected with the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament and the New Testament as well, *The New Catholic Encyclopedia* states:

"Very rarely do the O.T. writers attribute to God's Spirit emotions or intellectual activity (Isa. 63:10; Wis. 1: 3-7). When such expressions are used, they are *mere figures of speech* that are explained by the fact that the *Ruah* was regarded also as the seat of intellectual acts and feeling (Gen. 41:8). Neither is there found in the O.T. or in Rabbinical literature the notion that God's Holy Spirit is an intermediary being between God and the world. This activity is proper to the angels, although to them is ascribed some of the activity that elsewhere is ascribed to the Holy Spirit of God"¹⁴ (emphasis mine).

Repeatedly, we see that the very religion whose heart and soul revolve around the Trinitarian Doctrine, and who has bequeathed this doctrine to the Protestants, teaches that the *Holy Spirit is not a person* in the O.T. Yet, the Protestants continue to believe otherwise without researching the facts. They invariably use the same method employed by the evolutionists to establish the ages of fossils and fossil strata (i.e. the fossils are dated according to the strata in which they are found, and the strata are dated according to the index fossils found in them). In the case of the Trinitarians it is not so much

¹² Ibid. p. 35.

¹³ James Hastings, *Hastings' Bible Dictionary*, "Holy Spirit," Charles Scribner's Sons, New York: 1911, Vol. 2, p. 390.

¹⁴ *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, "Holy Spirit", Vol. XIII, p. 574

circular reasoning as it is reliance upon the exegetical meanderings of late nineteenth and early twentieth century revivalists whose utterances concerning the Holy Trinity were based upon the traditions of the early Catholic fathers. In fact, Billy Graham says:

"Matthew Henry says it (*Elohim*) signifies the plurality of persons in the Godhead, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. This plural name of God . . . (confirms) our faith in the doctrine of the Trinity . . ."¹⁵

To the contrary, no less an authority than the *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* states:

"The Old Testament could hardly be expected to furnish the doctrine of the Trinity . . . It is exegesis of a mischievous, if pious, sort that would discover the (Trinitarian) doctrine in the plural form, 'Elohim', of the Deity's name" (parenthesis mine).¹⁶

The Power of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament

The Semitic writers were prolific in their use of anthropomorphisms to describe God in a manner that made Him "live," if you will. Although He was thought of as being infinite, the anthropomorphic view brought Him down to a personal level in the lives of His children. Turning once again to Peloubet, we see that:

"The anthropomorphisms in which the Old Testament abounds are used in order that man may realize that God is not merely a force . . . but is a real person with mind, will, heart, feelings like His children, but in an infinite degree . . . We use the same expressions today. 'When the Bible speaks,' says Sanday, 'of the hand, arm, mouth, lips, and eyes of God,' when He makes 'bare His mighty arm, and musters His hosts with a shout, -- all this is but a vivid conception of His being, His intelligence, His activity, and *universal power*; and testifies to the warmth and intensity of the religious feelings of the writers'" (emphasis mine).¹⁷

"That's all well and good," you might say, "but doesn't that apply to the Holy Spirit?" Well, yes it does, in a way, but the Holy Spirit was never thought of as being a "personal" entity.

"Just as the ancient Israelites spoke anthropomorphically of God's hand, and face, so they spoke of His breath, i.e. His vital *Power* or *Spirit*, which was active and as efficacious as God Himself" (emphasis mine).¹⁸

This is the very idea presented in Genesis 1:2 when the *ruach* moved over the face of the waters. It is the same idea presented as the Lord God bends over the lifeless clay form of Adam and breathes into his nostrils the breath (*ruach* -- *Vital Force* or *Power*) of life. Even Cornelius J. Hagerty, who is a staunch Roman Catholic Trinitarian, admits that the Holy Spirit as it is presented in the Old Testament is not a person but a *Force* or *Power*, which emanates from God:

"The Spirit of God is mentioned frequently in the Old Testament. It means at least an *Action*, *Force*, or *Energy* from God that enlivens, forms, strengthens creatures on whom it acts" (emphasis mine).¹⁹

Furthermore, with reference to the Old Testament Jews, Hagerty says:

¹⁵ Billy Graham, *The Holy Spirit*, Word Books Publishers, Waco: 1978, p. 29.

¹⁶ James Hastings, *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, T & T Clark, Edinburgh: p. 458.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 224.

¹⁸ *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, "Spirit of God," Vol. 13, p. 574

¹⁹ Cornelius J. Hagerty, *The Holy Trinity*, The Christopher Publishing House, North Quincy: 1976, p. 131.

"References to the Spirit of God in the Old Testament signified for the great majority of the Jews no more than the *Force, Activity, or Energy* of God" (emphasis mine).²⁰

If references to god in the Old Testament signified for the great majority or the Jews no more than a force, activity, and energy of God (remember, Jesus was a Jew), and if it still signifies that to the Jews today, when God change? The fact is, He never has and never will. He is still the One God of Israel and always will be. He is not a Trinity and the Bible nowhere teaches such a concept.

Repeatedly, the very church that insists that the Holy Spirit is a distinct "person," and the third member of the Holy Trinity, contradicts itself when it states the unadulterated truth. If the Spirit of God was not a person in the Old Testament, it is not a person in the New Testament, and therefore not a member of a so-called Holy Trinity! God does not change to suit the whims and fanciful imaginations of men be they pagan or Christian. There is neither variableness nor shadow of turning with the great Creator God of this universe. However, if there were, and if God, at some point decided that He should become a Trinity on a lark in order to satiate pagan man's inordinate desire to worship Him as such, where is the proof? Such a God would not be deserving of worship. Where indeed can we find in the pages of the Bible during the period between the close of the prophetic age of the Old Testament and the opening of the Messianic age of the New, a clear and precise message calling for a change in the number of the members of the Godhead? We cannot, for there is none.

As a parting thought, let's take one more look at what the Roman Catholic Church has to say about the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament.

"The OT (Old Testament) clearly *does not envisage god's spirit as a person*, neither in the strictly philosophical sense, nor in the Semitic sense. *God's spirit is simply god's power*. If it is sometimes represented as being distinct from God, it is because the breath (ruach) of Yahweh acts exteriorly. Isa. 48:16; 63:11; 32:15" (emphasis mine).²¹

What, then, are we to conclude about the Holy Trinity when the bastion of "orthodox" Christianity, and the defender of the faith concerning the Trinitarian Doctrine, makes such dogmatic claims? Logically, we should conclude that Holy Trinity is patently false and that she is guilty of the grossest hypocrisy. Her teaching on the Holy Trinity as an official doctrine bearing upon personal salvation beginning in 325 A.D., was a calculated ploy to gain and hold pagan "converts" to Christianity who were flocking to her standard by the thousands. Why? Because they were not required to renounce their former beliefs and practices in order to be a part of all that was the Church of Rome with her ritual, ceremony, pomp, and circumstance, the majority of which was derived from the Babylonian Mysteries, and to which the "converts" had been accustomed for so many hundreds of years. If the Spirit of God was not a person in the Old Testament, it is not a person in the New Testament, and therefore not a member of a so-called Holy Trinity! God does not change to suit the whims and fanciful imaginations of men be they pagan or Christian.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 132.

²¹ *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Art. Spirit of God, Vol. 13, p. 574