

Jehovah of Hosts

When I share the truth about the Trinity and the deity of Christ with Jehovah's Witnesses, I often begin with something like this:

I believe in the Trinity because the Bible teaches the doctrine. No, the Bible doesn't use the specific word "Trinity" any more than it uses the specific word "theocratic" or "Bible." Instead, it teaches the doctrine by teaching the three pillars or foundations that make up the doctrine. The first such pillar is that there is only one true God, Yahweh, the Creator of all things. The second is that there are three divine persons, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. The Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Spirit, and the Spirit is not the Father. Three persons who communicate with one another and love one another. Finally, the third pillar is the teaching that these three persons are completely equal in sharing in the divine Being. This would include the deity of Christ and the personality of the Holy Spirit. This is where we directly disagree. May I show

you from the Bible how it teaches these truths?

Jehovah's Witnesses believe the Trinity is nowhere to be found in Scripture, so they are quite confident that you will fail in attempting to support the Trinity from the Bible. So I press on:

I assume you would agree with me that there is only one true God, Yahweh, or as you pronounce it, Jehovah. I believe the name "Jehovah" refers to the very divine Being, the eternal God who created every thing. We can agree, I assume, that the Father is identified as Jehovah.¹ But I believe that the Bible identifies Jesus as Yahweh, as well, and the Spirit is the Spirit of Yahweh. Each of these three *persons* share the one divine name, Yahweh or Jehovah. May I show you a few passages of Scripture that make this identification?

At this point I can go to a large number of passages where the New Testament writers think nothing of applying to the Lord Jesus passages from the Old Testament that were written in reference to Yahweh.² But I have found two particular passages to carry the most weight in communicating this truth to those who believe that Yahweh is God, believe the Bible is true, but reject the deity of Christ: Hebrews 1:10–12 in comparison with Psalm 102:25–27, and John 12:37–41 in comparison with Isaiah 6:1–10.

ETERNAL CREATOR

There can be no confusion about the intended meaning of the psalmist who penned these words in Psalm 102:25–27:

Of old You founded the earth,
 And the heavens are the work of Your hands.
 Even they will perish, but You endure;
 And all of them will wear out like a garment;
 Like clothing You will change them and they will be changed.
 But You are the same, and Your years will not come to an end.

The first thing to establish in fairly and honestly dealing with the

passage is what it meant in its original context. The entire psalm is written about Yahweh. Verse 1 indicates it is a prayer to the LORD. The use of the all-caps form LORD is the standard English means of indicating that the underlying Hebrew term is Yahweh, or Jehovah. Some Bibles, such as the Jerusalem Bible, or the *New World Translation* published by the Watchtower Society, use the term “Jehovah” or “Yahweh.” Throughout Psalm 102 this term is found, indicating plainly that the psalm was originally written in praise of Yahweh. This is important, for it is the context of the words found in verses 25 through 27.

The psalmist speaks in these verses of the unchanging and eternal nature of Yahweh. He does so by contrasting the changing creation with the unchangeable Creator. One of the primary “evidences” God uses to demonstrate His unique nature and sole standing as the one true God is that He is the Creator.³ This is the case here. Yahweh founded the earth (Psalm 24:1; 78:69; 89:11; Proverbs 3:19; Isaiah 48:13), and the heavens are described as a “work” of His hands (Psalm 19:1). On the most basic level, then, the universe itself is a dependent creation, while God is eternal and unchanging. They are temporal and will pass away, but God is eternal, and He will “endure.” They are like an old garment that we throw away when it becomes old and useless. But He does not age. He does not change. His years have no number and will never come to an end. As Moses had said, “from everlasting to everlasting, You are God” (Psalm 90:2).

Why is it important to focus on what this passage means? Because it is speaking of characteristics that are *unique to the one true God*. This will become vitally important when we look at the means some use to avoid the weight of these passages as they are used in the New Testament.

The writer to the Hebrews shows no compunctions in taking this passage from the Psalter—a passage fit *only* for describing the eternal Creator himself—and applying it to Jesus Christ. Here is how he does it in Hebrews 1:8–12:

But of the Son *He says*,

“YOUR THRONE, O GOD, IS FOREVER AND EVER,

AND THE RIGHTEOUS SCEPTER IS THE SCEPTER OF HIS KINGDOM.
 YOU HAVE LOVED RIGHTEOUSNESS AND HATED LAWLESSNESS;
 THEREFORE GOD, YOUR GOD, HAS ANOINTED YOU
 WITH THE OIL OF GLADNESS ABOVE YOUR COMPANIONS.”

And,

“YOU, LORD,⁴ IN THE BEGINNING LAID THE FOUNDATION OF THE
 EARTH,

AND THE HEAVENS ARE THE WORKS OF YOUR HANDS;
 THEY WILL PERISH, BUT YOU REMAIN;
 AND THEY ALL WILL BECOME OLD LIKE A GARMENT,
 AND LIKE A MANTLE YOU WILL ROLL THEM UP;
 LIKE A GARMENT THEY WILL ALSO BE CHANGED.
 BUT YOU ARE THE SAME,
 AND YOUR YEARS WILL NOT COME TO AN END.”

An entire string of Old Testament passages are presented, each intended to demonstrate the superiority of Christ. Verse 8 begins by introducing the words of the Father regarding the Son. Verse 10 continues the same theme, again giving us the words of the Father relevant to the Son. It is vital to understand that verses 10 through 12 are, in fact, *addressed to the Son*. It is Jesus who is addressed as “LORD” in verse 10, and it is *His* activity in creation, and *His* unchanging nature, that is revealed in the rest of the passage. The significance of this is clear when one realizes that the writer to the Hebrews is directly applying the passage from Psalm 102:25–27⁵ to the Son. The meaning of the original is beyond dispute. The fact that it is speaking of *unique characteristics of the true God* is likewise unarguable. Therefore, the fact that Hebrews applies such a passage to the Son tells us what the writer himself believed about the nature of Jesus Christ. *One simply could not meaningfully apply such a passage to a mere creature, no matter how highly exalted.*

What does it mean that the writer to the Hebrews could take a passage that *is only applicable to Yahweh* and apply it to the Son of God, Jesus Christ? It means that they saw no problem in making such an identification, because they believed that the Son was, indeed, the very incarnation of Yahweh.

The only way “around” this kind of direct identification of the Son as Yahweh is to point out that using an Old Testament passage of someone in the New Testament does not, of necessity, argue for identity of person. For example, in Hebrews 1:8, the writer applies a passage that was originally about one of Israel’s kings (possibly Solomon) to the Lord Jesus. Does this mean that Jesus is Solomon? Aside from the impossibility of such an identification in the first place, such an argument misses a very important distinction. The connection between the Lord Jesus and Solomon has to do with a shared characteristic: kingship. But kingship is not a *unique* attribute of Solomon. There have been many kings. So while citing a passage about Solomon of Jesus doesn’t make Jesus Solomon, citing a passage about a *unique characteristic* (creatorship, immutability, eternity) of *Yahweh* does make Jesus Yahweh, *for no one else shares that characteristic*. Being a king didn’t make Solomon who he was, but being eternal and unchangeable *does* define who Yahweh is.

Allow me to illustrate. If I wanted to identify someone as Solomon by using a citation from the Old Testament, I would not do it by citing a passage that is merely about Solomon as a king, for that would not prove *identity* but rather *position*. There were other kings, like David, or Hezekiah. Simply identifying someone as a king wouldn’t tell me *which* king I had in mind. If I instead applied a *unique* description of Solomon, *that* would convey identity. If I, for example, said that such and such a king had 700 wives and 300 concubines (1 Kings 11:3), who else could I be referring to but Solomon? That would distinguish which king I had in mind and would communicate *identity*. In the same way, if I were to merely call a person “loving,” I would not, by so doing, be identifying that person as God, even though God is, indeed, loving. God is love, but there are others who express love and are loving. It is not unique to God to love. But if I were to say that someone is eternal, the Creator of all things, and unchanging, *that* would communicate identity, for there is only one who is eternal, unchanging, and the Creator of all things. And this is what the writer to the Hebrews does in 1:10–12. Hence the error of the attempt to avoid the force of the identification of Jesus as Yahweh here in Hebrews 1.⁶

WHO DID ISAIAH SEE?

Toward the end of Jesus' public ministry as recorded by John we find an incident where a group of Greeks seek out the Lord Jesus. The significance of the passage often goes right past us because we are looking more at the encounter than a little comment John tacks on to the end of his citation from Isaiah:

But though He had performed so many signs before them, *yet* they were not believing in Him. *This was* to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet which he spoke: "LORD, WHO HAS BELIEVED OUR REPORT? AND TO WHOM HAS THE ARM OF THE LORD BEEN REVEALED?" For this reason they could not believe, for Isaiah said again, "HE HAS BLINDED THEIR EYES AND HE HARDENED THEIR HEART, SO THAT THEY WOULD NOT SEE WITH THEIR EYES AND PERCEIVE WITH THEIR HEART, AND BE CONVERTED AND I HEAL THEM." These things Isaiah said because he saw His glory, and he spoke of Him. (John 12:37-41)

The struggle with the meaning of the words from Isaiah often causes us to fly right past verse 41. Yet what does John mean when he says that Isaiah "said these things because he saw His glory and spoke of Him"? Who is the "Him" to whom Isaiah refers?

We have to go back a little to see that John cites two passages from the book of Isaiah. In verse 38 he quotes from Isaiah 53:1, the great "Suffering Servant" passage that so plainly describes the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. John says the unbelief of the Jews, despite their seeing signs, was a fulfillment of the word of Isaiah in Isaiah 53. He then goes beyond this to assert their *inability* to believe and quotes from Isaiah 6 and the "Temple Vision" Isaiah received when he was commissioned as a prophet:

In the year of King Uzziah's death I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called out to another and said, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts, The whole earth is full of His glory." And the

foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke. (Isaiah 6:1-4)

In this awesome vision, Isaiah sees Yahweh (the LORD) sitting upon His throne, surrounded by angelic worshippers. The glory of Yahweh fills his sight. Isaiah recognizes his sin and is cleansed by the Lord, then commissioned to go and take a message to the people. But the message is not one of salvation, but of judgment.

He said, "Go, and tell this people: 'Keep on listening, but do not perceive; keep on looking, but do not understand.' Render the hearts of this people insensitive, their ears dull, and their eyes dim, otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and return and be healed." Then I said, "Lord, how long?" And He answered, "Until cities are devastated *and* without inhabitant, houses are without people and the land is utterly desolate" (Isaiah 6:9-11).

John cites the heart of the message of judgment given to Isaiah and sees the hardheartedness of the Jews, who had seen the miracles of the Lord Jesus and heard His words of grace as the fulfillment of these words.

Then John says, "These things Isaiah said because he saw His glory, and he spoke of Him." John has quoted from two passages in Isaiah, Isaiah 53:1 and Isaiah 6:10. Yet the immediate context refers to the words from Isaiah 6, and there are other reasons why we should see the primary reference as the Isaiah 6 passage. John speaks of Isaiah "seeing" "glory." In Isaiah 6:1 the very same term is used of "seeing" the LORD, and the very term "glory" appears in verse 3.⁷ Even if we connect both passages together, the fact remains that the only way to define what "glory" Isaiah saw was to refer to the glory of Isaiah 6:3.⁸ And that glory was the glory of Yahweh. There is none other whose glory we can connect with Isaiah's words.⁹

Therefore, if we ask Isaiah, "Whose glory did you see in your vision of the temple?" he would reply, "Yahweh's." But if we ask the same question of John, "Whose glory did Isaiah see?" he would answer with

the same answer—only in its fullness, “Jesus’” Who, then, was Jesus to John? None other than the eternal God in human flesh, Yahweh.

If the apostles themselves did not hesitate to apply to the Lord Jesus such unique and distinctive passages *that can only meaningfully be applied to deity*, to the Lord Jesus, how can we fail to give Him the same honor in recognizing Him for who He truly is?