

# One God

## Let Us Make Man

By Sean Finnegan

There are four "us" texts in the Bible (Genesis 1:26; 3:22; 11:7; Isaiah 6:8). These are verses in which God uses a plural pronoun when referring to something He will do. The most common example of this phenomenon is quoted below.

Genesis 1:26 and 27

Then God said, "Let us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness..."

God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

The traditional understanding is that these places prove that God is composed of multiple persons (the Father, the Son, and the holy spirit) who are conferring together to act. This view, although popular, is not the only interpretation that makes sense. In order to shed light on this, we will consider a number of times when men saw visions of God.

Isaiah saw God seated upon the throne with the train of His robe filling the temple with glory. Yet, Yahweh was not alone; He was accompanied by an undisclosed number of seraphim.

Isaiah 6:1-3

In the year of King Uzziah's death I saw the LORD [Yahweh] 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."

Immediately Isaiah became aware of his own impurity and the sin of his people. One seraph flew and purified Isaiah with a coal of fire. Then, as if Isaiah were not even there, God asked a question, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?" Isaiah perked up and boldly declared, "Here am I. Send me!" God needed a human agent to declare His Word to the people of Israel. The seraphim are part of His host, and so God sent Isaiah as His appointed prophet on earth for Him and the seraphim.

The prophet Ezekiel saw God many years after Isaiah (shortly after a number of the people of Judah were exiled by Nebuchadnezzar as seen in Ezekiel 1:1-3). His vision of God is one of the most bizarre in the entire Bible. In fact, the first chapter of Ezekiel reads like a science fiction

novel. The chapter abounds with the words "like," "resembling," and "appearance" as he relates to the reader what he has seen. He saw God engulfed in flames (verses 26 and 27), seated upon a throne situated upon a crystalline surface (verse 22) which was carried by four cherubim (verse 5; 10:15, 20). These four cherubim carry God wherever His spirit leads them.

Shortly after Ezekiel's vision, while Daniel was living in Babylon, he saw God. After visions of four great beasts coming up from the sea and the little horn, Daniel saw the Ancient of Days sitting on His throne.

Daniel 7:9 and 10

I kept looking until thrones were set up, and the Ancient of Days took *His* seat; His vesture *was* like white snow and the hair of His head like pure wool. His throne *was* ablaze with flames, its wheels *were* burning with fire.

A river of fire was flowing and coming out from before Him; thousands upon thousands were attending Him, and myriads upon myriads were standing before Him; the court sat, and the books were opened.

Notice that again God is not pictured alone. He is attended by myriads upon myriads, or as the KJV says, "ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him." This is amazing—millions of heavenly beings surround the throne of the supreme Judge as He determines the verdict of the little horn.

The last Bible prophet, John, saw God seated on His heavenly throne (Revelation 4:1-11). In this case, a series of beings in a concentric formation are described from closest to farthest. The inner circle around the throne is made up of four creatures (possibly the cherubim from Ezekiel's vision). Beyond the four creatures, are twenty-four elders sitting upon their thrones. Lastly, the outer circle consists of myriads of angels (Revelation 5:11; 7:11). God is surrounded by heavenly creatures about whom very little is said in the Scriptures. Other texts which demonstrate that God is accompanied by heavenly beings include Job 1:6; 2:1; Psalms 89:6 and 7; 103:19 and 20; Zechariah 6:5; I Timothy 5:21.

One incident wonderfully puts all of this together and effectively explains God's level and method of interaction with His heavenly host (recorded in I Kings 22 and II Chronicles 18). The episode involves a prophet named Micaiah who saw God. However, before getting to that, a little background may prove beneficial. The king of Israel, a wicked man named Ahab, wanted to go to war against Syria (Aram) to reclaim some lost territory, but he wanted the assistance of the king of Judah, a righteous man named Jehoshaphat. Thus, Ahab sent for Jehoshaphat; and while the two were sitting side-by-side preparing to go to war, Jehoshaphat said, "I am as you are, my people as your people, my horses as your horses. Please inquire first for the word of the LORD [Yahweh]" (I Kings 22:4 and 5).

Then, about four hundred prophets began to prophesy before the two kings saying: "Go up, for the Lord will give *it* into the hand of the king" (verse 6). Nevertheless, Jehoshaphat was not impressed by these false prophets (probably prophets of Baal) and said, "Is there not yet a

prophet of the LORD [Yahweh] here that we may inquire of him?" Ahab replied with disdain, "There is yet one man by whom we may inquire of the LORD [Yahweh], but I hate him, because he does not prophesy good concerning me, but evil. *He is Micaiah son of Imlah.*" Therefore, Ahab sent for Micaiah. When the king's messenger came to him, he said, "Behold now, the words of the prophets are uniformly favorable to the king. Please let your word be like the word of one of them, and speak favorably." This pressure was exerted upon Micaiah, so that the king of Israel could save face in front of the king of Judah. Yet, Micaiah responded with conviction, "As the LORD [Yahweh] lives, what the LORD [Yahweh] says to me, that I shall speak."

When Micaiah came before the kings, he was asked to prophesy and retorted sarcastically, "Go up and succeed, and the LORD [Yahweh] will give *it* into the hand of the king." Ahab then put Micaiah under oath to speak only the truth in the name of Yahweh; so Micaiah responded, "I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains, like sheep which have no shepherd. And the LORD [Yahweh] said, 'These have no master. Let each of them return to his house in peace.'" This prophecy upset Ahab (even though he asked for it), and he commented to Jehoshaphat, "Did I not tell you that he would not prophesy good concerning me, but evil?" Micaiah then continued his prophecy.

#### II Chronicles 18:18-22

Micaiah said, "Therefore, hear the word of the LORD [Yahweh]. I saw the LORD [Yahweh] sitting on His throne, and all the host of heaven standing by Him on His right and on His left. The LORD [Yahweh] said, 'Who will entice Ahab king of Israel to go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?' And one said this while another said that. Then a spirit came forward and stood before the LORD [Yahweh] and said, 'I will entice him.' And the LORD [Yahweh] said to him, 'How?' He said, 'I will go and be a deceiving spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.' Then He said, 'You are to entice *him* and prevail also. Go and do so.' Now therefore, behold, the LORD [Yahweh] has put a deceiving spirit in the mouth of these your prophets, for the LORD [Yahweh] has proclaimed disaster against you."

This is a remarkable prophecy. Micaiah saw the throne of the Almighty surrounded by His royal attendants—the spirit beings (angels). God knew what He wanted done, but He did not preplan how it should be done. He left that open to discussion. The angels were given a chance to say one thing or another; and, when one in particular came with the plan to confirm Ahab's arrogance through the mouths of his four hundred prophets, God approved and sent him to perform the task.

God is not a domineering leader. He involves others in His decisions. That He will get the job done is not the question, but how it is to be done is left open. All of us have probably had the unpleasant experience of working for someone who thought he could do everything himself and would not let others do the work. A boss with this kind of controlling attitude shows a lack of appreciation for those who are under him or her. God is not like that. He does not just do everything Himself. There are some things, such as the creation of the universe, in which He

acted alone (Isaiah 44:24; 45:18). Yet, even in this situation, the angels were there forming a choir to sing for joy as God worked (Job 38:6 and 7). However, it is probable that the majority of times that God acts, He empowers others to participate. Consider the first verse of the book of Revelation, "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his bond-servants, the things which must soon take place; and he sent and communicated *it* by his angel to his bond-servant John." A chain of communication is evident here. God is the source Who assigned Jesus the task of giving this revelation to John, but Jesus does this through his angel. God could easily have just spoken directly to John but that would leave others out of the loop. God cares about His heavenly companions and works through them and with them to accomplish His own perfect will.

What does all of this have to do with the "us" texts—Genesis 1:26, 3:22, and 11:7? In the first instance, God somehow involves the heavenly beings in the making of man; the second refers to how God and His angels have the knowledge of both good and evil; and the last speaks about God and His angels going down to the tower to confuse the languages there. Thus, God is not a plurality but a single being—the Father (John 17:3)—Who does not act in a vacuum but in concert with His spirit beings. He can say "us" if He wants to in an uncomplicated way and refer both to Himself and someone other than Himself—angels. What an awesome God, Who demonstrates His perfect character even through His leadership style!