

“God is the God of truth אמת אלהים [elohim emet]! The love of truth, submission to the force of truth, the surrender of traditional views which will not stand the test of truth, is a sacred duty, an element of the fear of God.”

– Franz Julius Delitzsch

# How Jewish is the Trinity?

(A Critique of a Messianic Document)

by Paul Sumner

The following article is a critique of a tract entitled “**Jewishness and the Trinity**” written by **Arnold Fruchtenbaum** (hereafter abbreviated **AF**). He is the founder and director of **Ariel Ministries** in California.

AF’s study-tract contains incorrect or incomplete information, weak arguments, and examples of *eisegesis* (reading into the text) – all of which misrepresent Scripture and thus requires a response.

## What’s Wrong

**First**, AF has no New Testament warrant for what he is doing. The NT never uses the Hebrew Bible verses that he does to teach doctrine about God or Yeshua or the Trinity of God. AF’s work is a variation of traditional attempts to validate the Church’s post-biblical doctrine of the Trinity to a Jewish audience.

**Second**, AF ignores those Hebrew Bible texts that the NT repeatedly uses in its own case before the court of Jewish opinion. Modern Christian interpreters often avoid these texts because they do not validate the Trinity doctrine, as it is defined by Christian tradition. Instead, as other interpreters have done, AF builds his case on hand-picked texts and ambiguous Hebrew words that he believes prove that the Trinity was a Jewish concept.

**Third**, almost every proof-text AF cites from the HB can be interpreted in other ways that better fit the contexts and contents of the original passages. Nothing he cites leads to a *trinitarian* conclusion, unless someone already believes in the concept of a Three-in-one or Triune Godhead.

**Fourth**, the two passages he quotes from post-biblical Jewish literature are suspect evidence. One is from a medieval kabbalistic primer of esoteric theosophy and occultism. And to the other text, AF adds words not in the original to make it say what he *thinks* the rabbis meant to say.

## The NT Presentation

In contrast to this, the NT builds its case using HB passages and interpretations that were commonly held by Jews in the First Century.

At the time of Yeshua, many Jews believed in God and in a heavenly or divine Messiah. (That is not the same as believing in the Triunity.) We know this from contemporary non-biblical Jewish documents. AF cites none of them, perhaps because they fail to show that Jews at the time of Yeshua believed in a Triune Godhead.

My critique of AF’s study focuses on five points: the plural word *Elohim*, the plural pronouns used by God, the *Shema*, texts that refer to several Elohim, and non-biblical Jewish documents. At the end, I outline the actual NT case regarding Yeshua.

## (1) Elohim in Context

The Bible has three Hebrew words translated “God” – El, Eloah, and Elohim. (This doesn’t count the Aramaic *Elah* used mostly in Ezra and Daniel.) Of the three, *Elohim* is a plural noun and is the word most often used for the true God (2602 times).

AF says *Elohim*’s plural form “opens the door to a doctrine of plurality in the Godhead.” But this is a leap of logic, for “plurality” does not necessarily imply Tri-unity.

## Plurals in Hebrew are Common

The Hebrew Bible frequently uses plural nouns to describe objects that are by nature multi-dimensional or complex. For example, “water” is plural (*mayim*) because it is always changing form and there is more than one kind of water: a tear drop, a rainstorm, a stream, an ocean. The word “sky” or “heaven” (*shamayim*) is plural because it is so vast and is everchanging. Even the word “salvation” is sometimes

plural. God's numerous acts of deliverance involve so many aspects of our lives that it is sometimes better to say "salvation" (*yeshu'ot*) to describe what he has done, even though they comprise one grand act.

So with **Elohim**, the true God. He is so vast and complex, so multi-faceted, so great a God, that it's best to describe him with a plural term. He is GOD in the fuller sense of the word. No other deity worshiped by other peoples is like the Elohim of Israel.

Other nouns used for God are sometimes plural: **Lord** (*Adonim*, Deut 10:17; Mal 1:6; Ps 136:3), **Maker** (*Osim*, Isa 54:5; Psalm 149:2), **Creator** (*Borim*, Eccles 12:1), and **Holy One** (*Qedoshim*, Prov. 30:3). Yet in other verses the same words are singular: *Lord* (Exod 23:17; Jos 3:11; Ps 97:5), *Maker* (Psalm 95:6; 115:15; Job 4:17), *Creator* (Isa 40:28; 43:15), *Holy One* (Isa 1:4; 40:25; 54:5). This variation in usage suggests that the biblical writers chose to magnify certain words for God only at certain times. They did not use **bold**, underlined, or CAPITAL letters for emphasis.

### Plurals Used for Pagan Gods

A single pagan god can be designated by the plural *elohim*: Judges 11:24—"Chemosh your elohim"; 1 Kings 11:5—"Solomon went after Ashtoreth, the elohim of the Sidonians"; 2 Kings 1:2—"Inquire of Baal-zebul, the elohim of Ekron." Archeology verifies that Babylonians and Canaanites often used plural nouns to describe individual gods in order to exalt one above the others.

At times in the Bible, *elohim* is plural and refers to multiple pagan deities and should be translated "gods" (Exod 12:12; Isa 36:18; Ps 96:5).

### "Elohim" Used for Humans

Individual men can be called *elohim*—Moses (Exod 4:16; 7:1), a judge (Exod 22:8, 9, 28), and the Davidic King (Psalm 45:6 Eng.).

Great men are also given honor by the Hebrew term *adonim*, the plural of *adon* or "lord"—Abraham (Gen 24:51), Joseph (Gen 42:30), Saul (2 Sam 9:9), David (1 Sam 26:15), Elijah (2 Kings 2:3), and the Davidic King (Psalm 45:12, "he is your adonim"). This usage reinforces the idea that Hebrew terms of honor or greatness may occur in plural form when used for individuals.

### Elohim Fits the Pattern

In light of these Hebrew patterns, it is truer to the HB text to think of the plural *Elohim* as "the plural of fullness or greatness" or an "intensive plural" or the "plural of magnification." *Elohim* is a title of highest honor. He is GOD of gods (Deut 10:17). He encompasses every definition of "God" and fills every aspect of deity till they overflow.

Thus when AF translates Elohim as "Gods" (plural), he overlooks these patterns of Hebrew usage and the thrust of HB theology. Elohim is not plural because God is a composite of persons. He is the complete manifestation of Deity.

### Eloah and El

AF mentions that the singular word **Eloah** ("God") is used only 250 times, while its plural form **Elohim** is used some 2500 times. He then suggests that this one-to-ten ratio "turns the argument in favor of plurality in the Godhead rather than against it," because the Hebrews preferred the plural concept over the singular. This is a leap of logic. Does that ratio imply the Hebrews were unsure about God's plurality, that only 1/10th of the time they thought of him as a *non-triune* God? Yet if they eventually decided God was a triune plurality, why did they leave the word Eloah in the Bible? Was it meant to serve as a reminder of an earlier, primitive, *unorthodox* understanding of the nature of God?

AF fails to mention that the other word for "God"—**El**—is also singular. Nor does he explain why the Hebrews used this term (200+x) instead of Eloah or Elohim. Query: Does Elohim refer to the Triune Godhead, while the singulars El and Eloah refer to individual members? Is Yeshua El and the Holy Spirit Eloah? Or the reverse? Psalm 50:1 reads: "El, Elohim, YHVH has spoken." Which term refers to whom?

Obviously, AF's subjective interpretation leads to chaos. Over-interpreting Hebrew words for God—without listening to the biblical theologians—does violence to the Bible and opens the door to error.

Instead, we should be asking insightful questions of the Text such as: What do these nouns mean; where are they used in Scripture; and do they have special connotations that the biblical writers (and the Holy Spirit) want to emphasize in their message?

### "God" in the NT

The NT shows no awareness that the plural "Elohim" refers to the Triune Godhead. This alone should be decisive for Bible believers. When the apostles refer to the God (Greek *theos*) of the ancient Hebrew fathers, they mean the Father of Yeshua:

The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob,  
the God of our fathers, has glorified his  
servant Yeshua. (Acts 3:13)

The God of our fathers raised up Yeshua.  
(Acts 5:30a)

When Yeshua refers to his Father as "God" or "my God" (John 6:27; 14:1; 20:17), the word in Hebrew would have been *Elohim*. (It so appears in the modern

Hebrew NT translations of Delitzsch, Salkinson, and the Israel Bible Society.)

In fact, the NT distinguishes between the Father and Yeshua by using the terms “God” for the Father and “Lord” for the Son. A few times, Yeshua is called “God,” but never without some qualification that makes it clear he is the Son of God, not “God the Son,” as in Christian theology. The apostles want people to confess that Yeshua is *Lord*, not God (Rom 10:9; 1 Cor 12:3; 2 Cor 4:5). The declaration “Yeshua is Lord” is grounded in Hebrew Scripture, and the NT identifies Yeshua as God’s *Lord*, not as YHVH himself (Matt 22:43-45; Acts 2:33-36).

Note the great hymn in Philippians 2:11: “...every tongue should confess that Yeshua the Messiah is *Lord*, to the glory of God the Father.”

## (2) Plural Pronouns

In the HB, Elohim uses the plurals “us,” “we,” and “our.” For example, “Let *us* make man in *our* image” (Gen 1:26); “The man has become like one of *us*” (Gen 3:22); and “Come, let *us* go down” (Gen 11:7).

To whom is God speaking? To himself? To other members of the Triune Godhead? These passages do not tell us, so we must look elsewhere in Scripture for the answer.

## The Heavenly Court: A Central HB Concept

Frequently, God is depicted as a king enthroned in his royal court surrounded by heavenly beings. “I saw the Lord sitting on a throne...[and] serafim stood above him” (Isa 6:1, 2). “I saw YHVH sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing by him on his right and on his left” (1 Kings 22:19). These beings are God’s host or army (Heb. *tsevah*). “You are he, YHVH alone...the heavenly host bows down to you” (Nehemiah 9:6).

These servants comprise the “assembly of holy ones” (*qahal qedoshim*, Psalm 89:6 Heb), the “congregation of God” (*adat El*, Psalm 82:1), or the “council of the LORD” (*sod YHVH*, Jer 23:18, 22). Job 38:4 and 7 say these “sons of God” were present at the creation, implying that God was speaking to them when He said, “Let us make man in our image.” Angels often have human appearance in Scripture and have wills to choose to obey God, as we do. Our image of God is like theirs.

In **Isaiah 6:8**, the Lord asks, “Whom shall I send and who will go for *us*?” The context of the chapter tells us God is referring to members of his court: in this case, the *serafim* who stand nearby (verses 2-7).

**Isaiah 41** also depicts the divine courtroom, where God summons people to a “true prophets test” to determine who really knows the future.

Present your case . . .

Let them bring forth and declare to *us* what is going to happen . . .

That *we* may consider them . . .

Or announce to *us* what is coming . . .

That *we* may know that you are *elohim*.

(Isa 41:21-23)

**Heavenly council imagery** is woven throughout the HB as a fundamental theological assumption of the Hebrew Bible. YHVH is the “Great King,” but he is not alone in the supernatural world. He is “God of gods” (Deut 10:17; Psalm 136:2; Dan 11:36) and “Lord of lords” (Deut 10:17; Psalm 136:3). (In the NT, Yeshua shares the title “Lord of lords” [Rev 17:14; 19:16], but not the unique title “God of gods.”)

## The New Vision in Daniel 7

This is why the vision in Daniel 7:9-14 is so significant. Up till then, God was pictured as sitting *alone* surrounded by his heavenly court. Daniel brings new revelation. He sees the angelic hosts escort into the King’s presence someone who looks like a human being. God the King (“the Ancient of Days”) then gives this “Son of Man” authority to rule all the earth.

This passage was key to Yeshua and the apostles to validate his messianic claims, and allusions to this new vision of heaven occur throughout the NT.

Like Daniel’s co-ruling **Lord**, God gave to Yeshua “all authority in heaven and earth” (Matt 28:18), until he “destroy[s] the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8) then “[delivers] up the kingdom to the God and Father” (1 Cor 15:24). And like a **High Priest** in heaven (Heb 8:1), Yeshua “made purification of sins [then] sat down at the right hand of Majesty on high” (Heb 1:3). Now enthroned next to God, he “intercedes for us” (Rom 8:34) as “mediator between God and men” (1 Tim 2:5).

## Was Yeshua in the Council of God?

The Hebrew word **sod** (סֹד) describes the circle of intimate friends or counselors around a king, with whom he shares his will and discusses his confidential plans. To be within the *sod* of God implies unusual privilege. True prophets are admitted into the *Sod* (Jer 23:22), where they hear the word of God (*devar elohim*), then take the message to their people with the seal of authority, “Thus says YHVH.”

John may allude to the imagery of this Inner Council when he says, “No one has seen God at any time. It is the only Son, who is on the Father’s bosom, who has explained him” (John 1:18). To be on the *bosom* means to be close to the *heart* (where, in Hebrew psychology, our thinking occurs) and close to the *mouth* (from which come the plans of the heart expressed in words). Only an intimate friend or

family member can recline on a man's bosom (John 13:23).

For Yeshua to be on God's bosom implies he knew the mind, will, plans, purposes of the Father. And as messenger of the Davar, he brought the Father's word to men and could best "interpret" him (John 1:18). In that sense, Yeshua could say "he who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). Yeshua is not the Father. But because he knows him so well and speaks God's words and lives out his mind, the Father is present in him.

Clearly, he had a special place in the inner circle (*sod*) of God. So special that all the heavenly beings in and around God honor the Son with the Father: "Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb" (Rev 7:10).

### Was Yeshua God's Angel?

Since the 2d century, various Christian interpreters have taught that the "Angel of YHVH" or "Angel of God" in the HB was the preincarnate Son of God. Perhaps the most extensive argument for this view is Ernst Hengstenberg's *Christology of the Old Testament*. AF argues for the same conclusion in his study.

Indeed, several NT verses teach that the Son pre-existed his birth in Bethlehem (John 1:1; Phil 2:6-7; John 8:58; etc.). But they do not say he was – in his pre-existent form – the Angel of God. Rather, the Son was unknown to Israel and the world before Bethlehem. Hebrews 1:1-2 says, "God, after he spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in his Son."

The teaching that Yeshua was an angel (or the Angel) began very early, for the book of Hebrews devotes two chapters (1-2) to rejecting the idea.

The Hebrew word translated "angel" is *malakh*, which means a messenger, representative or ambassador. It does not denote "angel" in our modern image of the word. Even a prophet was called *malakh YHVH* ("angel, messenger, of the LORD") (Haggai 1:13). "Malachi" means "my messenger" (cf. Mal 3:1).

In my opinion, the Angel of YHVH is not Yeshua. But he is like Yeshua, in the sense that God at times communicated with his people by "the angel of his presence" (Isa 63:9) – a human-like presence that spoke to them "as a man speaks to his friend." So with Yeshua. "In these last days, [God] has spoken to us in his Son." Just as Melchizedek was "like" the Son (Heb 7:3), so the Angel pre-figures the Messiah, but he is not a pre-incarnate glimpse of Messiah in action.

Yeshua is called an Apostle (sent one, Heb 3:1) and Prophet (John 6:14), but never "Messenger"

(Greek *angelos*), though he plays the role of Messenger from his Father's *sod*.

The Jewish interpreters who translated the Hebrew Bible into Greek (the Septuagint) apparently thought of the Messiah as God's *angelos*. At Isaiah 9:6 he is called the "Messenger of the Great Council" (*megales boules angelos*).

### (3) The Shema

AF says the word "one" (Heb. **echad**, אֶחָד) in the *Shema* denotes a "compound one" or a three-in-one plural unity. He thus translates Deut 6:4 as: "Hear O Israel, YHVH our Gods is a compound YHVH." In other words, the great confession of the Jewish people actually witnesses to the Triune nature of God.

AF cites verses in which two or more people or objects are joined together to create oneness (*echad*). A married man and woman become "one flesh" (Gen 2:24); two sticks put together become "one stick" (Ezek 36:17). Yet the point of these verses is that these once distinct, disunited people or objects are now united. They're no longer compounds, they're a single unit.

In fact, the word for compound unity, togetherness, or community is **yachad** ( יַחַד ) – not *echad*.

Using a Hebrew concordance, let's look at how *echad* is used in the HB.

- Its primary meaning is the numeral *one*. "He shall not be put to death on the evidence of one witness" (Deut 17:6); "He shall be free at home one year" (Deut 24:5).

- *Echad* also means *first*. "There was evening and there was morning, the first day [*yom echad*] (Gen 1:5). AF uses this verse to show the "composite" nature of a day (evening + morning). But he failed to note that the other six days (also consisting of an evening and morning) are the *second, third, fourth, fifth, and sixth* days (Gen 1:8, 13, 19, 23, 31).

- At times, *echad* means *the same*. "I will give them one heart and one way" (Jer 31:39). "All go to the same place [*makom echad*]" (Eccles 3:20). (Perhaps when Yeshua said, "I and the Father are one," he meant "I and the Father have the same spirit, mind, purpose"; John 10:30).

- Contrary to AF's thesis, *echad* can indeed mean an *absolute* or *singular* one. "How could **echad** [one man] chase **elef** [a thousand men]" (Deut 32:30). "Look to Abraham your father...when he was **echad** [one single man] I called him...and multiplied him" (Isa 51:2). "Abraham was **echad** [only one man], yet he possessed the land; so to us who are many the land has been given" (Ezek 33:24).

• Echad can also mean *unique, only one, or solitary* one. And this is an important use for interpreting the Shema.

Who is like your people Israel,  
A *unique nation* [goy **echad**] on earth.  
(2 Sam 7:23)

It will be a *unique day* [yom **echad**] which is  
known to YHVH. (Zech 14:7)

Uniqueness is the central theme of Deuteronomy, the book in which the Shema resides. YHVH is unique among the elohim, Israel is unique among the goyim. And the Shema reminds Israel of these two principles. It can be translated [with my additions] as follows:

Listen [and obey] O Israel:  
YHVH [not Baal or Asherah or Chemosh]  
is our God.  
YHVH is unique, the Only One.  
[Therefore] you [who are his unique people]  
shall love YHVH your God  
with all your heart . . . (Deut 6:4-5a)

## The Shema in the NT

When Yeshua quoted the Shema, he did not use the passage to argue for co-equal deity (Mark 12:29-33). This suggests that it did not contain a hidden allusion to the plural nature of God. He addressed his Father as “the only true God” (John 17:3). And when the apostles use the term “one God” they mean the Father, the “God of Yeshua” — not the Triune Godhead (Rom 16:27; 1 Cor 8:4-6; Eph 1:17; Judah 25).

### (4) One, Two, or Three?

When you look for something and expect to find it, you probably will. Christians often go to the Hebrew Scriptures looking for the theological model called the Trinity. They start with the *doctrine* as it was defined in the Nicean, Chalcedonian, and Athanasian creeds of the 4th and 5th centuries. And in their determination to find Three in the Bible, they find Three. AF cites several verses in which he sees more than one Elohim. Let’s examine one passage.

In **Isaiah 48:12-16**, AF sees three persons of the Godhead: YHVH, the Lord YHVH, and the Spirit. The Text mentions these three names. But if we analyze the passage closely within the context of the chapter, then the chapters surrounding chapter 48, we arrive at a different conclusion.

This is a highly poetic passage, as is much of Isaiah. In the original, the sentences run together with no punctuation and no consistent indication of who is speaking. This is common in prophetic literature. But Isaiah has left clues how to distinguish who is speaking.

The first speaker is clearly God himself, the Creator (Isa 48:12-13). In verse 14 the voice changes. It now seems the prophet himself is speaking of God’s love for a man who will rise up and destroy Babylon. (We learn from other passages that this man is Cyrus, the Persian king.) Verses 15 and 16a record God’s affirmation of Cyrus (“I called him...I brought him”).

Then comes the key verse: 16b. This is likely spoken by **Cyrus** himself: “And now the Lord YHVH has sent me, and his Spirit.” Earlier in Isaiah, Cyrus was boldly called God’s **anointed one** (Heb. *mashiach*, 44:28-45:5) and “the man of His plan” (46:11). By Isaiah’s definition a *mashiach* is anointed with God’s Spirit (Isa 11:2; 42:1; 61:1). It would thus not jolt the listener to hear Cyrus say he had been sent with the Lord’s anointing to accomplish God’s work as his *mashiach*. This thus is a human servant speaking, not one YHVH speaking as YHVH’s servant-*mashiach*.

This “Cyrus interpretation” does no violence to the Text and is supported by the larger context of Isaiah. My point is this: merely mentioning YHVH, the Lord YHVH, and the Spirit together in one passage does not prove or even imply that they are co-equal members of a Triune Godhead.

## Three Does Not Make a Trinity

The apostle Paul wrote, “I charge you in the presence of **God** and of **Messiah Yeshua** and his chosen **angels**” (1 Tim 5:21). Similarly, John mentions **God**, **Yeshua**, and the **seven spirits** who stand before God’s throne (Rev 1:4-5; later John describes these spirits as “seven angels”; 8:2). In these we recognize Hebrew council imagery. But merely listing the three — God, Yeshua, angels — does not make them a Trinity. A triadic group does not prove anything about their eternal, ontological nature.

Medieval Catholic scribes were keenly aware that no verse in the NT *explicitly* taught the Trinity doctrine. So one was created and inserted into some copies of the Greek NT to give them an anchor-text to prove the doctrine. That verse is **1 John 5:7** — “There are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit, and these three are one” (AV-KJV, NKJV). Nearly [all modern Bibles omit the verse](#) because translators know it is not authentic.

## (5) Non-biblical Jewish Literature

### The Zohar

AF quotes a passage from the *Book of Splendor* (Heb. *Zohar*) to show that Jews centuries after Yeshua “sensed plurality in the Tetragrammaton.” But the Zohar is a collection of Gnostic Jewish speculations published in 1290 AD/CE. It does not represent

common Jewish thought even in the Middle Ages, much less at the time of Yeshua.

For contemporary Jewish ideas about God and Messiah, we must look into the so-called “Pseudepigrapha” collection and to the Qumran Scrolls. Nearly all of these were written before or during the time of Yeshua and give us a better window into Jewish thought, before the evolution of Rabbinic Judaism and Orthodox Christianity.

### What Many Jews Actually Believed

Jews at the time of Yeshua were not contemplating the Trinity. They were trying to identify the “Man” who was sitting beside God in heaven. Their question arose from passages such as Daniel 7:9-14, in which a heavenly lord shares God’s rule at his right hand. For centuries, this perplexing imagery occupied the minds of many spiritual leaders in Israel.

Modern Judaism tries to conceal this fact, but as one historian notes:

From the book of Daniel on, nearly every variety of Judaism maintained the pattern of the supreme God and his vice-regent/vizier. . . . Hardly any variety of Judaism seems to have been able to manage with just one divine entity.

(Peter Hayman,  
*Journal of Jewish Studies*, Vol. 42 [1991])

In other words, AF’s thesis that all Jews – from the time of Moses down to the Middle Ages – believed in the Triune God is in error. It is historically untrue.

### Two Powers, Not Three

Also in his article, AF distorts one ancient passage. When he quotes from Midrash Rabbah Bereshith on Gen 1:26 [“Let us make man in our image”], he adds words that mislead the reader:

Moses said, Master of the universe, why do you give an excuse to the sectarians (**who believe in the Tri-unity of God**)?

The words in bold “who believe in the Tri-unity of God” are not in the original text. AF added them to explain who the “sectarians” are (Jewish disciples of Yeshua) and what he *thinks* they believed.

Not only is the addition AF’s biased opinion, it is historically inaccurate. For in early rabbinic literature, the “sectarians” or **minim** (literally, *believers*) are people who believe in “Two Powers” in heaven, not in a Triune God.

He who says there are Two Powers in heaven is answered: Has it not elsewhere been said: “And there is no God with me.”

(Sifre on Devarim [Deut] 379)

Our rabbis taught: Adam was created [last of all beings] on the evening of Sabbath. And why?—Lest the Minim say: The Holy One, blessed be He, had a שותף [*shutaf*, partner].

(TB Sanhedrin 38a)

Historians of Early Judaism know that the earliest conflicts between the rabbis and the Jewish believers were over the identity and origins of the Messiah. It was not over the Trinity. The famous scholar of Judaism George F. Moore said the idea of “the trinity [*shilush*] belongs to a later development of dogma” (*Judaism*, Vol. 3, p. 116). According to R. Travers Herford (*Christianity in Talmud and Midrash*), it formed no part of the discussions among Jews before the 4th century—the era of the first trinitarian church councils.

### Battle Within Judaism

On the other hand, Judaism has not always been of one voice. For example, Rabbi Akiva (2d cent. AD/CE) identified the Man in **Daniel 7:13-14** as *the Messiah* (TB Hagigah 14a; Sanhedrin 38a). But Akiva’s opinion was rejected as blasphemy because it could lead to heresy (i.e., belief in Yeshua) (TB Sanhedrin 38b; Mekhilta de Rabbi Ishmael 5, 4).

Similarly, some rabbis said the “lord” (*adon*) next to YHVH in **Psalm 110:1** was the Messiah (Midrash Rabbah Bereshith 85, 9 [on Gen 38:18]; Midrash Tehillim 29-30 [on Psalm 18:36]; Avot de Rabbi Natan 34). But other rabbis said the “lord” was Abraham or the people Israel (Midrash Tehillim 9 [on Psalm 2]; TB Sanhedrin 108b; TB Nedarim 32b; Mekhilta de Rabbi Ishmael 6).

In time, in response to Jewish followers of Yeshua and to the Catholic (trinitarian) Church, official Judaism rejected the idea of a heavenly or divine Messiah: he was merely human. And God himself was, according to Maimonides, solitary (*yachid*) in heaven (*Thirteen Principles*, #2). No one sat beside him or shared his throne. This is now what we are told “all Jews believe.” But in the beginning it was not so.

### (6) One Elohim, One Adon— The New Testament Image

Long before the development of the Nicean-Chalcedonian-Athanasian doctrine of the Trinity, the NT built its theology on the foundations of the HB.

Psalm 110:1 is the most frequently quoted and alluded to verse from the HB in all the NT. The Hebrew reads:

YHVH said to my **Adon**, Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.

When Yeshua and the apostles use this text, they identify him as the *Adon* – not as YHVH. He is YHVH's Lord who governs for him (Matt 22:43-46; 26:64; Mark 16:19; Acts 2:33; 5:31; 7:55-56; Rom 8:34; 1 Cor 15:24-25; Eph 1:20-22; Col 3:1; Heb 1:3,8:1;12:2; 1 Peter 3:22; Rev 3:21).

Egyptian Jews living over a century before Yeshua believed that the "Adon" in Psalm 110 was the pre-existent offspring of God, begotten in heaven. Note how the Septuagint addresses this Lord and alludes to heavenly council imagery:

With you is the royal dignity  
In the day of your power,  
Among the splendor of the holy ones,  
Before the dawn, I have begotten you.  
(Psalm 110:3 LXX)

## NT Visions of Heaven

Comparing visions in the Old and New Testaments reveals continuity between them. As I noted before, Daniel 7:9-14 pictures a Son of Man entering God's throne room among the angelic host. In Stephen's own vision of heaven, he says, "I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God" (Acts 7:56). And when John peers into heaven he sees God, the Lamb, and numerous heavenly beings around the throne (throughout **Revelation**). And Hebrews wants us to envision the "heavenly Jerusalem" where we will see God and Yeshua, myriads of angels, the congregation of believers, and the spirits of righteous martyrs (**Hebrews 12:22-24**).

This is the NT's *revised* image of heaven. In the HB, we see most often only God and his court. In the NT, we see God, the Son of God, and the court. (The imagery progression from HB to NT is demonstrated in chapters 4 and 5 of Revelation.) \*

The New Image dominates the mental landscape of the apostles. For example, nearly every epistle begins with a similar greeting: "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Yeshua the Messiah" (Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:3; 2 John 3, etc.). Jacob says he is a "servant of God and of the Lord Yeshua the Messiah" (Jacob 1:1). And Judah lifts up praise "to

the only God our Savior through Yeshua the Messiah our Lord" (Judah 25).

What should be decisive for us is how the occupants of Heaven worship, since they are closest to the scene. Contrary to later Christian practice, they praise "Him who sits on the throne and the Lamb," "our Lord and his Messiah," "our God and his Messiah" (Rev 5:13; 11:15; 12:10). The words clearly identify the Objects of worship.

Because 1 Corinthians 8:6 summarizes this NT emphasis and imagery, it could be called a **Messianic Shema**:

For us there is one God, the Father . . .  
and one Lord, Yeshua the Messiah.

(Some early Christian scribes were offended that this verse failed to validate the Trinity, so they altered their Greek manuscripts to read: "One God . . . one Lord . . . and one Holy Spirit.")

## (7) Conclusion

Many Christians don't see these repeated NT patterns and emphases because they have been trained to look for the Trinity Doctrine: Three-in-One, a Triune Deity. Even when they see the "One God/One Lord" pattern, they still believe it somehow validates the *Tri-une* Godhead. Even when the apostles distinguish between "God" and "the Lord Yeshua," and when Yeshua himself calls his Father "the only true God" (John 17:3), orthodox Christians still say the words "one God" mean Three-in-One.

Arnold Fruchtenbaum's attempt to find the Trinity in Hebrew Scripture does not bolster the credibility of Christian interpreters of Tanakh. It is similar to the way Roman Catholic apologists abused the Bible in debates with Jews in the Middle Ages.

In contrast, if Christians used the HB texts that Yeshua used, they could show true continuity between the HB and the NT, then point to valid historical links with post-biblical Jewish literature. They could validate Scripture and thus have divine authority behind their apologetical efforts.

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\* More detailed studies on the throneroom imagery can be found in two articles: "[Visions of the Heavenly Council in the Hebrew Bible and New Testament](#)" [13 PDF pages] and "[Visions of the Divine Council in the Hebrew Bible](#)" [152 PDF pages].