



The Trinity

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Note: The Scripture references in this hand-out are taken from the New King James Version.

Do you expect to have a complete, detailed understanding of the Trinity as a result of this study?

You shouldn't set your expectations to understand all aspects of the Triune nature of God too high because this is a concept that is too great for our mortal minds to fully grasp. As Hank Hanegraaff says, we can apprehend the concept of the Trinity, but we can not fully comprehend it.

The word "Trinity" is not even found in the Bible, so why do we study it?

This word is not in the Bible but the doctrine of the Trinity, or the triune nature of God is clearly taught throughout the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation. The word "Trinity" came from the Latin word, "Trinitas" which means "threefold," the threefold manifestation of God. The word Trinity was used in Christian writings as far back as 160 AD and was used in the Nicene Creed, 325 AD and the Apostles Creed which is still used today:

I believe in God, the Father Almighty,
the Creator of heaven and earth,
and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord:
Who was conceived of the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried.
He descended into hell. The third day He arose again from the dead.
He ascended into heaven
and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty,
whence He shall come to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy *catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and life everlasting.
Amen.

**The word "catholic" refers not to the Roman Catholic Church, but to the universal church of the Lord Jesus Christ.*

What kind of analogies have you heard people use to try to explain the Trinity?

Water has been used because it can exist in three states, liquid, ice, and steam. An egg has been used, which consists

of a shell, the egg white, and the yoke. The different roles of a man have been used where the man can be a father, husband and son. I've also heard that our seeing God in these mortal bodies is like being under water and seeing three fingers of a hand in the water, they look like separate objects but they are in fact connected as part of the hand that we can not see.

What is the problem with all these analogies about the Trinity?

All of them break down at some point or another. They all could lead to an incorrect view of the nature of God.

How does 1 Thessalonians 5:23 provide a better analogy for the triune nature of God?

1 Thessalonians 5:23 - Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This verse makes reference to the triune nature of people... all of us have three aspects that make us who we are: we have a body which enables us to interact with the physical world God created for us; we have a soul that represents our inner self, our thoughts, personality, and the seat of our emotions; and we have a spirit that has the capacity to commune with God if it has been born again. Those who have not been born again have a human spirit that drives them but it is dead to the things of God. Our triune nature is a good analogy for God's triune nature because we are made in the image of God...

Genesis 1:26 - 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."

How does Genesis 1:26 reveal the triune nature of God?

Genesis 1:26 - Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness"

This reveals the three persons of the Godhead in consultation and expressing himself as a plurality using terms such as Us and Our. In fact the very first time we see God mentioned in the Bible, the plural for is used:

Genesis 1:1 - In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

The Hebrew word for God that is used here is Elohim, the term "Elohim" is a plural noun.

How does Deuteronomy 6:4 contradict the concept of the Trinity?

Deuteronomy 6:4 - Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!

We know that it can not contradict the concept of the Trinity because it is inspired by the Holy Spirit and God can not contradict Himself. So an apparent contradiction in the Bible is always an opportunity for us to learn something profound... the Hebrew word that is used for "one" here means a complex unity. Another place this word is used is where God describes marriage:

Genesis 2:24 - Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

Marriage is the formation of a unit from two persons. Likewise, God is three persons but one nature. As I've heard Hank Hanegraaff say, God is one what and three whos.

Despite all this evidence in the Old Testament for the triune nature of God, Jews still deny the Trinity. How do they deal with passages such as Genesis 1:26 that refer to God in the plural form?

Jews dismiss the triune nature of God in Genesis 1:26 by saying this is just a reference to God as royalty. Monarchs often refer to themselves in the plural form to indicate that who they are is bigger than themselves.

How is the Trinity revealed in Genesis 18:1-2?

Genesis 18:1-2 - Then the LORD appeared to him by the terebinth trees of Mamre, as he was sitting in the tent door in the heat of the day. So he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing by him; and when he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them, and bowed himself to the ground,

When the Lord appeared to Abraham, he was manifest as three persons. Read this whole passage carefully... I originally thought that this was the Lord and two of His angels because two angels are referred to as executing God's judgment in destroying Sodom in Chapter 19. But look at verses 5 and 9... the use of the word "they" indicates that all three were Abraham's Lord.

How is the Trinity revealed in Psalm 2:7?

Psalm 2:7-8 - I will declare the decree: the LORD has said to Me, 'You are My Son, today I have begotten You. This is a reference to God the Son as being distinguished from God the Father.

How do we know that this Son here is a reference to God?

From the context, the very next verse is talking about the Son coming to own the earth, only God could own the earth...

Ps 2:8 - Ask of Me, and I will give You the nations for Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for Your possession.

What does it mean that "I have begotten you," does this mean that the Son is a created being?

The Hebrew word for begotten doesn't just mean born, it meant to bring forth. God the Son was brought forth to be our Savior, The Father anointed Him for this role... this is what Christ means, it is the Greek word for Anointed One and the Hebrew word Messiah means the same thing. By the way, the Son was born as well since he entered this world as a baby but unlike us, He existed in eternity past prior to entering this world as one of His creations.

Which terms refer to the three persons of the Godhead in Isaiah 48:16-17?

Isaiah 48:16-17 - Come near to Me, hear this: I have not spoken in secret from the beginning; from the time that it was, I was there. And now the Lord GOD and His Spirit have sent Me. Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: "I am the LORD your God, who teaches you to profit, who leads you by the way you should go.

The one speaking who refers to himself as "Me" has to be God the Son because He is identified as the "Redeemer, the holy one of Israel" in verse 19. The "Lord God" has to be God the Father because He sends the Son and the Holy Spirit is also mentions as "His Spirit" who joined with the Father in sending the Son.

What is the distinction between "the Lord God" in verse 16 and "the Lord your God" in verse 17?

"The Lord God" in verse 16 is the Father who sends the Son and "the Lord your God" in verse 17 is the Son because this message was given to Israel to whom He was speaking. He is also the One who describes Himself as their "Redeemer, the holy one of Israel."

If you were going to do a detailed study on what the Bible teaches about the Trinity, what part of the Bible would be the best place to focus?

While the truth of the Trinity is present in the Old Testament, greater illumination on this doctrine is found in the New Testament. The Trinity is declared in the New Testament where the names of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are used separately as well as together. For example, in John 17 (as well as many other places), the Lord prayed to the Father. This would make no sense if He prayed to Himself.

How is the Trinity revealed in John 8:18?

John 8:18 - I am One who bears witness of Myself, and the Father who sent Me bears witness of Me.

Jesus made it clear here that the Father is a separate and distinct person from Him because He referred to the Father as a corroborator of His testimony. It took two witnesses to establish the truth of a matter and Jesus appealed to Jews understanding of this law...

Deuteronomy 19:15 - One witness shall not rise against a man concerning any iniquity or any sin that he commits; by the mouth of two or three witnesses the matter shall be established.

What was Jesus claiming about Himself in John 8:18 that the Father corroborated?

If you back up in John 8, you find that Jesus claimed to be the giver of life...

John 8:12 - Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.

Only God gives life, Jesus was claiming to be God. He was also claiming to be the Messiah who would save those who followed Him.

What kind of witness did the Father give that confirmed that Jesus was who He claimed to be, Messiah-God?

The miracles that Jesus performed were not His work, Jesus attributed these miracles to the work of the Father...

John 14:10 - the Father who dwells in Me does the works.

Is Jesus making a circular argument when He attributes the miracles to the Father yet uses these miracles as testimony from the Father that Jesus is who He claimed to be?

Jesus was true when He attributed the miracles to the father because many of the miracles were fulfillment of prophecy that Jesus could not have done Himself such as where He was born, being born in the line of David, being born of a virgin, and when He was born (per the schedule in Daniel 9). And the greatest miracle of all, His resurrection, had to be done by God because Jesus was killed.

How do you reconcile the fact that Jesus attributes His miracles to the work of the Father in John 14:10 yet He promises to resurrect Himself in John 2:19-21?

John 2:19-21 - Jesus answered and said to them,

"Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."

Then the Jews said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?" But He was speaking of the temple of His body.

In John 2, He is speaking of Himself as the Second Member of the Godhead who is the giver of life. In John 14, Jesus is

referring to the fact that He voluntarily laid aside His prerogatives as God to perform His mission as our Savior...

Philippians 2:5-8 - Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.

How is the Trinity revealed in Luke 1:35?

Luke 1:35 - And the angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God.

This passage describes the miracle of the virgin birth of Jesus. The Holy Spirit is mentioned along with God the Father, "the Highest" and the Son of God.

How is the deity of Christ seen in Luke 1:35?

Jesus is described as the "Holy One" and the fact that He was called the Son of God. The Jewish audience understood the term, "Son of God" to mean "the same as God." The Son of God has the same nature as God the Father and God the Holy Spirit.

How is the Trinity revealed in Matthew 3:13-17?

Matthew 3:13-17 - Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. And John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?" But Jesus answered and said to him, "Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he allowed Him. When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

Jesus is baptized in verse 16, the Spirit of God is seen descending like a dove in verse 17, and the Father speaks in verse 17.

Why do you think the Holy Spirit appeared as a dove on this occasion?

The dove is a symbol of reconciliation with God...

Genesis 8:8-11 - He also sent out from himself a dove, to see if the waters had receded from the face of the ground. But the dove found no resting place for the sole of her foot, and she returned into the ark to him, for the waters were on the face of the whole earth. So he put out his hand and took her, and drew her into the ark to himself. And he waited yet another seven days, and

again he sent the dove out from the ark. Then the dove came to him in the evening, and behold, a freshly plucked olive leaf was in her mouth; and Noah knew that the waters had receded from the earth.

The dove brought Noah the first proof that God had ended His judgment of the flood. The dove has since been used by man as a symbol of peace for that reason, it is peace with God. Other places of Scripture use the dove as a symbol of tender and devoted affection (Song of Sol. 1:15, 2:14, etc) and likewise of mourning (Isaiah 38:14, 59:11). All this applies to the emotions God had regarding His Son officially beginning His ministry at His baptism: His mission to redeem mankind, His affection for the Son, and mourning over the break in fellowship the Triune Godhead would experience when Jesus bore the sins of the world on the cross...

Matthew 27:46 - And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" that is, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (NKJ)

Can you think of another occasion when God the Father verbally expressed His pleasure in the ministry of Jesus?

When Jesus revealed his glorified self on the mount of transfiguration to Peter, James and John...

Matthew 17:5 - While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!"

How is the Trinity revealed in Matthew 28:19-20?

Matthew 28:19-20 - "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.

All three persons of the Trinity are mentioned here as part of the formula for baptizing disciples.

How do you reconcile the commandment of Jesus about being baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit with occasions in Acts where people were only baptized in the name of Jesus (Acts 8:16 & 19:5)?

To be baptized in the name of Jesus implied being baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The book of Acts is a history book and not one from which a person should attempt to form doctrine.

How does the way the Trinity is expressed in Matthew 28:19-20 reveal the complex unity of the Godhead?

Notice the singular use of the word name. It does not say be baptized in the names of but rather in the name of (singular).

How is the Trinity revealed in Romans 8: 16-17?

Romans 8:16-17 - The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs-- heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.

All three persons of the Godhead are mentioned here: the Holy Spirit bears witness with our spirit about our being in God's family, we are heir of eternal life with God the Father and Christ who is God the Son.

There are many other passages in Paul's epistles that mention two or three persons of the Trinity together...

1 Cor 12:4-6 - There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all.

2 Cor 13:14 - The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

Gal 4:6 - And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!"

Eph 5:18-20 - And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,

II Th 2:13-14 - But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

1 Tim 3:16 - And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up in glory.

Titus 3:4-6 - But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior,

The General epistles and Revelation also reveal the Trinity:

1 Pet 1:2 - elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace be multiplied.

I Jn 4:2 - By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God,

I Jn 4:12-15 - No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.

I Jn 5:7 - For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one.

Jude 1:20-21- But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.

Rev 1:4-6 - John, to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.