



The Old Testament and the Trinity

LECTURE 1. INTRODUCTION TO THE TRINITY

ALEC & BELLE WATERHOUSE LECTURES

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Outline

- A. General Introduction
- B. Only Worship God—The Shema
- C. God in Creation
- D. God in Redemption
- E. God in the Consummation
- F. Conclusion: Trinitarian Monotheism

1. Progressive Revelation

- Gregory of Nazianzus taught that the Father was clearly revealed in the Old Testament, while the Son was prophesied. The Son is clearly revealed in the New Testament, while the Spirit is disclosed but more clearly seen today.
- Gregory of Nyssa noted that the people of the Old Testament had to be completely weaned off polytheism before they could receive and embrace the threeness of the Trinity.

2. Strong Hints that God is Multi-Personal within the Old Testament

- The “Us” and “Our” Texts Show Divine Plural Self-Reference, beginning in Genesis 1:26-28
- “The Angel of the Lord” Texts, as in Gen 18 & 32
- The Lord addresses and acts toward the Lord, Psalm 110
- The “Wisdom” of Proverbs 8
- The “Spirit” in Psalm 51 and Zechariah 4
- The “Word” in Isaiah 40 and 55

3. The Old Testament is the Root of the Doctrine of the Trinity

- The Unity of the Canon, which itself is grounded in the One Holy Spirit who inspires both the Prophets and the Apostles, provides the certainty that the unique God of the Old Testament Revelation is the Trinity of the New Testament Revelation.
- In other words, the root of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity is found in the Hebrew Bible.

4. Some Important Old Testament Texts

- First, we shall evaluate at length the Shema.
- Afterwards, we shall rehearse a few Old Testament texts which demonstrate how we should understand the God who is Creator, Redeemer, and Consummator—this God is One and Multi-personal.
- Finally, we shall connect these OT texts to the New Testament witness.

B. Only Worship God—The Shema

1. The Devotional Confession of Israel
2. The Law That Blesses (Deuteronomy 6:1-3)
3. The God Who Is (Deuteronomy 6:4-9)
4. Our Only Devotion
5. Toward Trinitarian Monotheism

1. The Devotional Confession of Israel

- The Shema is both a liturgical and credal text, according to Daniel Block:
 - a. Liturgical:* “To this day, orthodox Jews recite the Shema’ twice daily as part of their prayers in the morning when they wake up, and at night before they fall asleep.” The Shema commands worship.
 - b. Credal:* “The Shema’ is as close as early Judaism came to the formulation of a creed.” The Shema confesses who God is in relation to us.

2. The Law that Blesses

“This is the command—the statutes and ordinances—the Lord your God has commanded me to teach you, so that you may follow them in the land you are about to enter and possess. Do this so that you may fear the Lord your God all the days of your life by keeping all his statutes and commands I am giving you, your son, and your grandson, and so that you may have a long life. Listen, Israel, and be careful to follow them, so that you may prosper and multiply greatly, because the Lord, the God of your ancestors, has promised you a land flowing with milk and honey.”

Deuteronomy 6:1-3

3. The God Who Is

Listen [שמע] Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. These words that I am giving you today are to be in your heart. Repeat them to your children. Talk about them when you sit in your house and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Bind them as a sign on your hand and let them be a symbol on your forehead. Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your city gates.

Deuteronomy 6:4–7a

Importance of the Shema

- The importance of the Shema has been described in various ways. This worshipful confession is:
 - a. “The primary link between Christianity and Judaism”
 - b. “The center of Deuteronomomic theology.”
 - c. ”The cornerstone of biblical faith.”

Exposition of the Shema

- a. “Listen” – an invitation to a relationship
- b. “Israel” – the covenantal people of God
- c. *Yahweh*, “The Lord” – Exodus 3:14, “I am who I am” or “I will be who I will be”
- d. *Elohinu*, “Our God” – The common name, but used to indicate a special relationship.
- e. *Echad*: “one,” “unique,” “alone” – Is this about Monotheism or Monolatry? It is a call to worship rather than a call to abstract conceptualization.

4. Our Only Devotion

- The best translation: ***“Yahweh is our God! Yahweh alone!”***
- Following the path laid down by the Shema, the writers of the Old Testament declare emphatically that this unique, relational God alone ought to be the object of worship. Our human worship of God must be entire and singular in its devotedness.

5. Toward Trinitarian Monotheism

- The Shema teaches that God is “monotheistic,” but the Monotheism of Moses is not to be confused with other Monotheisms, like those of:
 - a. Post-Christian Judaism
 - b. Heretical Sabellianism
 - c. Heretical Arianism
 - d. Islam
 - e. Enlightenment Mathematics

Toward Trinitarian Monotheism

- During the Early English Enlightenment, theologians began to view God in abstract terms as the “monotheistic” God. Religion was reduced to binary terms: polytheism’s many gods were contrasted with monotheism’s one God. It was assumed all monotheisms referred to the same God.
- God was conceived in overtly intellectualized and overly mathematical ways.

Toward Trinitarian Monotheism

- When Jesus discussed the Shema, it was in order to describe it as that command which is “most important” (Mark 12:29-30; Matthew 22:37; Luke 10:27).
- Moreover, Jesus and his interlocutor referred primarily to verse 5’s command to inculcate the heart’s devotion to God rather than verse 4’s seemingly more abstract definition of God: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.”

C. God in Creation

Among others, these passages indicate the later doctrine of the Trinity is perceptible in the divine work of Creation:

1. Genesis 1:1-3
2. Psalm 33:6

1. Genesis 1:1-3

- a. *God*: “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.”
- b. *Spirit of God*: “The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.”
- c. *Word of God*: “And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light.”

2. Psalm 33:6

- “By the word [*dabar*] of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath [*ruach*] of his mouth all their host.”
- Again, all three persons are subtly indicated in this one verse, each in relation to the one divine act of creation: The Lord, the Word, the Breath.

D. God in Redemption

Among others, these passages indicate the later doctrine of the Trinity is perceptible in the divine work of Redemption:

1. 2 Samuel 7:8-17
2. Isaiah 52:13-53:12

1. 2 Samuel 7:12-16

“When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.”

2 Samuel 7:12-16

- The kingdom will be given to the “offspring” of David. This looks back to the promise to Adam and Eve of a descendant who would defeat the Serpent (Gen 3:15). It also refers back to the promise to Abraham of a “seed” who would “bless” all nations (Gen 12:1-3).
- The gift of this kingdom is “eternal,” a divine property.
- Notice the kingdom belongs to God’s own “son.”
- Notice the “son” shall be disciplined, as Christ would be vicariously disciplined for the sins of his people.

2. Isaiah 53:10

“Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.”

- The Lord may be the antecedent here of “he,” the one who shall see his “offspring” (again, *Zera'*). The “offspring” himself is the vicarious suffering servant, who arises to “prolong his days” and redeem his people.

E. God in the Consummation

Among others, these passages indicate the later doctrine of the Trinity in the divine work of the Consummation of all things:

1. Daniel 7:9-10 and the Ancient of Days
 2. Daniel 7:13-14 and the Son of Man
- The intervening text, verses 11-12, indicates this passage refers to the Final Judgment. This passage allows us to see eternal heaven, God's dwelling, the divine court.

1. Daniel 7:9-10, “Ancient of Days”

“As I looked, thrones were placed, and the Ancient of Days took his seat; his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames; its wheels were burning fire. A stream of fire issued and came out from before him; a thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him; the court sat in judgment, and the books were opened.”

- “Ancient of Days” refers to God the Father.

2. Daniel 7:13-14, “Son of Man”

“I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.”

- This “Son of Man” unusually stands as a king before the throne of God and receives universal, eternal rule.

F. Conclusion: “Trinitarian Monotheism”

- Monotheism develops between the Testaments, but the texts continually indicate only one God in both Testaments should be worshiped by the human heart.
- Moreover, the Old Testament revelation indicates a multi-personality within the One God.
- The Monotheism of the Bible, taken as a whole Canon, inspired by the One God, is a “Trinitarian Monotheism.” This Monotheism has also been called “Christological Monotheism.”

The Shema in the New Testament

- In 1 Corinthians 8:5-6, Paul clearly revised the Shema to include the worship of Christ as the one Lord with the one God.
- Note that at the same time he advocates the worship of Jesus, Paul denies the worship of false gods.
- Paul's confession is *thoroughly monotheistic*, and simultaneously, *thoroughly multi-personal*.

The Shema in the New Testament

*“For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as indeed there are many ‘gods’ and many ‘lords’—
yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist,
and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.”*