
Getting to Know
**the God of
the Bible**





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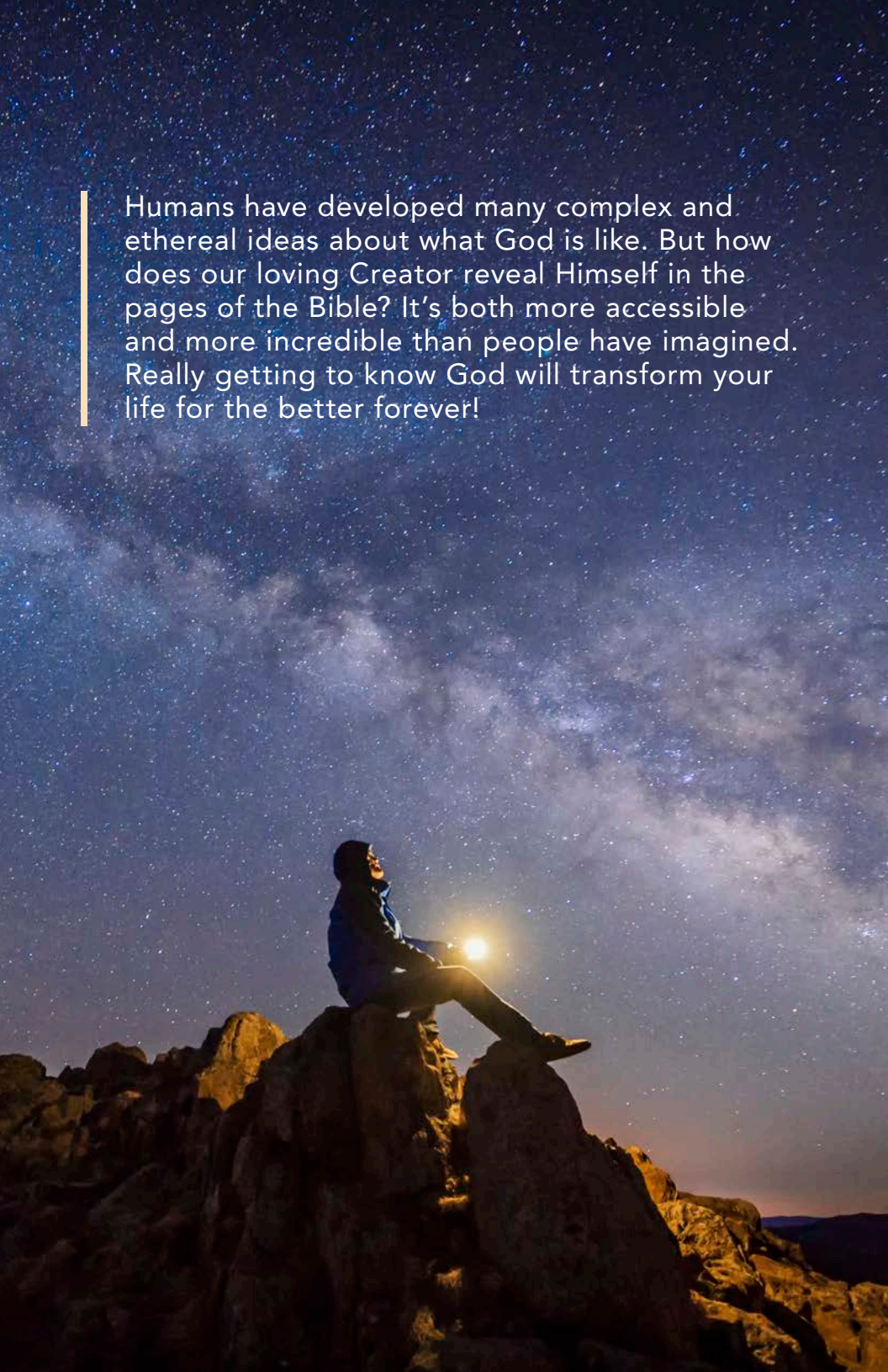
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A person is sitting on a large, dark rock formation at night. They are wearing a dark jacket and pants, and are looking up at the sky. A bright light source, possibly a flashlight or a small fire, is held in their hands, casting a warm glow. The background is a vast, dark night sky filled with stars and the Milky Way galaxy, which appears as a bright, hazy band of light stretching across the sky. The overall mood is contemplative and awe-inspiring.

Humans have developed many complex and ethereal ideas about what God is like. But how does our loving Creator reveal Himself in the pages of the Bible? It's both more accessible and more incredible than people have imagined. Really getting to know God will transform your life for the better forever!



Can we get to know God? Is He so far off, so mysterious, that we could never understand Him? Or does God want to have a close, personal relationship with us? Does He reveal Himself clearly in the Bible?

Our world is filled with myriad gods and ideas about God, most of which seem inconsistent or unintelligible.

One of the most common beliefs in Christianity today is the mystery of the Trinity—that there is one God who appears as three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Many have accepted this explanation of God as the defining doctrine of orthodoxy without studying its origin.

Strangely, the word *trinity* is not found in the Bible. When people raise questions about it, they are often told that humans can't fully understand God, that the doctrine is “a mystery beyond the comprehension of man,” and that they should simply accept this teaching on faith (James R. White, *The Forgotten Trinity*, 1998, p. 173).

But is this the way a loving God treats His creation? Does He keep us in the dark as to His nature and plans?

While there are some things that are indeed “secret” about God (Deuteronomy 29:29), Jesus said that He came to “reveal” the Father (Matthew 11:27; Luke 10:22). Jesus also told His disciples, “It has been given to you to know the *mysteries* of the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 13:11, emphasis added throughout).



This booklet will take you through a study of what the Bible, including the words of Jesus, reveals about God. As you go through this process, remember that the Bible is the only source of knowledge on this subject that is authenticated by God (John 17:17; 2 Timothy 3:16). As you will come to see, the Bible's teaching on God is quite different from the confusing, humanly devised teachings on this subject that exist today. See the sidebar: "The Bible: The Authoritative Source for Understanding God" (page 11) for additional explanation.

But what difference does it make?

What's so important about understanding who God is?

The book of Hebrews tells us that "without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6).

In other words, our faith rests on believing that God exists and that He has plans for those who eagerly strive to get to know Him. It is difficult to have this kind of faith without some type of understanding of who God is and how He plans to bless us.

Would you like to know how God describes His nature and His purpose for you?

If so, continue reading to begin a fascinating study that can help you better understand your Creator and why you exist.



Chapter 1

God in the Old Testament

Many scriptures throughout the Old Testament refer to God as a singular entity. In giving the 10 Commandments, God said, “You shall have no other gods before *Me*” (Exodus 20:3), and God’s faithful people understood Him to be God alone.

King David prayed to God: “For You are great, and do wondrous things; You *alone* are God” (Psalm 86:10). Similarly Isaiah wrote, “O LORD of hosts, God of Israel, the One who dwells between the cherubim, You are God, You *alone*, of all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth” (Isaiah 37:16; compare verse 20). The same prophet also referred to God as the “Mighty” or “Holy *One* of Israel” (Isaiah 30:29; 47:4; 54:5).

King David and Isaiah were adhering to what Moses had told the ancient Israelites. Moses said, “Therefore know this day, and consider it in your heart, that the LORD Himself is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; *there is no other*” (Deuteronomy 4:39).

The oneness of God is simply stated two chapters later in Deuteronomy 6:4, which says, “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is *one!*” Jews have given this passage special prominence in their morning and evening prayers, calling it *Shema Yisrael*—“Hear Israel.”

Jesus affirmed the importance of this passage saying, “The first of all the commandments is: ‘Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one’” (Mark 12:29). So the concept is indeed authentic. God is *one*.

But what does this mean? How is God *one*?

Jews have interpreted Deuteronomy 6:4 as meaning there is one being in the Godhead. Therefore, Judaism is described as a monotheistic religion—a religion that believes God is one in number and there are no other gods.

But what about other passages in the Old Testament that indicate that God is more than one being—that God is a plurality?

The plurality of God at the creation of the earth

The first time the word *God* is used in the Bible is in the first sentence of the very first book—the book of Genesis. The verse reads: “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth” (Genesis 1:1).

It is not surprising that the Bible, a book inspired by God, begins with a reference to action God took at the creation of the earth. What is surprising and missed by people reading this verse in a language other than Hebrew is that the word for God in this passage is *Elohim*, a Hebrew word with a plural ending.

Elohim is used for God over 2,300 times in the Old Testament, yet most English speakers don’t know it is plural. *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* defines this word: “pl. in number. a. Rulers, judges ... divine representatives ... b. divine ones, superhuman beings including God and angels.” Though plural in its ending, *Elohim* is usually used in a singular sense. The same lexicon describes this concept as “plural intensive—singular meaning.”

Yet had God intended for the writers of the Old Testament to identify Him as a singular being, He could have inspired them to use the singular form of this word—*Eloah*—instead of *Elohim*.

So, what we find in our first introduction to God in the book of origins is that *Elohim*—which is translated “God”—presents us with a challenge. How are we to understand God from both a plural and a singular perspective?

The plurality of God at the creation of man

The concept of God being a plurality is clearly found again in Genesis 1 with the creation of man. “Then God [*Elohim*] said, ‘Let *Us* make man in *Our* image, according to *Our* likeness’ (verse 26).

The Bible: The Authoritative Source for Understanding God

When searching for information on God, there are many sources. Opinions abound, but there is one source that stands head and shoulders above the rest. It is the book that is the foundation of Christianity.

When we consider the Bible, we find there is no other book like it. Written by approximately 40 different authors over about 1,500 years, it is consistent in thought, reflecting a single perspective—something that would have been impossible for humans of and by themselves to fulfill.

In advance, it accurately predicted major empires, the results of wars that were yet to come, spoke of specific captivities and their exact length for certain peoples, called people by name and said what they would do before they were even born, and gave scores of detailed prophecies about Jesus that were all fulfilled in exact detail.

Although people have doubted the Bible's authenticity, archaeological evidence continues to document the unerring accuracy of this amazing book as it was originally written. There simply is no other book with similar credentials. Fulfilled prophecy, archaeology and the blessings that come when we live by its instructions all verify that the Bible is indeed a supernatural work. Other writings have imitated the Bible and claimed to be additions to the Bible, but they simply don't have the credentials or standing of the Bible.

The Bible alone has the extensive markings of authenticity as the source we can trust for learning about God. When we accept this premise, we can then begin to understand who God is. Here are a few key reasons we should look to the Bible for the explanation of God:

- God inspired all that is in the Bible (2 Timothy 3:16).
- God cannot lie (Titus 1:2).
- Christ affirmed that God's Word (the Bible) is truth (John 17:17).
- The entirety of the Bible is true (Psalm 119:160).

For further study on the veracity of the Bible, see the articles in the "**Is the Bible True?**" section of our website.

In this passage we find *Elohim* using the plural pronouns “Us” and “Our.” Why was God using these plural pronouns? Was God talking to Himself or using the concept of “plural of majesty” as some have suggested—a manner of speaking wherein a singular ruler speaks in the plural, i.e. “We are ...”?

Commenting on “Let Us make” in Genesis 1:26, Albert Barnes states: “The plural form of the sentence raises the question, With whom took he counsel on this occasion? Was it with himself, and does he here simply use the plural of majesty? Such was not the usual style of monarchs in the ancient East.

“Pharaoh says, ‘I have dreamed a dream’ Genesis 41:15. Nebuchadnezzar, ‘I have dreamed’ Daniel 2:3. Darius the Mede, ‘I make a decree’ Daniel 6:26. ... We have no ground, therefore, for transferring it to the style of the heavenly King.

“Was it with certain other intelligent beings in existence before man that he took counsel? This supposition cannot be admitted; because the expression ‘let us make’ is an invitation to create, which is an incommunicable attribute of the Eternal One, and because the phrases, ‘our image, our likeness,’ when transferred into the third person of narrative, become ‘his image, the image of God,’ and thus limit the pronouns to God himself. ... Only a plurality of persons can justify the phrase” (*Notes on the Bible*, Genesis 1:26-27).

To be honest with the text, we should also note the ease with which the presentation switches from the use of plural pronouns in Genesis 1:26 to the use of a singular pronoun in the verse that follows. “So God [*Elohim*] created man in *His* own image” (verse 27). Here we have an example of the singular pronoun *His* used in connection with the plural intensive word *Elohim*.

So how are we to make sense of this switching between plural and singular pronouns? Is God a plural or a singular being? The Bible answers this question, but in a way different from what most people have been taught. First, let’s note a few more examples of the plurality of God recorded for us in the Old Testament.

The plurality of God in the Garden of Eden

In Genesis 3 we read of Adam and Eve’s tragic decision to disobey God’s command not to eat the fruit of a particular tree in the Garden in Eden. We’ll come back to the ramifications of this decision, but for now let’s simply note the consequence of their choice.

“Then the LORD God said, ‘Behold, the man has become like one of *Us*, to know good and evil. And now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life,

and eat, and live forever’—therefore the LORD God sent him out of the garden of Eden to till the ground from which he was taken” (verses 22-23). Here we again find the use of the plural pronoun *Us* in connection with God (*Elohim*).

And in the following verse we again see a switch back to a singular pronoun. “So *He* drove out the man; and *He* placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life” (verse 24).

The plurality of God in a messianic psalm

The Old Testament includes a number of prophecies regarding the coming of Jesus, the promised Messiah. One of these prophecies is found in Psalm 45:6-7, which reads, “Your throne, O God [*Elohim*], is forever and ever; a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom. You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore God [*Elohim*], your God [*Elohim*], has anointed You with the oil of gladness more than Your companions.”

Here we clearly find two distinct beings both referred to as *Elohim*. The fact that this passage was indeed a prophecy of Jesus is confirmed in Hebrews 1:8-9, which connects it with Jesus, the Son of God.

King David acknowledges the plurality of God

Similar to the preceding psalm, another psalm likewise indicates two beings in the Godhead. King David wrote: “The LORD [*YHWH*] said to my Lord [*Adon*], ‘Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool’” (Psalm 110:1).

Here we are introduced to two more names of God. The first, *YHWH*, *Yahweh* or *Jehovah*, “is [according to Jews] the incommunicable name of God. It is never given to a created being. The other word translated ‘Lord’ ... *Adonay*—means one who has rule or authority; one of high rank; one who has dominion” (*Barnes’ Notes on the Bible*, Psalm 110:1). Since “my Lord” refers to someone of higher rank than King David, it seems obvious that this was a reference to the coming Messiah.

Judaism denies or ignores this explanation of Psalm 110:1. One rabbi says that *Adon* must be a reference to another human and that this was likely King David writing a psalm to be sung about himself after he had died (outreachjudaism.org). But this explanation doesn’t harmonize with King David’s statement that this “Lord [*Adon*]” was to sit at God’s right hand (verse 1) and that He was “a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek” (verse 4). King David died and is no longer alive.

Interestingly, Psalm 110:1 is one of the Old Testament verses most often quoted in the New Testament. In addressing the Pharisees, Jesus used this passage in reference to Himself saying, “‘What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He?’ They said to Him, ‘The Son of David.’ He said to them, ... ‘If David then calls Him “Lord,” how is He his Son?’” (Matthew 22:42-45). Peter referred to this same psalm in connection with Christ on the Day of Pentecost after Christ’s death and resurrection (Acts 2:34-36).

When we couple the New Testament scriptures referencing Psalm 110 with this Old Testament passage, we understand that the One who would come as the descendant of David already existed as David’s Lord and was subject to God the Father. Jesus was indeed Lord and Christ—God and the anointed One.

Indications of the plurality of God in the book of Daniel

The book of Daniel is, without doubt, one of the most prophetic books of the Old Testament. With its symbolic beasts, style of writing and extensive mention of angels, it foreshadows and complements the New Testament book of Revelation.

Daniel 7 records one of Daniel’s prophetic dreams that details a series of major empires that would exist until “the Ancient of Days [God the Father]” was seated (verse 9). Daniel’s vision of the Father seated on His throne with thousands of angels ministering to Him as He rules over His creation (verse 10) is similar to the vision John saw and recorded in Revelation chapters 4 and 5.

Then Daniel comes to the time the beasts—which represented human kingdoms—“had their dominion taken away” because “One like the Son of Man” was “coming with the clouds of heaven” (Daniel 7:12-13).

Daniel then explains that the “One like the Son of Man ... came to the Ancient of Days” and that He—the One like the Son of Man—was then “given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed” (verses 13-14).

This “One like the Son of Man” is clearly Jesus Christ returning from heaven to rule the earth. Commenting on the significance of this name, Albert Barnes states: “The phrase ‘The Son of Man’ ... does not occur elsewhere in the Old Testament in such a connection, and with such a reference as it has here, though it is often found in the New, and is, in fact, the favorite term by which the Saviour designates himself” (*Notes on the Bible*, Daniel 7:13).

(Note that in the book of Ezekiel the phrase *son of man* occurs more than 90 times in reference to Ezekiel. But the phrase *Son of Man* in Daniel 7:13 is clearly a reference to the Messiah.)

It is also interesting to notice in Daniel 3:25 the phrase the *Son of God* is also found as the description of the being who appeared with Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego in Nebuchadnezzar's fiery furnace.

Since we have now seen multiple references to the plurality of God in the Old Testament, let's revisit the concept of how God is one.

The oneness of God

As we previously saw, Deuteronomy 6:4 says, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!" We noted that the Jews have understood this to mean that God is one being. Let's now examine the oneness of God in greater detail.

As we consider this, we should recognize that in the New Testament Paul also wrote that there is one God. Writing to the church at Corinth, Paul said, "There is no other God but one" (1 Corinthians 8:4), and to Timothy, he wrote, "For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5).

What Paul was relaying was precisely what Jesus had likewise said. John records Jesus saying, "I and My Father are *one*" (John 10:30). So both the Old Testament and the New Testament concur that God is one.

But what does the Bible mean when it says that God is one? Not understanding how the word *one* is used in the Bible has led to much confusion. Since we have already seen that the Bible speaks of the plurality of God, we need to find a biblical explanation of the oneness of God that harmonizes with the plurality of God.

The Hebrew word for "one" in Deuteronomy 6:4 (and in over 800 other places in the Old Testament) is *echad*, which has a variety of meanings. Definitions in addition to the number one include "one and the same," "as one man, together," "each, every," "one after another" and "first [in sequence or importance]" (*Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 1951, p. 25). It is translated "alone" in the New Revised Standard Version's translation of Deuteronomy 6:4: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD *alone*." Similarly, the Moffatt translation puts it: "Listen, Israel: the Eternal, the Eternal alone, is our God."

New Testament Use of "One" to Mean a Unified Group

The New Testament uses the same sense of *one*, meaning unity, as the Old Testament does. These references in the New Testament often refer to the Church and to God.

Writing to Church members in Galatia, Paul said, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all *one* in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28). Even though composed of many individuals, the Church is one in Christ Jesus. Members gather as one body—the Body of Christ—to observe the Passover, the weekly Sabbath and the other festivals of God.

Writing to members in the city of Corinth, Paul said, "For as the body is *one* and has many members, but all the members of that *one* body, being many, are *one* body, so also is Christ. ... For in fact the body is not *one* member but many" (1 Corinthians 12:12, 14). Paul goes on to explain that while members of the Church are individuals with differing gifts, they are one in similar fashion to a human body having many members that are all part of the same human body (verses 12-27).

The Godhead is similar in that there is only one God, with two spirit members currently in this unit. Though two beings, They are unified in thought and approach. This is what Christ meant when He said, "I and My Father are one" (John 10:30).

The unity that Jesus and the Father have is the same type of unity Jesus desires for those who become members of His Church. Just hours before His crucifixion, Jesus prayed to the Father for those who would be called through His disciples. Specifically, Jesus prayed "that they all may be *one*, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be *one* in Us, that the world may believe that you sent Me" (John 17:21).

This profound verse teaches us that just as the Church is a single unit made up of individuals, so is God. The Bible shows that God is a single unit currently comprised of two spirit beings.

When there are multiple meanings for a word, we must consider context and harmony with other scriptures to determine how the word should be understood. The setting of Deuteronomy 6:4 is in a section of Scripture in which Moses explained the importance of faithfully following God and avoiding the worship of the gods of surrounding nations. Note also the verse that follows Deuteronomy 6:4: “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength” (verse 5).

Based upon the context, it seems most likely that Moses was telling the Israelites that God was their God, that He was to be their highest priority, and that He alone was God (i.e., there are no other gods).

If we want to consider *echad* from the perspective of how many beings are in the Godhead, something that does not seem to be the context of Deuteronomy 6:4, we need to broaden our perspective to see how the Bible explains oneness in addition to the number one.

In Genesis 2:24 we find God speaking of marriage saying, “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one [*echad*] flesh.” Here, two humans are united as one family unit. And in procreation a male and a female—two beings—are joined together as one to produce a new life.

Similar usage of *echad* to mean the unity of more than one person is found in several additional Old Testament scriptures. At the Tower of Babel God observed that “the people are one [*echad*],” meaning they were united in their plan (Genesis 11:6).

In Exodus 24:3 we find the Israelites responding to Moses “with one [*echad*] voice.” During the time of the judges, the people of Israel gathered together “as one [*echad*] man” in their actions against the tribe of Benjamin (Judges 20:1, 8, 11), and later during a time of reform under Nehemiah, “all the people gathered together as one [*echad*] man in the open square” (Nehemiah 8:1).

Since multiple scriptures in the Old Testament show the plurality of God, the way to remain biblically consistent with these passages is to understand *echad* in relation to the Godhead as meaning that God is first in importance, the only true God, and a unified family.

The word *family* is a collective noun. There may be multiple members of a human family—father, mother and children—but the family is one family.

Family members may say, “*We* are going to do something,” but when we refer to this family, we say, “This family *is* [not *are*] going to do something.”

As we will see, the Bible talks about God’s family. It makes sense for members within this group to use plural pronouns when communicating with each other. It also makes sense to speak of this group in a singular sense, as a single group.

Before concluding this section, we should also realize that if Moses had wanted to convey a numerical count regarding God in Deuteronomy 6:4, he could have used the Hebrew word *yachid*, which means “only, only one, solitary, one” (*Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*). This word is translated “your only son” in Genesis 22:2, 12, 16.

Thus far, we have seen that the Old Testament speaks of the plurality and oneness of God. Let’s now turn to the New Testament for further clarification regarding the members within the Godhead.

For additional explanation of this subject, see our LifeHopeandTruth.com article “[God Is One](#).”

Chapter 2

What Jesus and the New Testament Reveal About God



Jesus said that He came to reveal the Father (Matthew 11:27; Luke 10:22). Jesus did this by teaching His disciples and by simply interacting with them on a human level. Because He was so much like the Father, Jesus said, “He who has seen Me has seen the Father” (John 14:9).

John, one of the disciples who was especially close to Jesus, learned much about God through his personal experience with Christ. In the books bearing his name he conveys information about God not found in the Old Testament.

John begins his Gospel account: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made” (John 1:1-3).

A few verses later, John adds: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the *Father*, full of grace and truth. ... No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten *Son*, who is in the bosom of the *Father*, He has declared Him” (verses 14, 18).

In these verses John reveals several important concepts about God that were not as fully explained in the Old Testament.

- **The Word (who became flesh) existed from the beginning with God.** These were two distinct beings, as the phrase *with God* indicates. As the late British theologian F.F. Bruce comments on the opening passages of the Gospel of John: “The Personal Word is *uncreated*, not only enjoying the divine companionship, but sharing the divine essence” (*The Message of the New Testament*, 1972, p. 105). Thus, both God and the Word are God, and both have eternally existed.
- **The Word (who became Jesus) was the member of the Godhead through whom God did the creating.** While the Old Testament taught that God created the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:1), John and other New Testament writers explain that Jesus was the member of the Godhead who did this under the direction of the Father (Colossians 1:16).
- **John speaks of the “Father” and the “Son” as the spirit beings currently in the Godhead.** John uses these familial terms in John 1:14, 18, 34, and no doubt learned this from Jesus. Christ taught His disciples to pray to the Father (Matthew 6:9) and that He was the Son of God (Luke 22:70). These familial terms—*Father* and *Son*—harmonize with the amazing revelation in Ephesians 3:15 that God has a “*family* in heaven and earth.”

Let’s now consider what the Bible further reveals about the roles of God the Father and the Word, who became Jesus, the Son of God.

God the Father

God the Father is the eternally existing, supreme spirit being in the Godhead, who has great love, intelligence, knowledge, wisdom, justice, power and authority. Jesus clearly stated, “My Father is greater than I” (John 14:28), and Paul confirmed that there is “one God and Father of all, *who is above all*” (Ephesians 4:6).

These passages and others, such as John 20:17 and Romans 15:6, show that the Father and the Word are *not* the same being simply appearing as different persons. They can’t be the same being if one is greater than the other or interacts with the other. They are distinct beings, each having a distinct role in the Godhead.

The Father created all things that exist through the Word (who became Jesus Christ). Because the Father authorized and took a special interest in the creation of mankind, God the Father is truly the Father of mankind—the One responsible for our existence. Based on the Old Testament, the Jews during

the first century knew God was their spiritual Father (Malachi 2:10; John 8:41), though they didn't really know Him.

God the Father's designation *Father* came to be more fully understood after He caused Mary to be impregnated with Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit and after His purpose for mankind was revealed. Luke 1:35 explains how Mary came to be pregnant and that she was told "that the Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God." God the Father was in this sense the Father of Jesus, and Jesus referred to Him as "Father" throughout His earthly existence.

While God the Father cares deeply about His creation, the Old Testament doesn't reveal much information about the Father. This is why it was necessary for Jesus to "reveal" the Father (Matthew 11:27; Luke 10:22). Jesus further explained, "No one has seen God [the Father] at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him" (John 1:18).

God the Father's desire is for humans to come to know Him, respect Him, obey Him and come to Him through His Son, Jesus (John 14:6). Speaking of the Word, who became Jesus, John explains, "But as many as received Him [Jesus] to them He gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:12).

While we come to the Father through Jesus, we should also note the Father's personal interaction with mankind. The book of Hebrews explains: "God [the Father], who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in the last days spoken to us by His Son" (Hebrews 1:1-2). The Father was also the being who sent His Son into the world "that the world through Him might be saved" (John 3:17, compare John 20:21).

In the process of becoming children of God, Jesus explained that humans need a special calling from the Father in order to understand and respond. Describing this profound truth, Jesus said, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:44, compare verse 65).

God the Father, who knows when a sparrow falls to the ground and who loves humans deeply (Matthew 10:29-31), determines when to call people.

In teaching us how to respond to God, Jesus instructed us to pray to the Father (Matthew 6:9). And there is no doubt that God hears and is touched by our prayers, for they are described as incense—a sweet-smelling aroma—to Him (1 Peter 3:12; James 5:16; Revelation 5:8).

Prior to leaving earth after His crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus also told His disciples about two other significant roles of the Father. First, He spoke of the Holy Spirit, for which they were to wait in Jerusalem, as “the Promise of the Father, ‘which,’ He said, ‘you have heard from Me’” (Acts 1:4). Then Jesus said that God the Father would determine when future prophetic events would be fulfilled (verses 6-7). Earlier Jesus had explained that the Father was the One who knew or would determine the precise time of His second coming to earth (Matthew 24:36).

The actions we have just considered show God the Father to be intimately involved with His creation and the head of the family of God (Ephesians 3:14-15). These actions are indeed fatherly. We will consider more fully the meaning of God being a family in the concluding chapter of this booklet.

Jesus as God

Various ideas about Jesus have been proposed. Some think He was a created being—a great rabbi or a prophet or an angel. Some think Jesus was simply one of three ways the singular God has appeared to mankind. But, as we have already seen, what many people think is not always what the Bible teaches.

So what does the Bible say about Jesus?

Earlier we saw that Jesus said He came to reveal the Father (Matthew 11:27) and that John 1 explains that the Word (the One who became Jesus) eternally existed with the Father and created the universe under the jurisdiction of the Father.

Let’s now expand on these concepts and focus on a few more to see a bigger picture as to who Jesus is.

Jesus was God in the flesh

This is one of the most important points for us to comprehend. Stating this truth almost got Jesus killed on at least two occasions before His crucifixion because the Jewish leaders of His day didn’t believe a human could be God. Notice how John records these incidents.

On one occasion while Jesus was in the temple, the Pharisees accused Him of not telling the truth regarding His identity (John 8:13). Even though He often referred to God the Father as His Father, the Jews “did not understand that He spoke to them of [God] the Father” (verse 27). They then accused Jesus of being born of fornication—mistakenly assuming that Jesus had a human father—and claimed that God was their spiritual Father (verse 41).

Names of God

Throughout the Bible, there are many names for God. *Elohim* is the first Hebrew word used for God (Genesis 1:1) and is found over 2,600 times in the Old Testament. The name *El* is also used in the Old Testament and is found in compound words such as *El Shaddai*—God Almighty or Almighty God (Genesis 17:1).

The four Hebrew letters *YHWH* are another name for God used extensively in the Old Testament. Since the vowels were not included with this word, no one knows with certainty how it should be pronounced.

Jews choose not to pronounce *YHWH* at all, believing that it is holy and should not be spoken. "It was thus replaced vocally in the synagogue ritual by the Hebrew word *Adonai* ('My Lord'), which was translated as *Kyrios* ('Lord') in the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Hebrew Scriptures" (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, "Yahweh").

When Jesus instructed His disciples to pray to "our Father in heaven," the Greek word for "Father" is *Pater* (Matthew 6:9). In Matthew 22:44 the Greek word *Kyrios* is used for "LORD." And when Christ prayed to His Father in the Aramaic language just before His death, He referred to His Father as *Eli* (Matthew 27:46) or *Eloi* (Mark 15:34).

Other names for God include "the LORD, whose name is Jealous" (Exodus 34:14) and "the LORD, whose name is the God of hosts" (Amos 5:27).

These passages show that there is no single name for God and that there is no single name for the One to whom we should pray. God hears prayers offered in all languages, and the names of God simply give us greater understanding of His character. For further study regarding God's names, see "**Names of God**" and "**Sacred Name: Does God Have Only One?**"

Jesus then told them plainly, “I proceeded forth and came from God” (verse 42). They still didn’t believe Him, and the heated conversation concluded in an astounding manner.

Jesus said, “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad.’ Then the Jews said to Him, ‘You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?’ Jesus said to them, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.’ Then they took up stones to throw at Him; but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by” (verses 56-59).

The Jews were incensed that Jesus claimed to be “I AM WHO I AM,” “the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob,” as this was the God who revealed Himself to Moses in the burning bush and who worked through Moses to bring the Israelites out of bondage in Egypt (Exodus 3:1-15). (Below in the section titled “Christ’s role in the Old Testament,” we’ll explore the Word’s previous interactions with God’s people.)

Later, the Jews again surrounded Jesus while He was in the temple and demanded to know His identity. “How long do You keep us in doubt? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly,” they said (John 10:24).

Jesus then told them that the works He did in His Father’s name were proof of who He was (verse 25) and that He and His Father were one (verse 30).

“Then the Jews took up stones again to stone Him” (verse 31). They told Jesus they were going to stone Him “because You, being a Man, make Yourself God” (verse 33). Jesus then referenced Psalm 82:6, which says, “You are gods [*Elohim*], and all of you are children of the Most High.”

Jesus cited this psalm to show them that since *elohim* was sometimes used in the Old Testament to apply to human rulers, the Jews’ own law permitted humans to be called gods. Jesus, of course, was truly God, and the angry religious leaders weren’t dissuaded. “Therefore they sought again to seize Him, but He escaped out of their hand” (John 10:39).

Even though several Old Testament passages show or imply the plurality of God, the Jewish leaders of the first century didn’t believe that a human could be God. Given that this is such an amazing truth, let’s see how this came about.

Paul wrote that Jesus “who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in

human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:6-8, English Standard Version).

Instead of holding on to all of His godly prerogatives, including His spiritual state, Jesus willingly gave these up to become human. The marginal note for verse 7 in the New King James Version says that Jesus “emptied Himself of His privileges.”

Though Jesus still remembered events that had transpired before He became human (Luke 10:18; John 8:58; 17:5), He became fully human and fully experienced human trials and difficulties. As the Bible in Basic English puts it, “For we have not a high priest who is not able to be touched by the feelings of our feeble flesh; but we have one who has been tested in all points as we ourselves are tested, but without sin” (Hebrews 4:15).

During their 3½ years of training under Jesus, the disciples came to understand that their Master was indeed God in the flesh. They came to believe that the prophecy stating that Jesus would be called “Immanuel” (meaning “God with us”) had come true (Matthew 1:23).

On one occasion Jesus came walking on water on a windy, stormy night to a boat carrying His disciples. Peter got out of the boat and took a few steps on the water before he became afraid because of the storm. Peter began to sink, but Jesus caught him. “And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. Then those who were in the boat came and worshiped Him, saying, ‘Truly You are the Son of God’” (Matthew 14:32-33).

On another occasion Jesus asked His disciples who they thought He was. “Simon Peter answered and said, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God’” (Matthew 16:16). Even Thomas, the disciple who said he would not believe Christ had been resurrected until he saw and handled Jesus himself, upon seeing the resurrected Christ exclaimed, “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28).

Later Paul would call Christ “the eternally blessed God” (Romans 9:5) and refer to Jesus as “our great God and Savior” (Titus 2:13). Some may wonder if “great God” in this passage is referring to the Father, but the context shows that it is referring to the One who will appear—Jesus (verses 11-14).

Peter wrote to “those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:1). Similarly, the author of the book of Hebrews says the Son is God (Hebrews 1:8).

Toward the end of the first century a heretical belief called gnosticism arose. One variation of this teaching known as docetism asserted that matter was evil and therefore Jesus could not have been composed of matter and must have been a spirit and not really a flesh-and-blood human being. John forcefully condemned this mistaken belief.

Confirming Jesus' full humanity, John wrote: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life—the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us—that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:1-3).

John was explaining that he and the other apostles had touched Jesus and interacted with Him on a physical level as humans do with each other. "That eternal life which was with the Father" was Christ. They realized that Jesus had eternal life with the Father, but gave that up to live on earth as a human. It was awe-inspiring for them to realize they had come in contact with part of the divine Godhead.

Putting these scriptures together, the obvious conclusion is that Jesus was indeed God in the flesh.

Jesus was a separate being, distinct from the Father

Some theories about the Godhead mistakenly teach that God the Father and Jesus are the same being. The faulty assumption is that God is a single being who functions at times as the Father and at other times as the Son. (The Trinity also teaches that the Holy Spirit is another way that God appears.) This teaching has been compared to a single actor putting on different masks to play different characters.

If we only look at passages in the Bible that show how closely related the Father and Son are in Their character, Their love of mankind and Their desire to give humans eternal life, it might seem plausible that God is only one being. After all, several scriptures tell us how united the Father and Son truly are.

The book of Hebrews says that Jesus was "the brightness of His [God's] glory and the express image of His person" (Hebrews 1:3). The Greek word that is translated *express image* "occurs nowhere else in the New Testament. It is that from which our word 'character' is derived. It properly means a [sic] 'engrav-

The Order of Melchizedek

The book of Hebrews tells us that Jesus has become "High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek" (Hebrews 6:20; compare 5:6). Many have wondered who Melchizedek was and why Jesus is connected with this person.

The first mention of Melchizedek is in Genesis 14:18-20. Abraham, having returned with spoils of battle, gave a tenth of the goods to Melchizedek, who was "king of Salem" and "the priest of God Most High."

Hebrews 7 gives us more information about Melchizedek, saying he was "without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, remains a priest continually" (verse 3).

The name *Melchizedek* means "king of righteousness" and *Salem* means "peace." These are titles for Christ, not a normal human. Hebrews 7 says this Melchizedek was an eternal being.

So who was Melchizedek? He was the member of the Godhead in the Old Testament who later became Jesus. He was Mediator for mankind as High Priest during the time of Abraham and continues as our Mediator today.

Melchizedek was functioning here as the priest of the Most High God. This example is another indication of the plurality of God. For further study, see our online article "[Who Was Melchizedek?](#)"

ing-tool;’ and then something ‘engraved’ or ‘stamped’—‘a character’—as a letter, mark, sign.

“The image stamped on coins, seals, wax, expresses the idea: and the sense here is, that if God be represented under the idea of a substance, or being, then Christ is the exact resemblance of that—as an image is of the stamp or die. The resemblance between a stamp and the figure which is impressed is exact; and so is the resemblance between the Redeemer and God” (*Barnes’ Notes on the Bible*).

Paul wrote similarly of Jesus, saying, “He is the image of the invisible God” (Colossians 1:15; compare 2 Corinthians 4:4). “The meaning here is, that the being and perfections of God are accurately and fully represented by Christ” (*Barnes’ Notes on the Bible*).

In John 14:9-10 Jesus told His disciples: “He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me?”

These passages reveal that Christ has the same character as the Father. But if God were only one being, why would the Bible speak of two? If God were only one being, couldn't He have just told us what He did without making Himself look like two beings?

When we look at additional scriptures about Christ, we find that He and the Father had different, but complementary roles, indicating two beings working together in harmony to fulfill an agreed-upon plan.

For example, the text preceding that which states Jesus was “the express image” of God says, “God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds” (Hebrews 1:1-2).

And after Jesus told His disciples, “He who has seen Me has seen the Father,” He added, “The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works” (John 14:9-10).

The implication of these verses is that the Son is different from God the Father—a different being who did different things. A careful study shows there are many distinctions between God the Father and the Son.

These distinctions include the fact that the Son is the member of the Godhead who humbled Himself to become a human and die for mankind's sins (Philippians 2:6-7). The Son was dead and in the grave for three days and three nights (Matthew 12:40). The Son has been given the responsibility for judging mankind (John 5:22, 27). Jesus is the being who serves as our High Priest (Hebrews 3:1).

We should also note that Jesus prayed to the Father, saying, “O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will” (Matthew 26:39). This clearly shows one intelligent being—Jesus—willingly submitting Himself to another intelligent being—the Father. Jesus was not praying to Himself but to another being. If the Father and Jesus were the same being, why should Jesus pray at all?

Christ shares the same eternal existence as God the Father, but the Bible also states that the Father has the greater authority (1 Corinthians 15:27-28;

11:3). Again, in John 14:28 Jesus confirmed that God the Father is clearly the “greater” of the two.

The list of distinctions between God the Father and the Son could go on much longer, but these can suffice to make the point. Would God—who cannot lie (Titus 1:2)—go to such lengths to make it look like there are two beings in the Godhead if there were only one? What would be the purpose for God’s creating such a scenario?

The Bible does describe Jesus as having the same divine character as the Father and as being in complete agreement with Him to give people eternal life if they accept and do “the will” of the Father (Matthew 7:21). But it also shows us that Jesus was a different being, having His own will. He was clearly separate from the Father.

The Word was not a created being

Some mistakenly teach that Jesus was a created being—that God the Father created Him at some time in the past, prior to His coming to earth as a human. This misconception springs from several misunderstood passages.

Some have thought that Jesus was a super angel prior to His birth as a human—the “Angel of the Lord”—in the Old Testament. Passages often cited include Judges 6:11-16 and Genesis 16:7-13. The Hebrew word for “angel” in these passages is *malak*, which means “messenger, representative ... angel” (*Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*).

In these passages the One who became Jesus was the messenger or representative of God. *Malak* is translated “Messenger” in the second sentence of Malachi 3:1 because it is obviously referring to Christ, who was “the Messenger of the covenant.” The correct translation of *malak* in reference to the Word—the One who became Jesus—in the Old Testament should be messenger or representative of God, not angel.

In John 1:14 we read that the Word, Jesus Christ, “became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father.” The Greek word that is translated “only begotten” in this verse is *monogenees*. This word is not saying that God the Father begot the Word in the sense of bringing Him into existence.

As Greek scholar Spiros Zodhiates explains: “The word *monogenees* actually is a compound of the word *monos*, ‘alone,’ and the word *genos*, ‘race, stock, family.’ Here we are told that He who came to reveal God—Jesus Christ—is of the

same family, of the same stock, of the same race as God. ... There is ample evidence in the Scriptures that the Godhead is a family” (Spiros Zodhiates, *Was Christ God?* 1966, p. 21).

What John 1:14 is telling us is that the Word was part of the same family as God the Father.

Another passage often misunderstood is found in Revelation 3:14. Here Jesus is said to be the “beginning” (*arche*) of God’s creation. In addition to “beginning,” this word can mean “the person or thing that commences, ... that by which anything begins to be” (*Thayer’s Greek Definitions*). It is translated as “originator” in the International Standard Version.

The Word, who became Jesus, was the originator of God’s creation. The Word was the being who was responsible for bringing the creation into existence. This meaning is confirmed in Ephesians 3:9, which says God “created all things through Jesus Christ.” If Jesus had been created by the Father, then Jesus would not have created *all* things.

Another confusing passage for some is found in Paul’s description of Jesus as “the firstborn over all creation” and “the firstborn from the dead” (Colossians 1:15, 18). Paul was referring to the Son’s position of preeminence similar to that held by a firstborn son. Christ was also the first to be “born” from the dead by a resurrection to spirit life.

As Albert Barnes explains, “The first-born, or the oldest son, among the Hebrews as elsewhere, had special privileges. He was entitled to a double portion of the inheritance. ... There can be no doubt that the apostle here has reference to the usual distinctions and honors conferred on the first-born, and means to say that, among all the creatures of God, Christ occupied a pre-eminence similar to that.

“He does not say that, in all respects, he resembled the first-born in a family; nor does he say that he himself was a creature, for the point of his comparison does not turn on these things, and what he proceeds to affirm respecting him is inconsistent with the idea of his being a created being himself. He that ‘created all things that are in heaven and that are in earth,’ was not himself created” (*Notes on the Bible*).

As for being the “firstborn from the dead,” Jesus was the first person to be resurrected to immortality from the grave (compare 1 Corinthians 15:20). Since others, including Lazarus (John 12:1), had previously been resurrected back

to physical life, the meaning again has to do with Jesus' having honor and preeminence. As the last part of Colossians 1:18 states: "That in all things He [Jesus] may have the preeminence."

The fact that the Word has always existed is confirmed in several easily understood passages. We have already looked at John's teaching that the Word "was in the beginning with God" (John 1:2).

In addition to John's explanation, the book of Hebrews speaks of Jesus being a priest forever "according to the order of Melchizedek" (Hebrews 7:17, 21). The Word was this Melchizedek of the Old Testament and is described as being "without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God" (verse 3). For further explanation, see the sidebar "The Order of Melchizedek" (page 28).

There are no scriptures that speak of Christ being created, and there are scriptures that say Jesus was God. Additionally, Hebrews 13:8 says, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever," and John 1:1-3 says that Christ created all things and that nothing was created without Him. Colossians 2:9 adds that "in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily."

It is hard for us humans to comprehend eternity, but the Word (who became Jesus) and God the Father have always existed. The Word was not a created being. For further study, see the article "[Was Jesus Created?](#)"

Christ's role in the Old Testament

While many understand Christ's compassion for people in the New Testament, few understand that He had similar empathy and care for people in the Old Testament. Several passages in the New Testament add to our understanding that the Word, who became Jesus, was the member of the Godhead who, in general, interacted with people in the Old Testament.

John the Baptist, whose preaching announced the coming of the Messiah, obviously knew of the Word's preexistence when he identified Jesus as "the Lamb of God" who was "before me" (John 1:29-30).

Even though John the Baptist was born approximately six months before Jesus (Luke 1:36), John the Baptist said that Jesus existed before he did. As for what the Word did in the Old Testament, we have already noted one insightful incident when Jesus said, "Before Abraham was, I AM" (John 8:58).

In this short statement Jesus affirmed His preexistence in the Old Testament as the member of the Godhead who had existed prior to Abraham and who

had appeared to Moses in a burning bush and worked through this patriarch to bring the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt (Exodus 3:13-17).

Interestingly, the word *LORD* (with capital letters) in Exodus 3:15 is another name for God. This word has been used to translate the Hebrew consonants Y-H-W-H—a string of four letters that is called the tetragrammaton. Although the pronunciation of *YHWH* is uncertain, today most say *Jehovah*, *Yahweh* or *Yahveh*. Both *YHWH* and “I AM” imply eternal existence—the very point about Himself that Jesus was conveying in John 8:58.

As the Israelites traveled out of Egypt, Exodus 13:21 explains that “the *LORD* went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light.” Commenting on this passage, the *Expositor’s Commentary* (Frank E. Gaebelien, editor), states: “The pillar of the cloud and the fire was but another name for ‘the angel of God,’ for Exodus 14:19 equates the two as does 23:20-23 ... the Christ of the NT is the shekinah glory or Yahweh of the OT.”

On several other occasions, Jesus explained that no one had seen the Father or heard His voice. John speaks of this point in four passages (John 1:18; 5:37; 6:46; 1 John 4:12). Yet several patriarchs and leaders in the Old Testament are recorded as having seen God. These people include Abraham (Genesis 18:1), Jacob (Genesis 32:30) and the 70 elders of Israel along with Moses, Aaron, Nadab and Abihu (Exodus 24:9-11). The One who became Christ thus had to be the member of the Godhead these people saw.

Paul, in a letter to members in Corinth, likewise wrote about Christ’s Old Testament activity. Specifically, Paul identifies Christ with the Rock from which they drank in the wilderness: “For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ” (1 Corinthians 10:4).

While the Word, who later became Jesus, primarily interacted with people in the Old Testament, this doesn’t mean that God the Father wasn’t involved.

The Father authorized the Word to create everything and He decides when to call each person. The Word was the Father’s representative, carrying out the plan for humanity that both had agreed upon “from the foundation of the world” (Matthew 25:34; John 17:24; Revelation 13:8).

The Word thus worked intimately with people in both the Old and New Testaments. Of course, He also continues to work with people today.

When Jesus Died, Did His Spirit Go to Heaven?

Some people mistakenly believe that when Jesus died, His body was put in the grave but some other part of Him immediately went to heaven. Two scriptures—both found in Luke 23—are commonly used to support this faulty idea.

The first instance occurred when one of the thieves who was being crucified next to Jesus asked Jesus to remember him when He entered His Kingdom (verse 42). Answering this man, Jesus replied, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise" (verse 43).

Some believe Jesus' words indicated that He and the thief would ascend to heaven that same day after their bodies died. But Jesus Himself contradicted this. Three days later after He had been resurrected from the grave, Jesus said to Mary, "Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father [who was in heaven]" (John 20:17).

The misunderstanding of Jesus' statement to the thief arises because of the perspective or understanding of the translators. In the original Greek there is no punctuation. Punctuation, including commas, was added by translators to add clarity as they understood the text.

Look carefully at the text in Luke 23:42: "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise." The location of the comma prior to the word *today* mistakenly implies that Jesus and the thief would both be in heaven on that very day. Translators placed this comma in this position because of their mistaken belief that people's souls go to heaven when they die.

If the comma is placed after *today* ("Assuredly, I say to you today, you will be with Me in Paradise"), we see Jesus was at that moment—*today*—telling the thief that they would eventually be together in paradise. After he is resurrected, the thief will have his opportunity to be with Christ.

For a more thorough explanation of this verse, read "**Thief on the Cross: What Happened to Him?**" For further study on how people will come back to life from the grave, see "**Resurrections: What Are They?**"

A second scripture that is often misunderstood is found in verse 46, which says, "And when Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He said, 'Father, "into Your hands I commit My spirit"' Having said this, He breathed His last."

Some people believe that this act by Jesus shows that His soul remained alive and went to be with the Father when His body died. But when Jesus died, He died completely. His death wasn't a partial death. He and the Father were not merely orchestrating the appearance of Jesus' dying. Why is this important? Because if Jesus didn't die, we don't have a Savior.

What many don't understand is that this spirit spoken of by Jesus is not synonymous with the soul, and the soul is not what most people think either. William Barclay wrote in his introduction to 1 John: "There was the *psuche*, which we normally translate *soul*, but we must have a care for it does not mean what we mean by soul. To the Greeks the *psuche* was the principle of life. Everything which had physical life had *psuche*. *Psuche* was that life principle which a man shared with all living creatures."

While the word *soul* refers to life, the Bible clearly teaches that the soul is not immortal. As noted in Ezekiel 18, the soul can die (verses 4, 20). The word *soul* refers to physical life.

So what was this spirit that Jesus committed to the Father before He died? The Bible speaks of a "spirit in man" or "spirit of man" that makes humans different from animals and allows them to comprehend spiritual concepts (Job 32:8; Proverbs 18:14; 1 Corinthians 2:11-12). At death "the dust [from which man was made, Genesis 2:7] will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it" (Ecclesiastes 12:7).

This spirit of man—which comes from God and gives us humans godlike abilities to think and reason while we are alive—returns to God when we die. While the spirit in man is an important component of humans, it is not an immortal, conscious entity that continues to live after a person dies.

For additional study on the spirit in man, see the LifeHopeandTruth.com article "**Spirit in Man: What Is It?**" and the video "**The Role of the Spirit in Man.**"

Jesus was dead for three days and three nights

When Jesus told the Jewish religious leaders that He was God, they tried to stone Him on at least two occasions. Continually hounded for a miraculous sign to prove His identity, Jesus eventually gave a group of scribes and Pharisees a sign that would prove who He was.

Speaking to this disdainful group, Jesus said, “An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Matthew 12:39-40).

Many people today fail to grasp the significance of this statement—a profound prophecy that was fulfilled immediately after Christ’s death and one that upends two major teachings of mainstream Christianity today—the immortality of the soul and Easter traditions. Many misunderstand whether Jesus really died and the length of time He was in the grave.

Although it seems strange to consider, many accept erroneous explanations of the Godhead that don’t allow for Jesus to have truly or completely died. Many mistakenly believe that just part of Jesus died—that only His body died and that His soul remained alive while His body was in the grave.

As for the idea that humans have immortal souls that continue to live after they die, this nonbiblical idea came from pagan mythology. The Bible teaches that humans do not have immortal souls. The word *soul* simply means life, and when people who have sinned die, their souls die (Ezekiel 18:4, 20).

A person’s “thoughts perish” when he or she dies (Psalm 146:4, King James Version). King David concurs: “For in death there is no remembrance of You; in the grave who will give You thanks?” (Psalm 6:5). Approximately 1,000 years later on the Day of Pentecost, Peter, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, said that King David was still “dead and buried” (Acts 2:29). There is not a conscious entity that continues to live after a person dies.

Although Jesus did not sin, He died in our place to pay the penalty for our sins. As Paul clearly states: “Christ died for our sins” (1 Corinthians 15:3). This was not a partial death—one in which only part of Him died—but an act that required that He be resurrected in order to live again.

Paul explains the enormous implications of Christ’s resurrection: “If there is no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen. And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty, and your faith is also empty. ... And if Christ

is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!” (verses 13-14, 17). Jesus had to be resurrected to be brought back to life because He was fully and completely dead.

Again, when Jesus died there wasn't part of Him still alive. This is why God must give “life to the dead” (Romans 4:17) and why after Jesus was put to death, He had to be “made alive by the Spirit” (1 Peter 3:18). Jesus did not resurrect Himself; He was raised back to life by the Spirit of the Father (Romans 8:11). If Jesus' soul had been still alive, there would have been no need for the Father through the Holy Spirit to resurrect Jesus' body. Jesus could have done this Himself.

The Bible clearly teaches that the way humans can receive immortality is through the resurrection of the dead. As Paul explains this process, “The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body” (1 Corinthians 15:42-44). If humans already had immortality via an immortal soul, there would be no need for a resurrection.

Jesus was the first person to die and be resurrected to life eternal. Paul explains that through His resurrection from the dead, Christ “has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” (verse 20).

The unbiblical idea that Jesus' soul was still alive and only His body was dead disrespects the sacrifice of Christ. His death was not simply a pretense. Christ truly died for our sins and ceased to have conscious thoughts for the time He was in the grave.

For further study regarding the soul, see our online article [“Immortal Soul: What Is a Soul?”](#)

The second aspect of Matthew 12:39-40 that is often misunderstood is the length of time Jesus would be in the grave. Jesus said He would be in the grave for three days and three nights. Most people mistakenly assume Jesus was crucified on a Friday afternoon and resurrected on Sunday morning. But there aren't three days and three nights in this scenario.

The biblical explanation of three days and three nights isn't found in the popular idea that Jesus was simply speaking an idiom—and only parts of three days and three nights were needed. The fact is, even if this were an idiom, there aren't parts of three days and three nights in the commonly taught Friday crucifixion–Sunday resurrection timeline. The timeline that best fits the Scriptures is a Wednesday crucifixion and burial late that afternoon coupled

with a resurrection late Saturday afternoon. For more details, see our online article [“How Do You Count Three Days and Three Nights?”](#)

Jesus: our High Priest

As we consider what the Bible tells us about the Word, we must also note His current role as our High Priest. One of the themes of the book of Hebrews explains how Jesus Christ is a much greater High Priest than the humans who served in this role as part of the Aaronic priesthood. Here are some key concepts that give us hope and assurance in our High Priest.

- **Jesus knows what it is like to be human.** We have already seen scriptures showing that Jesus was God in the flesh. Jesus is called “the Son of Man” more than 80 times in the New Testament, and this name continually reminds us of the fact that Jesus was indeed human. Isaiah prophetically referred to Him as a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief (Isaiah 53:3). Being fully human, Jesus experienced what it is like to be hungry, tired and mistreated by others.

Countering the heresy that was emerging toward the end of the first century—that Jesus was simply a spirit and not really human—John became quite emphatic. He wrote, “By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come *in the flesh* is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come *in the flesh* is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world” (1 John 4:2-3; compare 2 John 1:7).

Having been fully human, Jesus now compassionately serves as our High Priest. As Hebrews 4:15-16 says, “For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

- **Jesus gave His life for us.** This point is likely the best understood aspect of Christ’s life, yet it is one that isn’t always considered from the perspective of the Godhead. It is important for us to remember that this great atoning act reflected the love that God the Father and the Word have for mankind.

God the Father was willing to send “His only begotten Son” into the world “that the world through Him might be saved” (John 3:16-17). And the Word was willing to fulfill this mission: “Being found in appear-

ance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:8).

Jesus was willing to suffer the excruciating pain of crucifixion to pay the penalty for our sins (1 Corinthians 15:3; 1 Peter 2:24). And the Father was willing to allow this to occur (Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34).

- **Jesus is our Advocate with the Father.** This concept is found in John’s first general epistle: “My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 John 2:1). The word *Advocate* comes from the Greek word *parakletos*.

According to *Thayer’s Greek Definitions*, this word refers to someone “summoned, called to one’s side ... one who pleads another’s cause before a judge” and “of Christ in his exaltation at God’s right hand, pleading with God the Father for the pardon of our sins.”

As a human advocate can work on our behalf to not only comfort us but seek to secure our best interests, Jesus interfaces with the Father on our behalf. We see this concept in action with Jesus’ instruction to direct our prayers to the Father and to then close our prayers in Jesus’ name (Matthew 6:9; John 15:16; 16:23).

- **Jesus is our Judge.** Some people mistakenly view God the Father as a harsh, stern being and think of Jesus as the One who loves us and protects us from the Father’s unmerciful judgment. The reality is that “the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son” (John 5:22).

Why has the Father done this? John writes: “For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself, and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man” (verses 26-27).

Because He is God, He is unwaveringly righteous and just. Because Jesus is “the Son of Man,” He knows what it is like to be human. God the Father obviously thinks this is an important reason for delegating the judgment of humans to Jesus.

Jesus: soon-coming King

While Jesus is currently in heaven serving as our High Priest, He will not remain in heaven forever. Jesus pointedly told His disciples, “I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14:3).

A number of scriptures give us glimpses into what Jesus will do when He returns. Jesus said that He, the Son of Man, would return “on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (Matthew 24:30). Jesus will return to fulfill many biblical prophecies showing Him to be “King over all the earth” (Zechariah 14:9; compare verse 17). Revelation 20 indicates that His reign on earth will continue for 1,000 years—an amazing period of peace and opportunity often referred to as the [Millennium](#).

The author of the book of Hebrews says that Jesus will come to earth “a second time ... for salvation” (Hebrews 9:28). During His reign on earth, Jesus is going to give all who are alive the opportunity to learn and live by His Father’s commands so they can receive eternal life.

This will be an exciting time with many wonderful changes coming for all inhabitants of the earth. Jesus often told His disciples to watch for the signs of the end of this present age and His return. The next to the last verse of the Bible quotes Jesus as saying, “Surely I am coming quickly” (Revelation 22:20).



Chapter 3

Understanding the Holy Spirit

Trying to determine what the Holy Spirit is has been a challenging quest for many for a long time. The most common explanation of the Godhead—the Trinitarian view—teaches that the Holy Spirit is a coequal person with God the Father and the Son, but is this teaching found in the Bible?

Although sorting out what the Bible says about the Holy Spirit is more complicated than learning about God the Father and the Word, a clear explanation is available if we will carefully consider the Scriptures without bias toward a particular interpretation. As we have seen thus far, the humanly devised explanations of God the Father and the Son contradict the biblical teaching that the Godhead consists of two distinct spiritual beings (1 Corinthians 8:6).

Because the Trinity is the most popular explanation of God, in this chapter we are going to consider a brief history of how and why the Trinity doctrine was devised. First, we will see how the Bible explains the Holy Spirit, then learn about the Trinity, and then conclude with clear explanations of passages about the Holy Spirit that are often misunderstood.

As we begin our quest to understand the Holy Spirit, a brief observation is insightful. We have already seen that the Bible refers to

both the Father and the Son as God (John 1:1, 18; 20:28; Romans 9:5; Philip-
pians 2:6; Colossians 2:9; Titus 2:13; Hebrews 1:8; 2 Peter 1:1). But the Bible
never refers to the Holy Spirit as God. This simple fact should alert us that the
Holy Spirit is likely something different than a third being in the Godhead.

So what is the Holy Spirit? Let's see how the Bible describes it.

God's Spirit at creation

At the creation of the heavens and earth, Scripture tells us that “the Spirit of
God was hovering over the face of the waters” (Genesis 1:2). The Spirit of God
was thus present at the preparation of the earth for mankind, but God is the
being who said, “Let there be light” and is the being who did the work (verses
3, 31).

Although we later learn that Christ is the One through whom God did the
creating (Colossians 1:16; Ephesians 3:9), what is significant for us to focus
on here is that God—not the Holy Spirit—is credited with creating and fash-
ioning the earth. Why is Genesis written this way if the Holy Spirit is a third
person in the Godhead? Was the Holy Spirit just watching what God was
doing?

In considering the Old Testament, Jewish scholars have defined the Holy
Spirit as the power of God—not as a member of the Godhead. This expla-
nation is accurate, for the Bible repeatedly presents the Spirit of God as the
power of God, the force by which He accomplishes things.

By means of His Spirit, God can be everywhere at once (Psalm 139:7-10). It is
thus the operational presence and influence of God.

A Spirit of power

This definition of the Holy Spirit as the power of God is confirmed in a num-
ber of scriptures. The prophet Micah said God's Spirit was the impetus he
received from God to fulfill his ministry: “But truly I am full of power by the
Spirit of the LORD” (Micah 3:8).

Through the power of the Holy Spirit, God the Father conceived the Word
in Mary as the man Jesus Christ (Luke 1:31-32, 35). If God were a trinity, we
would expect Jesus to be called the Son of the Holy Spirit—the power that
came upon Mary to cause her to conceive (Matthew 1:18). But Jesus was never
called the Son of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus likewise taught that the Holy Spirit is the power of God. Speaking to His
disciples of the Holy Spirit they would soon receive, Jesus said, “Behold, I send

the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with *power from on high*” (Luke 24:49).

During the last few days before His ascension to heaven, Jesus reminded His disciples of this promise, saying, “You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). The Holy Spirit would empower Jesus’ disciples to carry out the commission He had given them.

Christ’s disciples understood the Holy Spirit to be the power of God. Peter wrote that the Spirit of God moved the prophets to speak God’s messages (2 Peter 1:21). Paul said he did mighty signs and wonders “by the power of the Spirit of God” (Romans 15:18-19). Paul further described the Holy Spirit as a spirit “of power and of love and of a sound mind” (2 Timothy 1:7).

When people repent of their sins and are baptized, they can have hands laid on them to receive the Holy Spirit—the power of God to help them to live in accordance with God’s instructions (Acts 2:38; 19:6).

How New Testament Christians understood the Holy Spirit

The way the writers of the New Testament spoke of the Holy Spirit is quite insightful. In this portion of the Bible, the Holy Spirit is referred to in many ways indicating it is not a person.

The Holy Spirit is called a gift (1 Timothy 4:14; Acts 10:45). It can be quenched (1 Thessalonians 5:19). It can be poured out (Acts 2:17, 33), and we are baptized with it (Matthew 3:11). It can renew us (Titus 3:5) and needs to be stirred up within us (2 Timothy 1:6).

Instead of being presented as a person, the Holy Spirit is described as wind (Acts 2:2), fire (verse 3), water (John 4:14; 7:37-39), oil (Psalm 45:7), a dove (Matthew 3:16) and an “earnest” (down payment or guarantee) on eternal life (2 Corinthians 1:22; 5:5; Ephesians 1:13-14, KJV). It is also significant to note that Jesus always prayed to the Father and not to the Holy Spirit (Matthew 6:9; 11:25-27).

Paul, the most prolific writer of the New Testament, never speaks of the Trinity. In all of his books, his standard greeting (with only slight variations) to the churches is, “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” He never mentions the Holy Spirit in all his greetings (see Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:3; 2 Corinthians 1:2; Galatians 1:3; Ephesians 1:2; Philippians 1:2; Colossians 1:2; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:1-2;

1 Timothy 1:2; 2 Timothy 1:2; Titus 1:4; Philemon 1:3). What disrespect this would be if the Holy Spirit were indeed a being in the Godhead!

Like other people of God in the Bible, Paul also understood the Holy Spirit to be the power of God that can encourage us, uplift us and inspire us. Speaking of his ministry to the church at Rome, Paul wrote: “For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ has not accomplished through me, in word and deed, to make the Gentiles obedient—in mighty signs and wonders, by *the power of the Spirit of God*, so that from Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ” (Romans 15:18-19).

In Revelation 21 we read of new heavens and new earth wherein “the tabernacle of God is with men” (verse 3) as is Christ, the Lamb of God (verse 22). The Holy Spirit is not mentioned here—another indication that the Holy Spirit is not a separate being in the Godhead.

For additional insight on how first-century Christians understood the Holy Spirit, see our online articles [“What Is the Holy Spirit?”](#) and [“What Did the Apostles Believe About God?”](#)

A short history of the Trinity

Historians know that the Trinity was never a perspective of the Jews or Christians of the first century. As one Trinitarian candidly acknowledges, “The Jews never regarded the spirit as a person; nor is there any solid evidence that any Old Testament writer held this view. ... The Holy Spirit is usually presented in the Synoptics [the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke] and in Acts as a divine force or power” (Edmund Fortman, *The Triune God*, 1972, pp. 6, 15).

Numerous sources confirm that the Trinity was a concept devised by theologians rather than a teaching of the Bible. “The Old Testament clearly does not envisage God’s spirit as a person. ... God’s spirit is simply God’s power. If it is sometimes represented as being distinct from God, it is because the breath of Yahweh acts exteriorly. ... The majority of New Testament texts reveal God’s spirit as something, not someone; this is especially seen in the parallelism between the spirit and the power of God” (*New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 1967, Vol. 14, pp. 574-575).

Gregory of Nazianzus acknowledged in the fourth century: “Of our thoughtful men, some regard the Holy Spirit as an operation, some as a creature and some as God; while others are at a loss to decide, seeing that the Scripture determines nothing on the subject” (*Oratio 38: De Spiritu Sancto*). *Easton’s Bible Dictionary* states that the word *Trinity* is “not found in Scripture” (“Trinity”).

So we are faced with a decision. We have to choose between accepting what God tells us about Himself in His inspired Word—the Bible—and accepting a humanly devised explanation of the Holy Spirit. As we consider our choice of explanations, we need to remember that Jesus declared that God’s Word is truth (John 17:17). Doesn’t it make sense that Jesus knew what was true and that the Bible is a better source for truth regarding the Godhead than the ideas of men?

As for how the Trinity came to be an integral part of Christianity, the *New Bible Dictionary* notes: “The word Trinity is not found in the Bible, and though used by Tertullian in the last decade of the 2nd century, it did not find a place formally in the theology of the church till *the 4th century*” (1982, “Trinity”). Several hundred years after the Bible was completed, religious leaders began developing and teaching that God is a Trinity.

Echoing this history, *The Oxford Companion to the Bible* explains: “Because the Trinity is such an important part of *later Christian doctrine*, it is striking that the term does not appear in the New Testament. Likewise, the developed concept of three coequal partners in the Godhead found in *later creedal formulations* cannot be clearly detected within the confines of the canon” (Bruce Metzger and Michael Coogan, editors, 1993, p. 782).

So why did church leaders develop a new, nonbiblical explanation of the Godhead?

The effort to define who God was began due to a major controversy that had erupted among those professing to be followers of Christ. “In about 320 a fierce theological passion had seized the churches of Egypt, Syria and Asia Minor. . . . The controversy had been kindled by Arius. . . . He had issued a challenge which his bishop, Alexander, found impossible to ignore but even more difficult to rebut: how could Jesus Christ have been God in the same way as God the Father? Arius was not denying the divinity of Christ; . . . but he argued that it was blasphemous to think that he was divine by nature” (Karen Armstrong, *A History of God*, 1993, p. 107).

Arius was an intelligent man and an accomplished debater, but he mistakenly believed that Jesus was a created being. The Roman Church selected a man named Athanasius, who was Alexander’s assistant, to counter this faulty teaching that was spreading throughout the churches.

Summarizing the argument, Karen Armstrong writes: “Either Christ, the Word, belonged to the divine realm (which was now the domain of God

alone) or he belonged to the fragile created order” (p. 108). Arius placed Him in the created order, but Athanasius placed Him in the divine realm.

The Trinity was a philosophical concept developed to defeat the argument of Arius. What we have to recognize is that it had no basis in Scripture. The Trinity was simply the humanly devised construct that the Roman church used to counter the heretical teaching that Christ was a created being and thus on a lesser plane than God the Father. Trinitarians claim that a few passages in the Bible do indicate that God is a trinity; we will carefully examine these scriptures a little later to see whether this contention is legitimate.

The Arian controversy raged for a number of years. In response, the proposed doctrine of the Trinity “gradually developed over several centuries and through many controversies. ... The Council of Nicaea in 325 stated the crucial formula for that doctrine in its confession that the Son is ‘of the same substance [*homoousis*] as the Father’ even though it said very little about the Holy Spirit. Over the next half century, Athanasius defended and refined the Nicene formula, and, by the end of the 4th century ... the doctrine of the Trinity took substantially the form it has maintained ever since” (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, “Trinity”).

Earlier religious leaders accepted the biblical teaching that the Father and Son formed the Godhead. In the second century, bishop Irenaeus stated: “There is none other called God by the Scriptures except the Father of all, and the Son, and those who possess the adoption” (*Against Heresies*, Book 4, preface; compare Book 3, chapter 6).

In time biblical teaching would be discarded in favor of a model identifying the Holy Spirit as a third member of the Godhead. The historical record shows that the doctrine of the Trinity wasn’t completed until centuries after the Bible had been written and Christ’s original apostles had died. Unfortunately, this false concept of God has done much to suppress the biblical teaching of the Godhead.

For additional information on the development of the Trinity, see our online article “[The Trinity: What Is It?](#)”

Commonly misunderstood scriptures

Advocates of today’s more common explanations of God claim to take their beliefs from the Bible and cite a number of scriptures to supposedly prove their explanations. But as we are going to see, these so-called proofs really aren’t proofs at all.

What about Matthew 28:19?

Prior to returning to heaven, Jesus charged His disciples: “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.” Some have assumed that this passage proves that the Holy Spirit is a person.

The word *in* (from the phrase “baptizing them in the name”) is the Greek word *eis*. It is defined as “into, to, towards, for, and among” (*Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*). Entering God’s family via baptism involves entering into or moving into an association with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

This verse is not addressing the nature of God or whether the Holy Spirit is a person. Acts 2:38 shows that we receive the Holy Spirit when we repent of our sins and are baptized. The process includes a minister laying his hands upon the person who is baptized (Acts 19:6) and then the person receiving the Holy Spirit from God (Acts 8:14-17).

McClintock and Strong in *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature* note that Matthew 28:19 “proves only that there are the three subjects named ... but it does not prove, by itself, that all the three belong necessarily to the divine nature, and possess equal divine honor. ... This text, taken by itself, would not prove decisively either the personality of the three subjects mentioned, or their equality or divinity” (1987, Vol. X, p. 552).

There are several scriptures similar to Matthew 28:19 that are commonly cited in an attempt to prove the Trinity, but when these scriptures are examined carefully, it becomes clear that they are simply referencing the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and are not proving anything about the nature of God.

Examples include Matthew 3:16-17; Galatians 4:6; Romans 15:30; Ephesians 2:18; 1 Peter 1:2; 3:18. Again, simply referring to three things does not mean all three things are exactly the same and equal or that these three things are a trinity.

For additional information on this passage, see our online article “[Does Matthew 28:19 Prove the Trinity?](#)”

What about 1 John 5:7-8?

The King James Version of the Bible renders these verses: “For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the

water, and the blood: and these three agree in one.” Strangely, the words in italics are not included in the generally accepted New Testament manuscripts.

Many Bible commentaries, including *The New Bible Commentary*, state that the inserted words in the King James and New King James Versions of the Bible are spurious. The New Revised Standard Version correctly renders these verses: “There are three that testify, the Spirit and the water and the blood, and these three agree.” Here John personifies these three elements as providing testimony that Jesus was the Son of God. (For additional explanation of personification, see the section at the end of this chapter, “Why do some scriptures personify the Holy Spirit?”)

Dr. Neil Lightfoot says that the textual evidence is against 1 John 5:7 as translated by the King James and New King James Versions of the Bible. “Of all the Greek manuscripts, only two contain it [the addition]. These two manuscripts are of very late dates, one from the fourteenth or fifteenth century and the other from the sixteenth century. Two other manuscripts have this verse written in the margin. All four manuscripts show that this verse was apparently translated from a late form of the Latin Vulgate” (*How We Got the Bible*, 2003, pp. 100-101).

Albert Barnes in his *Notes on the Bible* concurs that the addition is spurious and states that this passage “is never quoted by the Greek fathers in their controversies on the doctrine of the Trinity—a passage which would be so much in point, and which could not have failed to be quoted if it were genuine.”

As for what this passage means, John was offering proof that Jesus was the Son of God (1 John 5:1, 5). The “water” was likely a reference to Christ’s baptism and the Spirit coming upon Him (Matthew 3:13-17).

As for the reference to “blood,” we realize that Christ’s shed blood pays the penalty for our sins (Matthew 26:28). And John’s mentioning the “Spirit” reminds His readers of the power of God that Jesus came to announce and which is in those who are baptized (Acts 2:38).

We should also note that if we were to conclude that this passage proves that the Holy Spirit is a person, to be consistent, we would have to conclude that the water and blood are also persons. This, of course, is inaccurate. The passage in 1 John 5:7-8 does not prove that the Holy Spirit is a person.

Does Acts 5 prove that the Holy Spirit is a third member of the Godhead?

In this chapter Peter told Ananias that he and his wife, Sapphira, had lied to the Holy Spirit (verse 3) and then said, “You have not lied to men but to God”

(verse 4). Does this prove that the Holy Spirit and God are interchangeable—the same?

What is clear is that this husband and wife lied both to the Holy Spirit and to God. But this does not prove that the Holy Spirit is a separate being. Again, the Holy Spirit is the power of God. The reason Peter told them that they had lied to God is because to lie to an individual who has God's Holy Spirit residing within him and is acting on behalf of God is to lie to God. Here Peter was an agent or representative of God. To lie to Peter was to lie to God.

Does blasphemy against the Holy Spirit prove that it is a person?

Matthew 12:31-32 records Jesus saying, “Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come.”

Some have mistakenly assumed that these words of Christ prove that the Holy Spirit is a person. The reality is that this situation is similar to the one in Acts 5.

The context is an occasion when the Jewish leaders had accused Jesus of casting out demons by Satan himself (Matthew 12:22-24). Jesus explained the illogic of such an explanation, saying, “If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand?” (verse 26). The more logical explanation was that Jesus was casting out the “demons by the Spirit of God” (verse 28).

So why did Jesus say people could be forgiven for speaking against Him, “the Son of Man,” but not the Holy Spirit?

The distinction seems to be that Jesus acknowledged that people might have a hard time understanding that He was God in the flesh and that this was something that people could in time come to see and repent of. But speaking against the power of God—which was obvious to all via the casting out of a demon—was a direct insult to God. It was something that would not be forgiven because it was done with full understanding.

Commenting on speaking against the Holy Spirit in Matthew 12:32, Albert Barnes explains: “There is no evidence that it refers to the third person of the Trinity; and the meaning of the whole passage may be: ‘He that speaks against me as a man of Nazareth—that speaks contemptuously of my humble birth,

etc., may be pardoned; but he that reproaches my divine nature, charging me with being in league with Satan, and blaspheming the power of God manifestly displayed “by me” can never obtain forgiveness” (*Notes on the Bible*).

For additional information on blasphemy against the Spirit, see our online article “[Unpardonable Sin: What Is It?](#)”

Why is the Holy Spirit sometimes called “He,” “Him” and “Himself” in the New Testament?

Some have mistakenly suggested that because the Greek language uses masculine pronouns for some words associated with the Holy Spirit, this should be maintained in the translation of the text into English.

Greek, similar to other languages, designates nouns, both animate and inanimate, as masculine, feminine or neuter. The gender can be unrelated to personal male or female identity. For example, in German the word for table—*tisch*—is a masculine noun; the word for cup—*tasse*—is a feminine noun; and the word for child—*kind*—is neuter. In English, however, a table would not be referred to as “he”; a cup would not be identified as “she,” and a child would not usually be called “it.”

In Greek one word commonly used to designate the Holy Spirit is indeed masculine. The Greek word *parakletos* is a masculine noun, translated as “Helper,” “Comforter” and “Advocate” in John 14-16. Because this word is masculine, Greek uses masculine pronouns equivalent to “he” and “him” in English.

This is grammatically correct when using Greek, but not necessarily correct when using English. If the “Helper” is indeed a male person, then using a masculine pronoun in English would be correct. But if the “Helper” is not a person, then it would not be grammatically correct to use a masculine pronoun when translating the Greek to English.

There is another Greek word—*pneuma*—that is also used to designate the Holy Spirit, and this word is neuter. In Greek this word calls for the use of neuter designations equivalent to “it,” “itself” and “which” in English. The King James Version correctly uses neuter designations for this word in John 1:32; Romans 8:16, 26; and 1 Peter 1:11 saying, “it [the Spirit] abode upon him,” “the Spirit itself” and “when it [the Spirit] testified.”

Broadening this perspective regarding grammar, the Hebrew word *ruach*, which is translated “spirit,” “breath” and “wind” in the Old Testament, is feminine. We thus note that the Hebrew and Greek nouns that are used to indicate spirit in the Bible are masculine, feminine and neuter. These gram-

matical genders have nothing to do with actually being male or female or with whether the Holy Spirit is a person.

So really it is a matter of doctrinal interpretation. Most translators have used masculine and personal pronouns for the Holy Spirit in modern English translations because they believe the Holy Spirit is a person. A good example of this is found in the New King James Version, where the neuter noun *pneuma* in John 1:32 is referred to as “He” while the older King James Version reads, “I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it [not ‘he’] abode upon him.”

Similarly, the translations of *pneuma* in the King James Version in Romans 8:16, 26 and 1 Peter 1:11 are “itself,” “which” and “it.” More recent versions of the Bible have wrongly used the masculine pronoun “He” and the personal pronoun “who” for the neuter noun *pneuma*.

In short, the use of personal pronouns for the Holy Spirit in the New Testament is not based on linguistic accuracy but rather on translator misperception. While the gender of Greek words is a factor that can lead to confusion in translation, in reality it is a nonissue.

The translators of the New Testament did not stumble over the grammar involved. The real reason for their use of “He,” “Him” and “Himself” for the Holy Spirit was their acceptance of the nonbiblical doctrine of the Trinity. These instances of mistaken translation do not contradict the many clear scriptures that show that the Holy Spirit is the power of God instead of a person.

Why do some scriptures personify the Holy Spirit?

Several passages in the Bible personify the Holy Spirit—that is, they describe the Holy Spirit as though it were a person. These biblical references speak of the Holy Spirit telling Church leaders to send Paul and Barnabas on a missionary journey (Acts 13:1-4), forbidding Paul and Timothy to go into Bithynia (Acts 16:7), potentially being grieved (Ephesians 4:30), leading faithful Christians (Romans 8:14), speaking about conditions in the end time (1 Timothy 4:1) and testifying that Jesus was the Son of God (1 John 5:7-8). Do these passages prove that the Holy Spirit is a distinct being, similar to the Father and Son?

In these passages the Bible is using a style of writing called personification or anthropomorphism to describe inanimate objects. Other examples in the Bible of nonliving objects being given lifelike abilities include Abel’s blood

crying out to God from the ground (Genesis 4:10), the mountains and hills singing (Isaiah 49:13; 55:12) and wisdom speaking (Proverbs 1:20; 8:1) and having children (Luke 7:35).

In these instances, we understand that blood, mountains and wisdom aren't living beings. These inanimate objects are simply personified to add interest or emphasis to the subject being addressed.

Since the Holy Spirit is the power of God (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8)—a force through which God accomplishes His will and works with His people—personification of this power was a fitting style of writing for New Testament writers to employ. But the use of this literary style does not contradict the many scriptures describing the Holy Spirit as the power of God, nor does it prove that the Holy Spirit is a person.



Chapter 4

God's Purpose for Mankind

In exploring what God reveals about Himself, we have delved deeply into the Old Testament and New. We've looked at clear passages about God the Father and the Son of God. We have even examined several often-misunderstood scriptures and learned how the writers of the Bible and the early Church understood the Holy Spirit. But God didn't record all this just as an academic exercise.

Based on what we've seen, let's now focus on God's purpose for creating mankind. Understanding what the Bible teaches about our potential helps us understand God's character and rounds out the picture of who God is.

As we will soon see, this information about why we exist is ignored or suppressed by the more popular explanations of God. They fail to adequately convey the amazing destiny God has in store for humanity.

God's plan for man revealed at our creation

In preparing the earth for mankind, God created the plants and animals each "according to its kind" (Genesis 1:11-12, 21, 24-25). Man, however, was created differently. Mankind was made in the image of God.

As the creation account explains, "So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him, male and

female He created them” (verse 27). Being made in God’s image and being given “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” differentiated humans from all other physical life on earth (verse 26).

Being made in God’s image and given dominion over the earth means we were given the ability to communicate, reason, plan and rule over the earth in a way that animals cannot. From the very beginning, mankind had the pre-eminent status in God’s physical creation. Being made this way indicates that God had a special purpose for mankind.

The Bible later reveals that this purpose was for humans to become part of the God family.

Created to rule

Musing on God’s creation and mankind’s esteemed role within it, King David asks, “When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained, what is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him?” (Psalm 8:3-4).

David then notes the unique position God had given mankind: “For You have made him a little lower than the angels, and You have crowned him with glory and honor. You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen—even the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea that pass through the paths of the seas” (verses 5-8).

And why was mankind so favored by God? Why did God give mankind dominion—rulership—over the earth? Because God has a great purpose for humans that far exceeds that of the remainder of His creation.

Building upon this observation by King David, the book of Hebrews notes: “You [God] have put all things in subjection under his [mankind’s] feet.’ For in that He put all in subjection under him, He left nothing that is not put under him. But now we do not yet see all things put under him” (Hebrews 2:8).

So what else is going to be put under mankind’s jurisdiction? What else is mankind destined to rule over?

Verse 7 explains that mankind’s status is currently “lower than the angels.” But God’s plan is for us to eventually be over “all things” (verse 8). Verse 5 explains that the angels will not be in charge of “the world to come.”

Jesus Christ and the saints—people who have been faithful to God’s calling—

will reign over the earth when He returns (Revelation 1:6; 2:26-27; 5:10). In addition to assisting Christ in establishing the Kingdom of God here on earth, God's faithful people will apparently at this time also be over the angels (1 Corinthians 6:2-3). God truly has great plans for those who will submit to His beneficial laws and way of life.

How we become members of the God family

In addition to ruling with Christ, God's ultimate purpose for creating humans is to have them become part of His eternal family. As we have already noted, God the Father is the head of "the whole family in heaven and earth" (Ephesians 3:14-15).

The process begins when the Father opens our minds to comprehend His teaching and plan (John 6:44, 65) and then has us come to Him through His Son (John 3:17; 1 John 4:9). Expounding upon the reason the Word became flesh, John writes: "He [the Word] came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right *to become children of God*, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:11-13).

This passage explains that it is God's will that we become His children. But this doesn't just happen automatically. God expects something of us.

The biblical process for responding to God's call requires us to repent of our sins, be baptized and have hands laid on us so we can receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38; 19:6). Having the Holy Spirit—the power of God—helps us to live in a way that pleases God, and it identifies us as belonging to God (Romans 8:8-9).

We are to use the power of the Holy Spirit to help us grow in the "fruit of the Spirit"—to become like God. Paul lists the fruit of the Spirit as "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Galatians 5:22-23; read more in our online section "[The Fruit of the Spirit](#)").

And now we come to something truly astounding.

Paul writes in Romans 8:14: "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, *these are sons of God*." Here we are told that even though we are human, we are already considered sons of God if we follow the lead of the Holy Spirit. How can this be?

Paul continues: “For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom [whereby, King James Version] we cry out, ‘Abba, Father.’ The Spirit Himself [itself, KJV] bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God” (verses 15-16, compare 2 Corinthians 6:18; Galatians 4:6; Hebrews 2:10-15).

Reflecting on this amazingly kind, generous and merciful plan that God has for us, we are reminded that we were made in the image of God at creation and mankind has continued to be in God’s image even after sin entered the world.

Christ, who did not sin, is even more so in the image of God (Colossians 1:15; 2 Corinthians 4:4; Hebrews 1:3), and this is why we are instructed to let Christ’s mind be in us (Philippians 2:5). As we grow spiritually, we conform to the image of the Son (Romans 8:29).

In short, through the Holy Spirit in us, we are to take on the family characteristics of God. In this process, we begin to act like God acts. We begin to think like God thinks. We begin to do things that God does. We become like God. Just as children in human families take on and exhibit family characteristics, we take on and exhibit characteristics of the God family.

Let’s now return to what Paul writes in Romans 8:14-16, where we saw that if we have God’s Holy Spirit within us and follow its direction in our lives, God already considers us part of His divine family.

Why does God do this? Because He is the One “who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did” (Romans 4:17). God sees in advance where the path we have chosen will lead. If we remain faithful to God and do not abort this process by neglect or not repenting of sin, we will in due time become part of God’s eternal family.

Addressing this same point, John writes: “And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life” (1 John 5:11-12).

Of course, for now we are still flesh and blood. What else will occur when we transition from this physical life to full-fledged members of the God family?

Glorification as spirit beings

Peter comments on the blessing of having “the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord” (2 Peter 1:2), explaining that we have been given “exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the *divine nature*” (verse 4).

John also writes of this amazing future: “When He is revealed, *we shall be like Him*, for we shall see Him as He is” (1 John 3:2). The destiny of those who respond to God’s calling is to eventually have the same nature as God.

This means we will exchange our physical existence for one that is spiritual. We will become spirit beings—we will “bear the image of the heavenly Man [Christ]” (1 Corinthians 15:49).

We will not be equal with God. God will always be the Supreme Head of His family. But we will be elevated from this human level of existence to the God level.

The transition from being flesh and blood to being spirit occurs when we are resurrected—brought back to life from the grave—or changed into spirit if we are alive at Christ’s return (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17; 1 Corinthians 15:50-52). King David knew this would occur for him when he would awake from the grave. As he put it: “As for me, I will see Your face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake in your likeness” (Psalm 17:15).

Explaining this transition from physical life to spiritual life, Paul writes: “The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor, it is *raised in glory*. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. ... For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality” (1 Corinthians 15:42-44, 53).

In this statement Paul reveals something else about our future spiritual state. Not only will we be spiritual, immortal beings, we will also be glorified. Foreseeing the glory that those who respond to God would receive after being resurrected, Daniel describes them as ones who will “shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever” (Daniel 12:3).

As amazing as it may sound, the glorification of faithful humans when they are changed into spirit is often repeated in Scripture. In Hebrews 2:10 Christ’s ministry is described as one of “bringing many sons to *glory*,” and Peter speaks of our remaining faithful to God so “when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive *the crown of glory* that does not fade away” (1 Peter 5:4).

And as we might expect, God the Father is the member of the God family who oversees not only our calling (John 6:44) but also our glorification. Paul explains: “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He

foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also *glorified*” (Romans 8:28-30).

In this passage we see God the Father and the Son calling and working with humans so they can be added to the family of God. Since all humans are made in God’s image, God “desires all men to be saved” and is “not willing that any should perish” (1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9). This is who God is and what His plan is for humanity.

For further study, see [“How to Become a Child of God”](#) and [“Children of God.”](#)

How should we respond?

We have now seen how God is revealed in the Bible and His astounding purpose for mankind. God’s plan for us is truly one of love and compassion that is sure to be fulfilled. As the psalmist notes: “The Lord’s purpose is eternal, the designs of his heart go on through all the generations of man” (Psalm 33:11, Bible in Basic English).

Perhaps this is why John, the apostle who had a special relationship with Christ and who reveals in his writings so much of what God is like, says simply: “God is love” (1 John 4:8).

Our Creator wants us to respond to Him with love just as He demonstrated His love for us by allowing Christ to die for us “while we were still sinners” (Romans 5:8).

And how do we love God?

The apostle John answers: “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome” (1 John 5:3). Starting to keep all of God’s commandments—including the one that tells us to rest on the Sabbath, the seventh day of the week, Saturday—is a first step in this process.

John further explains: “And everyone who has this hope in Him [of becoming part of the God family] purifies himself, just as He [God] is pure” (1 John 3:3). Paul words this concept similarly, encouraging the Thessalonians to “walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory” (1 Thessalonians 2:12).

When we repent of our sins and start living by God’s commands, God is there to help us and encourage us, similar to the way a human father can lovingly

encourage his child. Those of us who are part of the Church of God, a Worldwide Association, are also willing to assist you in your quest to fulfill the destiny God desires for you.

If you begin attending Sabbath services in one of our congregations, you will hear the timeless truth of first-century Christianity as opposed to the traditions and ideas of men. At our services you will also be able to speak with a trained minister, who can answer your biblical questions and suggest additional resources to help you grow in your spiritual understanding.

We suggest you begin or enhance your relationship with God by reading the article “[The 10 Commandments for Today](#)” and the articles associated with it, by subscribing to our free magazine titled *Discern*, and by attending a [congregation](#) of the Church of God, a Worldwide Association, near you.

Having a knowledge of God and His plan for mankind is of little value unless we respond to our loving Creator. As James writes: “You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble!” (James 2:19). Hearing and knowing is not enough. We have to be “doers” (Romans 2:13; James 1:22).

Paul writes that God “will render to each one according to his deeds” (Romans 2:6). Then Paul lists the two possible judgments we can receive: “Eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath” (verses 7-8).

We in the Church of God, a Worldwide Association, hope you will be among those who repent and seek God’s forgiveness and help—who change their lives and gratefully receive glory, honor and immortality as children of God. Let us know how we can help.



You really can experience
the life God wants you to
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LifeHopeandTruth.com exists to fill a critical void in this world: the lack of understanding about the purpose of life, the lack of realistic hope for a better future and the lack of truth!

Neither religion nor science has satisfactorily addressed these issues, so people today are of divided opinions, confused or, worst of all, don't care anymore. The ancient words of the prophet Isaiah ring so true today: "Truth is fallen in the street." Why? Is it because God was right when He warned that humans are inclined to reject Him and usually choose not to know Him?

We are here for people who are searching for answers, who are ready to prove all things or who are hungry for more than what they've been taught most of their lives about God, the Bible, the meaning of life and how to live. We want to help you truly understand the good news of the gospel and fulfill Jesus Christ's admonition to "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness."

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