

Torah Observant “SHOMER MITZVOT”

שׁוֹמֵר מִצְוֹת

A Series on Practical Messianic Living and Apologetics (halakhah)
By Torah Teacher Ariel ben-Lyman HaNaviy

Excursus: “Who is God talking with in Genesis 1:26?”

*This written commentary is basically a transcript of a video. I recommend that you watch it from my YouTube channel playlist here: [Exploring the Shema: Discussions on the Issues of Trinity](#)

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Introduction

Let's have a quick follow-up discussion about a video that I made back in late July of 2020, one that is getting a lot of attention for the wrong reasons since I made it. Okay, I get it. The video is not a full treatment of the subject, and the viewers are actually getting only a snapshot of the context since the video is Part 4 of a 5-part set of short videos on that topic. The question the video asks is: “Who is God talking with in Genesis 1:26?” Based on watching only this single video one will likely miss the context of my question and full answer, and thus, most viewers will probably get the impression that I believe God is conversing with the angels. But is this really what I believe the verse is teaching? Keep watching this follow-up video to find out.

The Verse in Question with English, Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic Inspection

The first clause of Genesis 1:26 in the ESV reads this way:

Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness...”

Basically, every major English translation—including the ones published by rabbinic Jewish authorities—all read the same way: “...let **US** make man in **OUR** image after **OUR** likeness” (emphasis, mine). What’s going on?! Did Moshe make a mistake in his transmission of Torah? Is God somehow “more than one like the Christians teach?!” Has Judaism been wrong about God all this time?! What does the Hebrew actually say? Does it really have these words showing up in the plural, or is this just a case of translation bias?

Okay, before we attempt to answer the question of who God was conversing with, strap yourselves in because it's time to get a little bit technical with some of the original languages first. The clause in question reads like this in the Masoretic Hebrew:

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים וַיַּעַשׂה אָדָם בְּצַלְמֵנוּ כְּדְמוּתֵנוּ

Using BibleHub.com's lexical tools, what the Hebrew here shows us is:

- Even though 'Elohim' אֱלֹהִים (God) can be understood at times to convey singular or multiple subjects, here it is indeed written as a noun in the masculine plural.
- The “and said” term ‘vayomer’ וַיֹּאמֶר is a consecutive imperfect 3rd person masculine singular verb, so with ‘Elohim’ אֱלֹהִים as the “he” subject in this phrase it should be understood as a singular also.
- However, the ‘na’aseh’ וַיַּעַשׂה verb “make” is written as an imperfect cohortative if contextual 1st person common plural, and thus it should rightly be translated into the plural.
- Likewise, the ‘b’tzalmeynu’ בְּצַלְמֵנוּ clause “in the image” is written using a masculine singular construct noun with a 1st person common plural suffix, facilitating a proper “our” or literally “of us” rendering.
- Lastly, the final ‘kid’muteynu’ כְּדְמוּתֵנוּ clause “in the likeness” shows up as a feminine singular construct noun written using a first person common plural suffix, viz, “our” or literally “of us.”

And just to be thorough in our investigation, why don't we take a peek at the Septuagint Greek translation (aka the LXX). After all, some might cry foul at the “Christian” translations suspecting a corrupted rendering based on supposed later Trinitarian doctrines. However, careful historians will recall that the LXX was a version of the Bible that was made available nearly 300 years before Jesus and the other “Christians” hit the scene in ancient Isra’el. Here is what it shows:

Καὶ εἶπεν ὁ θεός, ποιήσωμεν ἄνθρωπον κατ’ εἰκόνα ἡμετέραν καὶ καθ’ ὁμοίωσιν

Brenton's English translation from the Septuagint Greek reads like this:

And God said, “Let us make man according to our image and likeness...”

I don't have the time to break down all of the Greek for the video crowd; however for the paper readers I will supply the details exclusively for you all. Just like we did with the original Hebrew, but with some minor translational changes, and using BlueLetterBible.com's lexical tools instead this time, the Greek shows us:

- The noun ‘ho Theos’ ὁ θεός (literally “the GOD”) is a nominative singular masculine noun.

- The “said” term ‘eipen’ εἶπεν is an orist active indicative verb in the 3rd person singular, so ‘ho Theos’ ὁ θεός should without question be understood as a singular also.
- However, the “make” term ‘poiesomen’ ποιήσωμεν is an orist active subjunctive 1st person plural verb, and thus it should be translated into the plural.
- Likewise, the “according to the image” phrase ‘kat eikona’ κατ’ εἰκόνα is followed by an active accusative singular feminine adjective ‘hemeteran’ ἡμετέραν, who’s root word is a pronoun, facilitating an accurate “of us” rendering.
- And lastly, the “and according to” phrase ‘kai kath’ καὶ καθ’ is followed by a noun “likeness,” the term ‘homoiosin’ ὁμοίωσιν, in the accusative singular 3rd declension feminine, rendering what is normally be translated as a singular if one wanted (if my moderate level koine Greek is accurate here), which is probably why Brenton and other LXX translators do not normally render it as “and according to **OUR** likeness.”

And just for grins, why not take a peek at one of the ancient Aramaic periphrastic translations from the original Hebrew? For Genesis 1:26 and 27, the Targum of Jonathan Ben Uzziel/Palestinian (with the fragments of the Jerusalem Targum in brackets) reads this way:

PAL 26 And the Lord said to the angels who ministered before Him, who had been created in the second day of the creation of the world, Let us make man in Our image, in Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl which are in the atmosphere of heaven, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every reptile creeping upon the earth.

PAL 27 And the Lord created man in His likeness: [Jerusalem. And the Word of the Lord created man in His likeness, in the likeness of the presence of the Lord He created him, the male and his yoke-fellow He created them.] In the image of the Lord He created him, with two hundred and forty and eight members, with three hundred and sixty and five nerves, and over-laid them with skin, and filled it with flesh and blood. Male and female in their bodies He created them.

Wow! Firstly, did you see how the Jonathan Ben Uzziel/Palestinian Aramaic Targum supplied the standard Jewish understanding of God conversing with the angels in Genesis 1:26 just before creating man? Nothing surprising there given ancient (and modern) Isra’el’s nontrinitarian understanding of God. But even more shocking is did you notice the bracketed Jerusalem fragment reading?! Let me highlight just that part for you once again:

[Jerusalem. And the Word of the Lord created man in His likeness, in the likeness of the presence of the Lord He created him, the male and his yoke-fellow He created them.]

And just to be sure we are catching the weight of these historical documents, the Aramaic Targums were in circulation within the Jewish communities long before there were Christian churches and Trinity discussions going on between the Greek Patristic fathers! Sounds like our 1st century New Testament Jewish writer John wasn't too far off in his "Logos" theology after all! If you want more on my take on the "Word of the LORD" as it carries through from the Old Testament to the New Testament, see my short video series on that topic, viewable from my TetzeTorah.com website as well as my TetzeTorahMinistries YouTube channel.

Okay, so now that we have established what the original texts say in regards to Genesis 1:26, we can likewise, comfortably accept that nearly every single translation from the original languages is fairly accurate: "...let **US** make man in **OUR** image after **OUR** likeness."

"Possibilities... Possibilities..."

So, why am I making a follow up video in the first place? Well, in my first video I provided at least one possibility (emphasis on the word *POSSIBILITY*) out of many for why Moshe wrote plurals where we monotheistic followers of God would have expected singular wording. The possibility (emphasis on the word *POSSIBILITY* again) that I supplied in the video is that historic Judaism has decidedly rejected the notion of a tripersonal God and thus has decided that God must have been talking with the angels in this verse. I went on to quote one of Judaism's premier teachers of bygone eras nicknamed Rashi in my video to prove this very point, however, in all fairness to Rashi and Judaism, my research shows that they don't actually believe God to have expected the angels to actually carry out any creative actions. Remind yourself as a student of the Bible that angels CANNOT create something out of nothing the way God can. Thus, Rashi is careful to show that God only consults the angels, but then goes on in the very next verse to do the creating solely by himself. Judaism cites other places in the Old Testament where a heavenly council has occurred in support of their nontrinitarian view.

Is this a possible interpretation of the passage? Sure. But I don't think it is a strong probability. In fact, even if the angels are merely acting as "consultants," as I mentioned earlier, the text does NOT say that they do any co-creating, and thus, even if we give ancient and modern Judaism the benefit of the doubt, to have God consult with angels about he ALONE is about to create man does not contradict the theology of a tri-personal Sovereign Creator. Thus, I'm not really sure why so many Christians become "up in arms" when they learn that Judaism teaches that God consulted with the angels just before creating man. As I demonstrated in the previous video, Rashi goes on to teach that God alone does the creating.

So, within the overall context of my previous video, this possibility of God (the exclusive Creator) and the angels (his on-looking heavenly host) “chatting with one another about the various things that God is making during Creation Week” shouldn’t really fall into the category of heresy, right? Tim Hegg of TorahResource.com makes this brief note concerning our verse in question:

...the introduction of angels into the narrative at this point, while surely possible, seems unlikely. The most natural reading of the text is simply that G-d is represented in some form of plurality. That an early Sage such as R. Ammi (80-110 CE) would interpret this as meaning that G-d consulted with Himself may indicate that the later Sages, who sought to find another explanation, were motivated in some measure by the on-going polemic with the emerging Christian Church. Indeed, the early church fathers saw in this text a warrant for their view of the trinity.¹

So to find a simple Internet Bible teacher the likes of Torah Teacher Ariel suggesting that it is possible that the angels were consulted should not be too outrageous, right? To be sure, even the esteemed Messianic Jewish activist, apologist, and Bible teacher Dr. Michael Brown believes that this is simply one possibility out of many. In fact, why don’t we watch his take on this passage right now? Check out this 4-minute excerpt from a video of his on the Trinity in the Old Testament.

([LINK](#) to video, which starts at 5:43)

Other possibilities that have been offered by Bible students are that Moshe was indeed referring to the single Creator known as Elohim, yet simply writing in the “majestic plural,” (i.e., the “royal WE”) that is, a way of speaking of God in plural even though he is a singular entity. Others along this same line like to imagine that God was simply using the “plural of deliberation” the way a person might “think out loud to himself just before making a decision to do something, using a plural pronoun instead of a single one” etc.).

To support these views, many of those same Bible students remind us that the Hebrew word Elohim in this verse is actually plural and thus supposedly proves the point. While I admit that Elohim is indeed a plural word, I remind the careful Bible student that most of the time, this noun nevertheless is usually paired with singular verbs and is thus not to be understood as referring to “plural” beings.

My Understanding of this Passage

So, what exactly is MY personal interpretation of this passage? I believe—unashamedly—that the passage is an early revelation of the complex unity that our God exists as—and thus, Elohim is indeed conversing with the Eternal Word of God (sometimes given the title of the “Word of the LORD,” sometimes given the title of the “Angel of the LORD,” and sometimes simply as YHVH)! This explanation is sometimes referred to as the “plural of fullness.”

¹ Tim Hegg, *Studies in the Torah Vol 1-5: Genesis* (TorahResource, 2002), p. 5.

While I admit—as do other Bible students—that this Genesis verse is not a “slam dunk” for proof that the Bible teaches a Trinity, nevertheless, what we do observe when we take the progressive, revelatory nature of the scriptures in their entirety is a God that exists as a singular “WHAT,” yet at the same time he exists as three “WHOS.” And I can hear all of those “mysterian theologians” out there are jumping for joy right now, because they all admit that “Great is this mystery of godliness!” Paul even states this very truth in 1 Tim 3:16, **“Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He [Yeshua] was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.”** (Emphasis, mine)

Having just quoted Paul in 1 Timothy, this is a great place to pull a lengthy “incarnation” quote from one of my all-time favorite—and highly recommended—Torah teachers by the name of Tim Hegg. Concerning God becoming a man, here is what he says in his *Theology Proper*, seminary level handbook:

It is the attempt to unravel or in some way explain the mystery rather than accepting it as inexplicable that creates the problem. Whether one follows the philosophical school that redefines God into a philosophical category, or the Kabbalists who reason that the transcendent God (Ein Sof) cannot be known, the God of the Bible is lost. From the first pages of Genesis, throughout the Tanach, and culminating in the Apostolic Scriptures, the nearness of God within His creation is manifest. He meets with Adam and Chavah in Gan Eden; He spoke directly to Noach, and visits Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, communicating with them directly. He appeared to Moshe, Aaron, and the 70 elders at Sinai, and His visible presence went with the nation of Israel as they traversed the desert. Through the prophets, the God of Israel revealed Himself and His will to the people.

All of these appearances, visions, and revelations were portends—a foretaste of the promise given at the very beginning (Gen 3:15), that the seed of the woman would indeed come and that in His coming, the eternal, infinite and all-powerful God would dwell with mankind not as “other,” but as one with and within the created world. It is this incarnational principle—God dwelling with His people in the person of Immanuel—that is the greatest of mysteries (cf. 1Tim 3:16) and at the same time the greatest object of wonder and praise. But if we seek to unravel the mystery of the incarnation we will inevitably error, either by diminishing (in whatever way) the absolute infinite nature of God, or by viewing Him as so transcendent that He is unknowable—beyond the reach of human capacity to comprehend.²

Conclusions:

God the Father was speaking to God the Son when he said, “...let **US** make man in **OUR** image and in **OUR** likeness.” This is the only interpretation that captures the full weight of the **US** and the **OUR** language used in the original Hebrew, while at the same time, it is the only interpretation that is fully supported by the later Apostolic Scriptures

² Tim Hegg, *God’s Self-Revelation, A Course in Theology Proper* (TorahResource, 2012), p. 18-19.

where it is explicitly revealed that Yeshua—God the Son—the Third Person of the Trinity—is the Creator of all things. God may have been conversing with his heavenly host about what he ALONE was about to create, however he most definitely was NOT conversing with the angels about helping DO the actual creating since angels are most definitely NOT spoken of in the Bible as being made in the image of God. Nowhere in scripture are we told that angels are created in God's image, but scripture does, in point of fact, teach that man was (see Gen 5:1; Gen 9:6; 1 Cor 11:7; Jam 3:9). Singling out Genesis 1:27 along with 5:1 we read:

(1:27) So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

(5:1) This is the book of the generations of Adam. When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God.

In addition to these passages, Scripture implies in multiple ways that man is uniquely special to God in ways that angels are not. One of the most remarkable statements of that is Heb 2:16:

For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham.

Indeed, the whole of Hebrews Chapter Two is the author's exposition on the uniqueness of man as God's creation—and the need for the Father to send the Son in human form so that the Son could directly relate to and impact man's eternal redemption—couched within a sharp contrast to the nature of one of God's other creations, namely, angels.

We Trinitarian Christians know this Eternal Word by his human name: Yeshua the Messiah! Yes, I do in fact believe that Yeshua—the Word made flesh—is the Second Person of the triune God, the very creator (i.e., the “Agency of creation”) of all things in heaven and on earth.

To be absolutely sure, John tells us this very fact in John 1:1-3 and in 10:

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.

10 He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him.

Likewise, Paul agrees with John's statements by telling us so in 1 Corinthians 8:6:

...yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

And again, in Colossians 1:16:

For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.

And in another place we see the mystery of the Trinity revealed as we recall that John and Paul just identified Yeshua as the Creator, yet here in Hebrews (verse 10) the writer identifies God as the Creator:

9 But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. 10 For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering. (Heb 2:9, 10, ESV)

So, in this conclusion section, let me state it once more just in case anyone may have missed it earlier in this follow up video: God was NOT conversing with the angels when he said, “let **US** make man in **OUR** image and in **OUR** likeness.” Angels are not made in in God’s image, only man is. Angels do not possess creative powers, only God does. And the text is absolutely clear in other locations that God alone ended up as being credited with creating man—even if (and this is a very big IF) he did consult with the angels before he created man (which I don’t think he did).

Are we clear on my personal position? If you are still confused as to what I believe, please do put your comments or questions (or objections) into the space below the video. I would love to dialogue further on this topic.

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