

The Trinity in the Old Testament

A comprehensive reference guide to passages used in Christian apologetics

Christian apologists appeal to a substantial number of Old Testament passages to argue that although the doctrine of the Trinity is not explicitly revealed in the Old Testament, the foundations of that doctrine are already present.

The central argument is that the Old Testament teaches the existence of one God while also presenting indications of plurality within the Godhead. In certain passages, two figures are identified with God yet distinguished from one another. In others, God speaks of His Spirit or His Son in ways Christians understand to anticipate the New Testament revelation of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

For clarity, I have organized the passages into eight categories, distinguishing the stronger apologetic arguments from supporting or more speculative interpretations.

1. Passages suggesting plurality within the one God

These are among the most frequently cited Old Testament passages in Trinitarian apologetics.

Passage	Trinitarian argument
Genesis 1:1–3	God creates, the Spirit of God moves over the waters, and God creates through His spoken word. Christians connect this with John 1:1–3.
Genesis 1:26–27	God says, "Let Us make man in Our image." The plural language is interpreted as a possible indication of plurality within God.
Genesis 3:22	God declares, "The man has become like one of Us."
Genesis 11:6–7	God says, "Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language."
Isaiah 6:8	God asks, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?" Singular and plural pronouns appear together.
Genesis 19:24	"The LORD rained brimstone and fire on Sodom and Gomorrah, from the LORD out of the heavens." Some apologists interpret this as a distinction between two divine persons.
Genesis 20:13	The Hebrew verb associated with God's causing Abraham to wander is plural in form. Occasionally cited as supporting plurality.
Genesis 35:7	The Hebrew verb describing God's appearance to Jacob is plural in form.
Deuteronomy 6:4	"The LORD our God, the LORD is one." Establishes the unity of God, which Trinitarians maintain alongside personal distinctions.

Important qualification: Genesis 1:26 and related plural statements do not establish the Trinity by themselves. Jewish interpreters commonly understand them as God addressing His heavenly court. Similarly, Elohim is grammatically plural but ordinarily takes singular verbs when referring to Israel's God; its form does not independently demonstrate multiple divine persons.

The Hebrew word echad (one) in Deuteronomy 6:4 can describe unity involving multiple elements, as in Genesis 2:24, but it does not inherently mean compound unity. These passages are best presented as compatible with Trinitarian theology rather than conclusive proofs of it.

2. Passages distinguishing the LORD from another figure identified as divine

These are particularly important because the argument does not depend merely on plural pronouns. Instead, the biblical text seems to distinguish between two figures who both possess divine identity or authority.

Passage	Trinitarian argument
Psalms 2:2–12	The LORD speaks about His Anointed and identifies Him as His Son. The nations are commanded to submit to Him.
Psalms 45:6–7	The royal figure is addressed as God, yet the passage subsequently refers to "God, Your God." Hebrews 1:8–9 applies this to Christ.
Psalms 110:1	"The LORD said to my Lord, 'Sit at My right hand.'" Jesus cites this to establish the Messiah's superiority to David.
Psalms 110:4–5	The Messiah is appointed an eternal priest, while the Lord is portrayed at the right hand. Christians read this with Hebrews 5–7.
Isaiah 9:6–7	The promised child is called "Mighty God" and "Everlasting Father," among other titles.
Isaiah 7:14	The promised son is called Immanuel, meaning "God with us."
Isaiah 40:3–5	A voice prepares the way for the LORD. The New Testament applies this prophecy to John the Baptist preparing the way for Jesus.
Jeremiah 23:5–6	The promised Davidic king is associated with the divine name "The LORD Our Righteousness."
Jeremiah 33:14–16	Repeats the Davidic restoration promise and applies the same name to Jerusalem, showing why the divine-name argument requires care.
Micah 5:2	The ruler from Bethlehem has origins described as being "from ancient days" or "from everlasting," depending on translation. Christians associate this with Christ's preexistence.
Daniel 7:9–14	The Ancient of Days gives universal and enduring dominion to one "like a son of man" who comes with the clouds of heaven.
Daniel 7:18, 22, 27	The saints receive the kingdom associated with the heavenly figure, helping explain the significance of the vision.

Zechariah 12:10 The LORD speaks of one who has been pierced. The precise reading of "Me" or "him" is debated; Christians connect the passage to Jesus' crucifixion.

Malachi 3:1–3 The LORD announces that a messenger will prepare the way before Him, followed by the coming of the Lord to His temple.

Hosea 1:7 The LORD says He will save Judah "by the LORD their God." Some interpret the wording as distinguishing divine persons.

Three particularly important texts

Psalm 45:6–7 — God addresses one who is called God

"Your throne, O God, is forever and ever... Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You."

In Christian interpretation, the distinction between the one addressed as God and the God who anoints Him anticipates the relationship between the Father and Son. Hebrews 1:8–9 explicitly applies the passage to Christ.

Psalm 110:1 — The LORD speaks to David's Lord

"The LORD said to my Lord, 'Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.'"

This is among the most important Old Testament passages used by Jesus and the apostles to explain His heavenly authority.

Daniel 7:13–14 — The Ancient of Days and the Son of Man

Daniel sees two distinguishable figures. The Son of Man approaches the Ancient of Days and receives everlasting dominion over all peoples and nations.

Christians argue that the Son of Man's authority, universal worship or service, and association with the clouds of heaven suggest more than an ordinary human ruler.

The Hebrew Bible does not explicitly call this figure the second person of the Trinity, but the New Testament repeatedly connects Jesus with Daniel's vision.

3. The Angel of the LORD: a divine figure distinguished from God

This is one of the more developed lines of Old Testament Trinitarian apologetics.

The central argument is that the Angel of the LORD sometimes:

- Speaks as God in the first person.
- Is explicitly identified with the LORD.
- Exercises divine authority.
- Is nevertheless distinguished from the LORD who sends Him.

Many Christian interpreters identify this figure with the preincarnate Christ, although that identification is not explicit in the Old Testament and remains disputed.

Passage	Significance
Genesis 16:7–13	The Angel promises to multiply Hagar's descendants, and Hagar identifies the one speaking with her as God.
Genesis 18:1–33	The LORD appears to Abraham in connection with three visitors.
Genesis 19:1–24	Two angels arrive in Sodom; verse 24 describes the LORD raining judgment from the LORD in heaven.
Genesis 22:11–18	The Angel of the LORD speaks as though Abraham's sacrifice would have been offered to Him and swears by Himself.
Genesis 31:11–13	The Angel of God identifies Himself as the God of Bethel.
Genesis 32:24–30	Jacob wrestles with a man and afterward declares that he has seen God face to face.
Genesis 48:15–16	Jacob blesses Joseph's sons by invoking God and "the Angel who has redeemed me from all evil."
Exodus 3:1–6	The Angel of the LORD appears in the burning bush, yet the speaker identifies Himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
Exodus 13:21–22; 14:19–20	God's presence in the pillar and the Angel of God are associated with Israel's deliverance.
Exodus 23:20–23	God promises to send an Angel in whom His name resides, commanding Israel to obey Him.
Exodus 32:34; 33:2, 14–15	God speaks about sending an angel and about His own presence going with Israel.
Numbers 20:14–16	Israel recounts how God sent an Angel to deliver them from Egypt.
Numbers 22:22–38	The Angel of the LORD confronts Balaam and speaks with divine authority.
Joshua 5:13–6:2	The commander of the LORD's army receives Joshua's reverence and tells him to remove his sandals on holy ground.
Judges 2:1–5	The Angel declares, "I brought you up from Egypt," and speaks of the covenant as His own.
Judges 6:11–24	The Angel appears to Gideon, while the narrative alternates between the Angel and the LORD.
Judges 13:3–23	The Angel appears to Manoah and his wife; afterward Manoah fears death because he believes they have seen God.
2 Samuel 24:16–17	The Angel of the LORD carries out judgment under God's command.
1 Chronicles 21:15–30	The Angel participates in the judgment and directs David through Gad, God's prophet.
Hosea 12:3–5	Hosea recounts Jacob's wrestling encounter, associating the Angel with God and the LORD.
Zechariah 1:8–13	The Angel of the LORD intercedes with the LORD for Jerusalem.

Zechariah 3:1–5	The Angel of the LORD stands in a heavenly judicial scene and pronounces God's forgiveness.
Zechariah 12:8	The house of David is compared with God and with the Angel of the LORD.

The strongest passages in this category are Genesis 16:7–13; 22:11–18; 31:11–13; Exodus 3:1–6; 23:20–23; Judges 2:1–5; 6:11–24; and 13:3–23.

A significant counterinterpretation is the ancient concept of agency, whereby a messenger could speak on behalf of the sender in the first person. This explains some of the language without requiring the Angel to be a separate divine person. Trinitarian apologists respond that the total pattern, especially passages where the Angel is identified with God, suggests something beyond ordinary angelic representation.

4. Passages presenting the Spirit of God as distinct from God

These passages are particularly relevant to the argument for the Holy Spirit's personal identity and divine nature.

Passage	Trinitarian significance
Genesis 1:2	The Spirit of God acts in creation.
Genesis 6:3	God speaks about His Spirit striving with or remaining with mankind, depending on translation.
Exodus 31:2–5	God fills Bezalel with the Spirit of God, giving wisdom and skill.
Numbers 11:16–29	God places the Spirit upon the elders to empower them.
Numbers 27:18	Joshua is described as a man in whom is the Spirit.
2 Samuel 23:2–3	David says the Spirit of the LORD spoke through him, then identifies the speaker as the God of Israel.
Nehemiah 9:20	God gives His good Spirit to instruct Israel.
Nehemiah 9:30	God warns Israel by His Spirit through the prophets.
Job 26:13	God's Spirit or breath is associated with His creative activity.
Job 33:4	"The Spirit of God has made me."
Psalms 51:11	David pleads that God not take His Holy Spirit from him.
Psalms 104:30	God sends forth His Spirit, and creatures are created.
Psalms 139:7–10	God's Spirit is portrayed as omnipresent.
Psalms 143:10	The psalmist asks God's good Spirit to lead him.
Isaiah 11:1–2	The Spirit of the LORD rests upon the coming Davidic ruler.
Isaiah 32:15	The Spirit is poured out from on high.
Isaiah 40:13–14	The Spirit of the LORD possesses divine wisdom.
Isaiah 42:1	God places His Spirit upon His chosen Servant.

Isaiah 44:3	God promises to pour out His Spirit on Israel's descendants.
Isaiah 59:21	God speaks of His Spirit and His words remaining with His people.
Isaiah 63:10–14	Israel rebels against God's Holy Spirit, who is portrayed as grieved and as leading the people.
Ezekiel 2:2; 3:24	The Spirit enters Ezekiel and speaks to him.
Ezekiel 11:5	The Spirit of the LORD falls upon Ezekiel and tells him what to say.
Ezekiel 36:26– 27	God promises to put His Spirit within His people.
Ezekiel 37:1–14	God's Spirit is associated with giving life to the dead.
Ezekiel 39:29	God promises to pour out His Spirit on Israel.
Joel 2:28–29	God promises to pour out His Spirit on all flesh.
Micah 3:8	Micah is filled with power by the Spirit of the LORD.
Haggai 2:5	God declares that His Spirit remains among His people.
Zechariah 4:6	God declares that His work will be accomplished by His Spirit.
Zechariah 7:12	God sends His words through the prophets by His Spirit.

The most important passages for arguing that the Spirit is more than an impersonal force are 2 Samuel 23:2–3; Nehemiah 9:30; Isaiah 63:10–14; and Ezekiel 11:5.

However, not every reference to the Spirit independently establishes personhood. The Hebrew *ruach* can mean spirit, wind, or breath, so individual passages must be interpreted in context.

5. Passages that seem to distinguish three divine figures

For the specific question of whether the Trinity is implied in the Old Testament, these deserve particular attention.

Isaiah 48:12–16

The LORD, the speaker, and the Spirit

Near the end of this passage, the speaker declares:

"And now the Lord GOD, and His Spirit, have sent Me." (Isaiah 48:16, NKJV)

Some Christian apologists interpret the speaker as the preincarnate Son, with the Lord GOD understood as the Father and the Spirit as the Holy Spirit.

Why it matters: This is one of the rare Old Testament passages where three distinguishable figures may be present in one statement.

Qualification: The identity of the speaker is disputed. Some commentators understand the final clause as the prophet speaking rather than the Messiah.

Isaiah 61:1–3

The Lord GOD, the Spirit, and the Anointed One

"The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me, because the LORD has anointed Me..."

The passage distinguishes the LORD, His Spirit, and the one anointed and commissioned for ministry.

Why it matters: In Luke 4:16–21, Jesus reads this passage and declares that it has been fulfilled in His ministry.

This gives Christians an explicit New Testament basis for identifying the anointed speaker with Jesus Christ.

Isaiah 63:7–14

The LORD, the Angel of His Presence, and the Holy Spirit

Isaiah 63:9–10 mentions the LORD's salvation, the Angel of His Presence, and His Holy Spirit.

Some Christian interpreters see here a possible foreshadowing of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Qualification: The passage does not explicitly identify the Angel of His Presence with the Son. The wording of verse 9 also differs in ancient textual traditions.

Isaiah 42:1–7

God, His chosen Servant, and His Spirit

God says of His chosen Servant:

"I have put My Spirit upon Him."

Christians identify the Servant with Christ, particularly through Matthew 12:17–21.

This provides a pattern of God sending His Servant and placing His Spirit upon Him.

Of these, Isaiah 48:16 and Isaiah 61:1 are especially useful in presenting the Christian argument, while Isaiah 63:7–14 provides a further possible threefold distinction.



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6. Passages involving the divine Word or Wisdom

Christian apologists frequently appeal to passages in which God's Word or Wisdom is portrayed as actively participating in creation or salvation.

Passage	Trinitarian interpretation
Genesis 1:3 and following	God creates by speaking. Christians connect His creative Word to John 1:1–3.
Psalms 33:6	The heavens are made by the Word of the LORD and by the breath of His mouth.
Psalms 107:20	God sends His word to heal and deliver.
Psalms 147:15–18	God's word is sent forth and performs His purposes.
Proverbs 8:1–36	Wisdom is personified and described as present with God before and during creation.
Proverbs 30:4	The passage asks concerning the heavenly Creator, "What is His name, and what is His Son's name, if you know?"
Isaiah 55:10–11	God sends His word, which accomplishes His purposes and returns to Him.
Job 28:12–28	Wisdom is presented as belonging uniquely to God and involved in His ordering of creation.

Two important examples

Proverbs 8:22–31

Wisdom speaks as existing before the earth and being present beside God during creation.

Christian interpreters have historically associated this personified Wisdom with Christ, particularly in light of 1 Corinthians 1:24, where Christ is called the wisdom of God.

However, Proverbs 8 is Hebrew wisdom poetry. Its immediate literary purpose is to personify divine wisdom. It should not be presented as an unambiguous description of an eternal divine Son.

Proverbs 30:4

"Who has ascended into heaven, or descended? ... What is His name, and what is His Son's name, if you know?"

Some apologists understand this as an extraordinary anticipation of the divine Son. Others understand "son" as part of a rhetorical question about the identity and knowledge of the Creator, without a direct reference to the Messiah.

7. Passages where the LORD appears to send the LORD

A related argument arises when one figure speaking as the LORD describes Himself as being sent by the LORD.

Passage	Argument
Zechariah 2:8–11	The speaker identifies Himself with the LORD and says that the LORD of hosts has sent Him.
Zechariah 3:1–2	The Angel of the LORD says, "The LORD rebuke you," making a distinction between the Angel and the LORD.
Zechariah 4:6–9	The LORD's Spirit and the LORD's sending of the prophetic message appear together.
Zechariah 6:12–13	The Branch builds the temple and rules as priest and king; some see distinct messianic and divine roles.
Hosea 1:7	The LORD speaks of saving His people by the LORD their God.
Isaiah 48:16	The speaker says that the Lord GOD and His Spirit have sent Him.
Isaiah 61:1	The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon the anointed speaker whom the LORD has sent.

Zechariah 2:8–11 is especially noteworthy. In verses 10–11, the speaker declares that He will dwell in the midst of Zion and that the LORD of hosts has sent Him. Some Christian interpreters regard this as evidence of personal distinctions within the Godhead.

As with the Angel of the LORD passages, other commentators attribute the shifts in speaker to prophetic quotation or divine representation through a messenger.

8. Threefold formulas and other supporting passages

These passages are sometimes cited as symbolic hints of the Trinity, although they are much less persuasive as independent evidence.

Passage	Proposed significance
Numbers 6:24–26	The threefold priestly blessing repeats the divine name three times.
Isaiah 6:3	The heavenly beings proclaim, "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts."
Genesis 18:1–22	Three visitors appear to Abraham in the context of a manifestation of the LORD.
Ecclesiastes 12:1	Occasionally cited because the Hebrew word for "Creator" has a plural form in the traditional text.

Isaiah 54:5	Hebrew forms associated with "Maker" and "Husband" are plural, though the passage refers to Israel's one God.
Daniel 3:24–25	A fourth figure appears in the furnace, described as resembling a "son of the gods" or "son of God," depending on translation. Some identify Him as the preincarnate Christ.
Psalms 2:7	The LORD declares to His Anointed, "You are My Son."
Psalms 89:26–27	The Davidic king addresses God as Father and receives the status of firstborn.
Isaiah 11:1–5	The coming Davidic ruler is empowered by the Spirit of the LORD.
Isaiah 59:20–21	The Redeemer comes to Zion, followed by God's covenant promise concerning His Spirit.

Threefold language, in particular, must be used cautiously. Repetition three times can express emphasis or completeness without implying three persons.

The strongest Old Testament passages for Christian apologetics

Although dozens of texts are discussed in Trinitarian apologetics, they do not all carry equal evidential weight.

I would prioritize these twelve passages for a Bible study or a Christian-Muslim discussion, especially if the goal is to demonstrate the scriptural foundations for the doctrine rather than merely collect unusual grammatical forms.

Priority	Passage	Main argument
1	Isaiah 48:16	Potential reference to three distinguishable divine figures
2	Isaiah 61:1–3	The Lord GOD, His Spirit, and the Anointed One
3	Psalms 110:1	The LORD addresses David's Lord
4	Psalms 45:6–7	One addressed as God is anointed by God
5	Daniel 7:13–14	The Ancient of Days and the heavenly Son of Man
6	Isaiah 9:6–7	The promised Messiah bears divine titles
7	Exodus 3:1–6	The Angel of the LORD identifies Himself as God
8	Genesis 22:11–18	The Angel speaks as God and swears by Himself
9	Judges 13:3–23	The Angel of the LORD is distinguished from God yet identified with Him
10	Zechariah 2:8–11	The divine speaker describes Himself as sent by the LORD
11	Isaiah 63:9–10	The LORD, the Angel of His Presence, and His Holy Spirit
12	Genesis 1:26–27	God speaks of Himself in plural terms

This is a ranking of their usefulness in constructing a cumulative Christian argument, not a claim that every passage is equally explicit or equally accepted by biblical scholars.

How the Old Testament argument fits together

The strongest approach is not to argue that any single Old Testament verse fully teaches the Trinity. Rather, Christian apologists build a cumulative case around four propositions:

1. There is only one God. Deuteronomy 6:4; Isaiah 43:10–11; 44:6–8; 45:5–6 establish the exclusive deity of the LORD.
2. More than one distinguishable figure is sometimes described in divine terms. Psalm 45:6–7; Psalm 110:1; Exodus 3:1–6; and Daniel 7:13–14 contribute to this argument.
3. God's Spirit acts, speaks, guides, and can be grieved. Examples include 2 Samuel 23:2–3; Nehemiah 9:30; Isaiah 63:10; and Ezekiel 11:5.
4. Certain passages appear to bring together God, His Spirit, and an anointed or sent figure. Isaiah 42:1; 48:16; and 61:1 are central examples.

Christian theology understands the New Testament as clarifying the relationships only partially disclosed in these passages.

The theologian B. B. Warfield expressed the concept through an analogy: the Old Testament is like a furnished room that is dimly illuminated. When the New Testament brings greater light, things already present become more clearly visible.



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The central apologetic conclusion: The Old Testament does not explicitly formulate the doctrine of one God existing eternally as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, it contains a series of passages that Trinitarian Christians understand as anticipating that revelation. Their argument is strongest when the texts are treated cumulatively, with their original context and alternative interpretations acknowledged.

This distinction is particularly valuable in discussions with Jewish or Muslim critics: the claim need not be that ancient Israelites possessed a fully developed Nicene doctrine of the Trinity, but that the New Testament understanding of God's nature emerges from and is consistent with patterns already present in Israel's Scriptures.