

Who Is
GOD?

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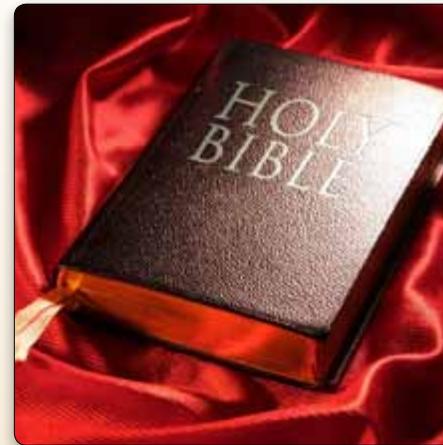
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Introduction

"One of the fundamental questions of the Hebrew religion is, 'Who is really God?'"—Helmer Ringgren, Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament

Most people have their own distinctive opinions of a Supreme Being. But where do these impressions come from? Many are simply reflections of how people perceive God. As a consequence the word *God* has come to embody a spectrum of meanings, many of them quite foreign to the Bible.

But which meaning is the true one? How does the Creator reveal Himself to man?



In contrast to many human assumptions, the Bible communicates a true picture of God.

The answer is, of course, a matter of debate. But we will state unequivocally here that the principal way God reveals Himself is through His Word, the Bible (for proof of its authenticity, download or request our free booklet *Is the Bible True?*). The Bible is a book about God and His relationship with human beings. The Scriptures contain a long history of God's revelation of Himself to man—from the first man Adam to the prophet and law-giver Moses down through the apostles of Jesus and the early Church.

In contrast to many human assumptions, the Bible communicates a true picture of God. This remarkable book reveals what He is like, what He has done and what He expects of us. It tells us why we are here and reveals His little-understood plan for His creation. This handbook of basic knowledge is fundamentally different from any other source of information. It is genuinely unique because it contains, in many ways, the very signature of the Almighty.

The Creator tells us in His Word, "I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand'" (Isaiah 46:9-10). He tells us that He alone not only foretells the future but can bring it to pass. What a powerful testimony to the mighty God of the Bible!

But, great as He is, God is not unapproachable. He is not beyond our reach. We *can* come to know this magnificent being!

As noted author Karen Armstrong observed: “Throughout history, men and women have experienced a dimension of the spirit that seems to transcend the mundane world. Indeed, it is an arresting characteristic of the human mind to be able to conceive concepts that go beyond it in this way” (*A History of God*, 1992, p. xxi).

She expressed our innate longing to know and understand things beyond our physical senses. We want to know why we are here, what our purpose is, whether some sort of higher power works in our lives and the world around us.

Inspired by God working through His Holy Spirit, the Bible itself gives us the master key to knowing Him: “Scripture speaks of ‘things beyond our seeing, things beyond our hearing, things beyond our imagining, all prepared by God for those who love him’; and these are what God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit explores everything, *even the depths of God’s own nature*” (1 Corinthians 2:9-10, Revised English Bible, emphasis added throughout).

We need to know—from inspired Scripture itself—who God is and how He relates to and reveals Himself to us. We need to understand the very nature of our Creator—to know, in the words of Albert Einstein, “the mind of God.” That, in a nutshell, is the purpose of this booklet. (The even more fundamental question of God’s existence is addressed in depth in

our free booklets *Life’s Ultimate Question: Does God Exist?* and *Creation or Evolution: Does It Really Matter What You Believe?*)

Never has humanity so desperately needed true knowledge about God. One writer aptly described our world as “crowded with bewildered souls: jaded, adrift men and women desperately looking for hope.” Our Creator wants us to understand Him much better so we can have hope and confidence in the truthfulness of His Word, which describes His plan and purpose for humanity.

Let’s begin our study by seeing what Scripture reveals about the glory and magnificence of God. This provides us with the proper background—the right attitude and approach—to comprehending the majestic nature of our Creator.



“Throughout history, men and women have experienced a dimension of the spirit that seems to transcend the mundane world.”

The Grandeur of Almighty God

“Thus says the High and Lofty One who inhabits eternity . . .” (Isaiah 57:15).

In this ungodly, secular age many people—even professing Christians—seem to have lost sight of the divine majesty of God. Many behave with unrecognized shallowness and irreverence, lacking respect for our Creator. It seems His name is uttered more often in profanity than in respect.

But what about those who have glimpsed the majesty of God? How have *they* reacted? Scripture shows that their response has nearly always been one of *profound humility*. When the prophets of the Old Testament scriptures and the apostles of the New Testament experienced God, to a man they saw themselves as utterly inadequate in comparison.

Close encounters with the divine

The patriarch Job, for example, became acutely aware of his own profound lack of understanding when God revealed to him some aspects of the magnificence of His creation (Job 38-41). Job’s humble reaction was immediate: “Then Job answered the LORD and said: ‘I know that You can do everything, and that no purpose of Yours can be withheld from You . . . I have uttered what I did not understand . . . Listen, please, and let me speak . . . I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, *but now my eye sees You*. Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes’” (Job 42:1-6).

When Moses first met with God at the burning bush, he “hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God” (Exodus 3:6). In Joshua’s encounter with the divine, he “fell on his face to the earth and worshiped, and said to Him, ‘What does my Lord say to His servant?’” (Joshua 5:14).

In vision Isaiah saw the Lord sitting on His throne amid the angelic host (Isaiah 6:1-4). The prophet immediately reacted by lamenting, “Woe is me . . . because I am a man of unclean lips, . . . for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts” (verse 5).

When Ezekiel saw “the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD,” he, like Joshua and many others, fell down on his face (Ezekiel 1:28). Experiencing firsthand the revealed majesty of God’s splendor instantly humbled these prophets and patriarchs of old. Theirs were dramatic, life-changing experiences.

The New Testament reveals the great God of the universe in the person of Jesus Christ. On the momentous occasions when Christ’s disciples caught a

glimpse of God's majestic powers as revealed through Jesus' miracles, their reactions reflected an awesome encounter with an unseen and powerful world far different from ours.

On one occasion Peter and the others had caught nothing after an entire night of fishing. Yet when Christ told them to drop their nets in a different spot, they suddenly caught so many fish that their nets began to break and their boats started to sink (Luke 5:4-7).

Peter was overwhelmed. "He fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, 'Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!'" (verse 8, New Revised Standard Version).

Later, Peter—along with James and John—briefly witnessed a preview of eternal life in the Kingdom of God. God afforded them the marvelous opportunity to see a vision of Christ transfigured in glory with Elijah and Moses. When they heard a voice from heaven, they reacted by falling on their faces. They were "greatly afraid" (Matthew 17:6).

Many years later, when the apostle John wrote the book of Revelation, he reacted to his vision of the resurrected, glorified Christ by falling "at His feet as though dead" (Revelation 1:17, NRSV).

At one point in his ministry, the apostle Paul reported that in vision he "was caught up into Paradise and heard things that are not to be told, that no mortal is permitted to repeat" (2 Corinthians 12:4, NRSV). He, too, was filled with awe.

Understanding the natural human reaction to such circumstances, God often encouraged His servants to not be afraid. Each of these men glimpsed the glory of God and was awestruck by His grandeur.

Our thoughts of God

Do we perceive God as these men did? Do we realize with Solomon that we dwell on earth while God is in heaven (Ecclesiastes 5:1-2) and that we should pay proper respect to God, speaking His name with dignity, realizing that He knows exactly what we do and that He will ultimately hold us accountable? (2 Corinthians 5:9-10).

Do we have the apostle Paul's attitude when he described the Lord to the young evangelist Timothy? ". . . He who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom be honor and everlasting power" (1 Timothy 6:15-16).

The awesome glory of God the Father and Jesus Christ far exceed anything we can even imagine. Realizing this should lead us to a profound sense of wonder and humility!

The Personal Nature of God

"God was a somewhat shadowy figure, defined in intellectual abstractions rather than images."—Karen Armstrong, *A History of God*

Has God always existed? If not, who created God? Is God one person, two or three? What did Jesus reveal to us about the nature of God when He continually referred to a being He called "the Father"? The answers will become evident as we progress through the Scriptures.

The first major point we need to understand is that, as stated earlier, God reveals Himself through His Word. The Creator wants men and women to understand Him as He reveals Himself in the Holy Scriptures. It's important that we carefully consider this truth.

In the Bible's first book we find a vital point regarding God's nature. Genesis 1 records many creative acts of God before He created mankind. But notice verse 26: "Then God said, 'Let *Us* make man *in Our image*, according to *Our likeness*.'"

Nowhere in the previous verses of Genesis did God use this phrase, "Let *Us* . . ." Why does Genesis now use this plural expression? Why have Bible translators down through the centuries understood that the *plural* was necessary in this verse?

Who is the *Us* mentioned here, and why is the plural *Our* also used twice in this sentence? Throughout the first chapter of Genesis the Hebrew word translated "God" is *Elohim*, a *plural* noun denoting more than one entity. Why did our Creator purposefully use these plural expressions? Is God more than one person? Who and what is He? How can we understand?

The Bible interprets the Bible

One of the most fundamental principles to keep in mind regarding proper understanding of God's Word is simply this: *The Bible interprets the Bible*. We often must look elsewhere in the Scriptures to see more light regarding the meaning of a particular passage. The New Testament sheds much light on the Old, and vice versa.

We can understand Genesis 1:26 much better in the light of some of the writings of the apostle John. He begins his biography of Jesus Christ by stating: "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).

If you are *with* someone, then you are *other than* and distinct from that person.

John clearly describes *two* divine beings in this passage.

In one sense we could refer to John 1:1 as the real beginning of the Bible. It describes the nature of God as Creator even before the beginning depicted in Genesis 1:1. As *The New Bible Commentary: Revised* states, “John’s distinctive contribution is to show that *before* the Creation the Word existed” (1970, p. 930).

Consider carefully the context of this crucial chapter of John. Verse 14 explains exactly who this Word actually became: “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.” The Word was conceived in the flesh as a physical human being—Jesus Christ. Although fully human, Christ perfectly reflected God’s divine character.

The Word of life

Here, then, we have *two* great personages, two uncreated, eternal beings—God and the Word, both divine—presiding over the creation. As the late British theologian F.F. Bruce commented 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). This Word was and is God along *with* the Father.

Later, in his first epistle, John adds to our understanding: “That which was from the beginning, which we

The One who became Jesus Christ, declared to be on the same plane of existence as God the Father, was born as a human being and perceived by and through the physical senses of human beings.

have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life” (1 John 1:1, New International Version). Here that same “Word” (Jesus Christ) of John’s Gospel account is called “the Word of life.”

It’s easy to overlook the importance of this crucial verse and read right over its enormous significance. The One who became Jesus Christ, declared to be on the same plane of existence as God the Father, was born as a human being and perceived by and through the physical senses of human beings—particularly of His early inner core of disciples, including the one who wrote these words, John. These men became Christ’s apostles—His emissaries—and were special witnesses of His resurrection.

John wrote that the Word, who was with God from the beginning, lived among them in the human flesh. Although He was born a physical human being, the disciples actually saw, touched, conversed with and listened to One who was, as will become increasingly clearer, a member of the *divine family*.

John continues: “The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you *the eternal life*, which was *with the Father* and *has appeared to us*” (verse 2, NIV). “The Word of life” in 1 John 1:1 is called “the eternal life” in verse 2.

John goes on to say: “We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is *with the Father* and *with his Son, Jesus Christ*” (verse 3, NIV). The Holy Scriptures reveal that God the Father and Jesus Christ form *a divine family*.

They have a distinct and loving family relationship. Addressing the Father, Jesus said, “You loved me *before the world began*” (John 17:24, REB). He refers here not to our limited human love but to the divine love of the heavenly realm.

Christ the Creator

Not only did the apostle John write the fourth Gospel account and three epistles preserved in the New Testament, but he also penned the book of Revelation. It was here, in the message to the seven churches of Revelation, that Jesus clearly identified Himself as the beginner or source of God’s creation. “These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, *the source* of God’s creation” (Revelation 3:14, REB).

Jesus not only died for our sins so we could be reconciled to the Father, but He is *our Creator*. The apostle Paul plainly tells us that “God . . . created all things *through Jesus Christ*” (Ephesians 3:9).

In Colossians 1:16 Paul further writes: “For by Him [Christ] all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created *through Him* and *for Him*.”

This passage is all-encompassing. Jesus created “all things . . . that are in heaven”—the entire angelic kingdom, which includes an innumerable number of angels—and the whole universe, including planet earth. Many people do not grasp the clear biblical fact that Jesus Christ is our Creator!

The book of Hebrews affirms this wonderful truth as well, stating that God the Father “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 1:2). The abundant witness of the New Testament Scriptures shows that God the Father created everything *through* the Word—the One who later became Jesus Christ. Thus, both divine beings were intimately involved in the creation.

The book of Hebrews presents Christ as the being through whom the Father brought the world of space and time into existence, and who “sustain[s] all things by his powerful word” (verse 3, NRSV). Scripture, therefore, reveals that Jesus not only *created* the universe, but He also *sustains* it.

Submission to the Father

However, Jesus was willing to voluntarily surrender His godly power and position for our sakes. The apostle Paul tells us: “Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped [i.e., not let go of], but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to

death—even death on a cross!” (Philippians 2:5-8, NIV).

After Jesus had been sacrificed for our sins and then restored to eternal life, He “sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high [that is, the Father]” (Hebrews 1:3). After He had directly experienced what it was like to be a flesh-and-blood human being, Christ returned to the Father’s throne—His previous habitation throughout all past eternity.

Remember His words just before His impending death and resurrection: “And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You *before the world was*” (John 17:5). In this passage Jesus talks of a time even before the creation account of Genesis 1:1, when these two divine beings were together.

Of course, then and always, the Father is supreme. Christ’s *equality* with the Father is in the sense of sharing the same level of existence, both of them being God. It does not mean, as some maintain, that the two are equal in authority—for Scripture clearly shows that Christ is subordinate to the Father.

The 15th chapter of 1 Corinthians is often rightly called the resurrection chapter. It tells us that everyone in God’s future Kingdom will be subject to Christ, the Father being the only exception: “It is evident that He [the Father] who put all things under Him [the Son] is excepted. Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all” (verses 27-28).

Earlier in 1 Corinthians, Paul clearly states that “the head of Christ is God” (11:3). In both passages Paul describes two individual divine beings, with Jesus being subject to God the Father. In fact, Christ Himself said, “My Father is greater than I” (John 14:28) and “My Father . . . is greater than all” (John 10:29). God the Father is thus the undisputed Head of the family.

A Family Relationship

“I will be to Him a Father, and He shall be to Me a Son” (Hebrews 1:5).

About one third of the New Testament consists of quotations from and obvious allusions to the Old Testament. These references are *not* random or accidental. Each holds meaning for us and has a reason for being there. Some of the most remarkable and illuminating references in helping us understand God are found in the books of Hebrews and Acts. The early chapters of Acts show the apostle Peter quoting passages from the Psalms to illustrate the awesome significance of the resurrection and messiahship of Jesus. The writer of Hebrews does the same in chapters 1 and 2 of that epistle.



The Scriptures reveal God in terms of a family relationship—God the Father and Jesus the Son are together the God family!

These key passages in the Psalms contain the sure testimony of the Father concerning His Son, Jesus of Nazareth. In them we find that God the Father testified in advance of the Word’s awesome future role.

The writer of Hebrews quotes Psalm 2: “For to which of the angels did He ever say: ‘You are My Son, today I have begotten you’? And again: ‘I will be to Him a Father, and

He shall be to Me a Son’?” (Hebrews 1:5; compare Psalm 2:7; 1 Chronicles 17:13). This was the prophetic destiny of the Word.

Psalm 45:6 also shows the Father testifying about the Son, as Hebrews 1:8 explains in quoting it: “But to the Son He says: ‘Your throne, *O God*, is forever and ever; a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom.’”

Many who’ve read this chapter of Hebrews read right over this verse, failing to grasp its enormous import. The Father called His Son, Jesus Christ, *God*. Christ is not only the Son of God. He *is* God! He is a member of the *family of God*. The Scriptures reveal God in terms of a *family relationship*—God the

Father and Jesus the Son are together the God family!

We earlier saw from John 1:14 that the Word, Jesus Christ, “became flesh and dwelt among us . . . as of the only begotten of the Father.” The Greek word *monogenees*, translated “only begotten” in this verse and verse 18, confirms the family relationship between God the Father and the One who became Jesus Christ.

Dr. Spiros Zodhiates, author of several books on the Greek language as used in the Bible, 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* . . .” (*Was Christ God? A Defense of the Deity of Christ*, 1998, p. 21, emphasis added).

The Family of God

The Father and Jesus have, from the beginning, planned to increase Their kind. The “God kind” is a family! It is headed by the Father and now consists of the Father and the Son, Jesus Christ. Ephesians 3:14-15 mentions “the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom *the whole family* in heaven and earth is named.”

The Father and Christ existed from the beginning and always will exist. It is Their plan and desire to add to Their kind—“bringing many sons to glory” (Hebrews 2:10). Just as all life was made to reproduce after its own kind as stated throughout Genesis 1, so God patterned man after the God kind. This is the ultimate meaning of verse 26, where God says, “Let Us make man *in Our image, according to Our likeness*.”

This is a two-stage process. First, God made man physical, of the dust of the earth. Then, through conversion and faith in Christ and obedience to God’s spiritual law of love, each person becomes spiritually a “new creation” (2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 4:24). This leads to the final birth of new children into the divine family, who are then “like” Christ, Himself the *firstborn* Son of God (Romans

8:29; Galatians 4:19; 1 John 3:2).

Indeed, just as human children are the same kind of beings as their parents (that is, *human* beings), so will God’s children be the same kind of beings as the Father and Christ (that is, *divine* beings). This is the awesome destiny of mankind! The God family will expand through God’s wonderful plan as revealed in His Word.

All children of this family—including Christ, who has always been with the One whom Christ revealed as “the Father” (John 1:18; Matthew 11:27)—will forever in the future willingly be under the ultimate sovereignty and leadership of the Father (1 Corinthians 15:28). Led by the Father and Christ, the members of this divine family will share a glorious and righteous eternity into the future.

This, then, is the sense in which God is a family—indeed a *growing* family, presently comprising two divine beings, the Father and Christ the firstborn, yet ultimately to be joined by a vast multitude of others.

For more details on God’s intention to make human beings part of His divine family, request or download our free booklet *What Is Your Destiny?*

Who Was David’s Lord?

At this juncture, we should consider that King David of Israel, who wrote many of the psalms, including probably Psalm 2, quoted above, was also a prophet (Acts 2:30). God gave him incredible insights into the nature of God and God’s rule over all creation. David is called “the man whom God exalted, the anointed of the God of Jacob, the favorite of the Strong One of Israel” (2 Samuel 23:1, NRSV).

Here was a man truly inspired by God’s Spirit. “The Spirit of the LORD spoke by me,” he said, “and His word was on my tongue” (verse 2). Our Creator revealed many truths through David and saw to it that his words were preserved in the Holy Scriptures—primarily in many of the psalms but also in the books of Samuel, Kings and Chronicles.

In one of the psalms specifically identified as having been written by David, he said, “The LORD said to my Lord, ‘Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool’” (Psalm 110:1). Says *The New Bible Commentary: Revised* about a reference to Jesus as “our Lord” in Hebrews 7:14: “Note the striking description of Jesus as *our Lord*. It corresponds here to the thought of Psalm 110:1, in which David called Him, ‘My Lord’” (1970, p. 1203).

In this remarkable psalm, the Father is talking to the Son in prophetic vision—“The LORD said to my [David’s] Lord . . .”

About 1,000 years later, Jesus Himself stumped the religious leaders of His day with this passage. They understood David’s immediate Lord here to be a prophecy of the Messiah—the Christ—a preeminent king descended from David and ruling as God’s representative. But why would David’s descendant be his Lord? Notice the conversation:

“While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, saying, ‘What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He?’ They said to Him, ‘The Son of David.’ He said to them, ‘How then does David in the Spirit call Him “Lord,” saying: “The LORD said to my Lord, ‘Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool’”? If David then calls Him “Lord,” how is He his Son?’ And no one was able to answer Him a word, nor from that day on did anyone dare question Him anymore” (Matthew 22:41-46).

Typically an ancestral father would be in the position of Lord over His descendants—not the other way around. It makes sense when we realize that the One who would be born as David’s descendant was already existent as David’s divine Lord, who was Himself subject to God the Father.

The apostle Peter confirms the identity of these two beings: “For David did not ascend into the heavens [he was buried after his death and still awaits the resurrection], but he says himself: ‘The LORD said to my Lord, “Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool’”” (Acts 2:34-35).

Remember this important rule for biblical understanding: *Examine the context*. Verse 36 explicitly identifies these two beings: “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God [the Father] has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.” How wonderfully clear! These crucial passages are talking

prophetically about the two members of the divine family—the Father and the Son.

A governing kingdom

Another Old Testament book likewise confirms the existence of two divine beings. The prophet Daniel, a faithful man of God, gives us an insightful look into the heavenly realm. Although God is spirit (John 4:24), which is normally invisible to the human eye (Colossians 1:15), the prophet was permitted to see these two beings in his mind. As the apostle John would several centuries later, Daniel received a vision of events in the spirit realm.

“I watched till thrones were put in place, and the Ancient of Days was seated; His garment was white as snow, and the hair of His head was like pure wool” (Daniel 7:9). Daniel records a striking description of the Father. Just as Jesus later revealed, God the Father, while a spirit being, nevertheless has form and shape (John 5:37).

The Kingdom of God ultimately denotes a level of existence to which human beings may be raised through a transformation from flesh to spirit.

Daniel also saw a large and faithful angelic host constantly serving the Father. “A thousand thousands ministered to Him; ten thousand times

ten thousand stood before Him” (Daniel 7:10). Angels are spirit beings too (Hebrews 1:7), and they are also portrayed with form and shape. We will see more about spirit beings having bodily form later.

Daniel continues: “I was watching in the night visions, and behold, One like *the Son of Man*, coming with the clouds of heaven! He [the Son of Man] came to the Ancient of Days [God the Father], and they [the angelic host] brought Him near before Him” (Daniel 7:13). Time and time again in the New Testament, Jesus called Himself “the Son of Man.”

Continuing, just like in Hebrews 1:8, Jesus is described in Daniel as possessing a kingdom: “Then to Him was given dominion [rule] and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him” (Daniel 7:14).

In the New Testament, Revelation 20:4-6 pictures the Millennium, the first 1,000 years of the utopian rule of Christ and His saints. Daniel, too, describes Jesus’ Kingdom: “His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed” (Daniel 7:14).

Christ’s righteous reign will continue far beyond the bounds of the Millennium. Isaiah 9:6-7 tells us it will last forever. Indeed, the Kingdom of God ultimately denotes a level of existence to which human beings may be raised through a transformation from flesh to spirit (compare John 3:3-8; 1 Corinthians 15:50-51).

This transformation entails becoming a glorified member of the family of God. Thus the God *family* is also the ruling God *Kingdom*—the Kingdom of God. (You can learn more by requesting our free booklets *What Is Your Destiny?* and *The Gospel of the Kingdom*. Visit our Web site at www.GNmagazine.org/booklets or contact any of our offices listed at the end of this booklet for your free copies.)

How Is God One?

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!” (Deuteronomy 6:4).

The Bible makes it abundantly clear that there is only one God. As commonly translated, Jesus quotes Moses in saying, “Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one” (Mark 12:29; compare Deuteronomy 6:4). Paul tells us that “there is no other God but one” (1 Corinthians 8:4) and that “there is one God” (1 Timothy 2:5).

The Bible also tells us that all other supposed gods are idols—figments of man’s own imagination gone awry. Throughout history man has created many false gods. It is with this contrast in mind that we should approach Deuteronomy 6:4 as it is typically rendered—“the LORD is one.” (For more on this wording, read “The LORD Our God, the LORD Is One” beginning on page 18.)

Many do not fully comprehend how the Bible uses numbers. This factor contributes to considerable confusion about God.

How should we understand the oneness of God? As well as the usual straightforward use of numbering, the concept of complete unity is associated with the Hebrew word translated “one” in Deuteronomy 6:4 and other verses.

Two become one

Let’s go back to the first book of the Bible, Genesis. There, after the creation of Adam and Eve, we see the institution of the marriage relationship: “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become *one flesh*” (Genesis 2:24). A couple becomes “one flesh” in a marital sexual union. But there is another important metaphorical meaning as well. Though two separate and distinct beings, in this context the two become one.

Some 4,000 years later Jesus reiterated this concept when He said, regarding marriage, that “‘the two shall become one flesh’; *so then they are no longer two, but one flesh*. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate” (Mark 10:8-9). In marriage the two become one when joined in sexual union and in the covenant relationship they share. But they still remain two separate individuals, still one male *and* one female—joined together in marriage as one family unit.

Of course, this oneness is not complete or total. Yet in a physical sense an obvious oneness is reached when man and woman come together at the moment of conceiving a child. As one science book put it: “Human life begins in . . . cooperation of the most intimate sort. The two cells wholly merge. They combine their genetic material. Two very different beings become one. The act of making a human being involves . . . cooperation so perfect that the partners’ separate

identities vanish” (Carl Sagan and Ann Druyan, *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors*, 1992, p. 199).

The separate DNA substances of two distinct human beings combine at conception to form a new, *unique* human being, one different from all other persons.

How wonderful are the things of God! How sublime are His purposes for the human family. Understanding marriage and the family helps us grasp aspects of the Kingdom of God. (To learn more, be sure to request or download our free booklet *Marriage and Family: The Missing Dimension*.)

One Church but many members

Continuing with our study of the biblical use of numbers, Paul wrote that “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). That is, these social distinctions would not divide God’s people. They were to be at one—in unity with each other.

There is one Church, said Paul, but composed of many individual members possessing various spiritual gifts and talents. As he later explained to the Christians in the city of Corinth: “There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all” (1 Corinthians 12:4-6).

Paul spent considerable effort to get this simple point across. He continues in verse 12: “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.” Here Paul compares the Church to the human body.

Next he reminds us in principle of what he had earlier written in Galatians 3:28, which we just read, stating, “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:13).

The Church is the spiritual body of Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:22-23). So that we fully understand, Paul then repeats Himself by continuing in 1 Corinthians 12 to compare the Church to the human body, which likewise has many members performing different functions: “For in fact the [human] body is not one member, but many . . . But now indeed *there are many members, yet one body*” (verses 14, 20)—that is, there are many Church members but one Church.

Finally, in verse 27, he makes this basic point yet again: “Now you are the [one] body of Christ and *individually* [different] members of it” (verse 27, NRSV). In that sense the divine family is similar: one God and only one God, yet two individual glorious family members now constituting that one God—plus many more members yet to be glorified among mankind (Romans 8:29).

Paul also wrote in another context, “For this reason I kneel before the Father, *from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name*” (Ephesians 3:14-15, NIV). Although there is only one family, there are many members. Truly converted Christians, led by God’s Spirit, are already counted as members of the family (Romans 8:14; 1 John 3:1-2), even though they have

not yet received glorification and immortality in the resurrection to eternal life, which will take place at Christ’s return (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

Elsewhere Paul tells us that “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Corinthians 15:50). We must be changed at the time of the resurrection (verses 51-54; Philippians 3:20-21). God will accomplish that in due course—provided we have overcome and developed righteous, godly character (Revelation 2:26; 3:21; 21:7-8).

One Church, one God

In John 17 Jesus prayed to the Father, “And this is eternal life, that they



There is one Church, said Paul, but composed of many individual members possessing various spiritual gifts and talents.

[Christ’s disciples] may know You, *the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent*” (verse 3). Jesus thus distinguishes between God the Father and Himself. They are not the same being. Nevertheless, They share perfect union and oneness.

Continuing in this incredible prayer spoken shortly before His crucifixion, Christ said regarding His followers, “Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that *they may be one, as we are one*” (verse 11, NRSV). Earlier He had said, “I and My Father are one” (John 10:30).

You need to grasp this enormously important point. The Church is to be one *just as* God the Father and Jesus Christ are one. That’s quite a tall order! The various members should be unified with each other just as Christ and the Father are in perfect union. Although we have to realistically admit that this has rarely been the case in church history, God expects us to strive for that spiritual unity.

The members of the true Church of God are all to be joined together by the *Spirit* of God (1 Corinthians 12:13)—*living* by that Spirit. It is every individual’s responsibility to seek out the organized fellowship that best represents the biblical model of the New Testament Church. (For further understanding, please request or download our free booklet *The Church Jesus Built*.)

We see, then, that the Father and Jesus Christ are also one in the same sense that Jesus prayed for the Church to be one—one in purpose, belief, direction, faith, spirit and attitude—joined together by the Holy Spirit.

Consider the additional insight Jesus gives us in His prayer in John 17: “I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; 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. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one” (verses 20-23).

This spiritual oneness, this unity between and among all truly converted Christians, can be accomplished only through God’s Spirit working in them. Their unity through the Holy Spirit should reflect the perfect unity—the oneness

—of God the Father and Jesus Christ the Son.

Another biblical example of oneness

Christ tells us we are to live “by every word of God” (Luke 4:4). Before any of the books of the New Testament were written, the Hebrew Scriptures—what we call the Old Testament—were the only recorded “word of God” available.

“The LORD Our God, the LORD Is One”

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!” This simple declaration by Moses in Deuteronomy 6:4, beginning what is now commonly referred to as the Shema (pronounced *sh’MAH*, Hebrew for “Hear”), has caused considerable consternation to many who try to understand who and what God is.

Reading here that God is one, most Jews for centuries have ruled out the possibility that Jesus of Nazareth could be the Son of God, on the same divine plane as God the Father.

Early Catholic theologians, reading the same verse, struggled to formulate in the doctrine of the Trinity a God consisting of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, with these being distinct persons yet at the same time a single triune God.

How, then, should we understand this verse?

One of the primary principles for understanding the Bible is that we must consider all the scriptures on a subject. Only then will we come to a complete and accurate understanding of the matter.

Other biblical passages clearly tell us that two distinct individuals, the Father and Jesus Christ the Son, are both God (Hebrews 1:8; John 1:1, 14). Therefore we should consider whether the Shema is commenting on the numerical oneness of God, or something else entirely.

The Hebrew word translated “one” in Deuteronomy 6:4 is *echad*. Its meanings include the number *one*, but also such associated meanings as “one and the same,” “as one man, together [unified],” “each, every,” “one after another” and “first [in sequence or importance]” (Brown,

Driver and Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 1951, p. 25). It can also be rendered “alone,” as the New Revised Standard Version translates it here (William Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 1972, p. 9). The exact meaning is best determined by context.

In this case, several interpretations could be both grammatically correct and consistent with other biblical statements.

In the Shema Moses may have simply been telling the Israelites that the true God, their God, was to be *first*—the highest priority—in their hearts and minds. The young nation had risen from slavery in a culture in which the Egyptians deified many gods, and they were poised to enter a land whose inhabitants were steeped in worship of many supposed gods and goddesses of fertility, rain, war, journeys, etc. Through Moses, God sternly warned the Israelites of the dangers of abandoning Him to follow other gods.

This interpretation—that God is to be the Israelites’ first priority—has support in the context. In the very next verse Moses continues, “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.”

This passage is at the heart of a several-chapters-long discussion of the benefits and blessings of wholeheartedly following God and avoiding the idolatrous practices of the people who were to be driven out of the Promised Land. Jesus Himself quoted Deuteronomy 6:4-5 as the “first and great commandment” in the law (Matthew

22:36-38; Mark 12:28-30).

The translation “alone” fits this context as well. That is, the true God alone was to be Israel’s God; the Israelites were to have no other.

This may be how a scribe who heard Jesus quote the verse in Mark 12:29-30 understood it. The scribe responded in verse 32 (NRSV): “You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that ‘he is one [Greek *heis*, which corresponds to *echad* in its multiple meanings], and *besides him there is no other*’”—which seems to indicate that this is what he understood the word rendered “one” to mean in the expression (in essence, “alone”).

This would not rule out Christ from being God along with the Father. Rather, there is no other God apart from the true God—that is, outside the God family now consisting of two divine beings, the Father and the Son. In short, the God family alone is God.

Another view of the Shema is based on the root word from which *echad* is derived—*achad*. This word means “to unify” or “go one way or other” (*Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*). In other words, *echad* can also mean in unity or a group united as one.

In several verses *echad* clearly has the meaning of more than one person united as a group. In Genesis 11:6 God says of those building the tower of Babel, “Indeed the people are one [*echad*] . . .” In Genesis 2:24 He says, “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one [*echad*] flesh.”

When we read of a large group of people being one or a man and wife becoming one flesh in marital union, we understand that multiple individuals are involved. We do not assume that separate individuals, though united in spirit and purpose, have physically merged to become a single being.

God the Father and Jesus Christ the Son are clearly of one mind and purpose. Jesus said of His mission, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work” and “I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me” (John 4:34; 5:30).

Describing Their relationship, Jesus said, “I and My Father are one” (John 10:30). Christ prayed that His followers, both then and in the future, would be unified in mind and purpose just as He and the Father were. “I do not pray for these [disciples] alone,” He said, “but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; *that they all may be one*, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; *that they also may be one in Us*” (John 17:20-21). Further exposition on God’s oneness, in the sense of unity, may be found throughout this chapter of the booklet.

No matter which translation we accept—whether “The LORD our God, the LORD is first,” “The LORD is our God, the LORD alone,” or “The LORD our God, the LORD is one [in unity]”—none limits God to a singular being. And in light of these scriptures we’ve seen and others, it is clear that God is a plurality of beings—a plurality in unity. In other words, God the Father and Jesus the Son form a family perfectly united as one.

Often the Old Testament can clear our foggy vision and help us understand the spiritual intent of the New. After all, we should understand that *all* the books of the Bible are the revealed Word of God, and all increase our understanding (2 Timothy 3:16).

Consider a seldom-read passage back in the book of Judges that illustrates how oneness can mean unity: “So all the children of Israel came out, from Dan to Beersheba, as well as from the land of Gilead, and the congregation gathered

together *as one man* before the LORD at Mizpah” (Judges 20:1).

For once, the entire nation of Israel was wholly unified in purpose to meet a serious

Scripture reveals two separate, distinct persons, both spirit, yet one in unity, belief, direction and purpose—members of the same divine family.

problem affecting the whole country. The expression “as one man” is used to convey the point that the nation was fully united at that particular time.

Verses 8 and 11 emphasize the point: “So all the people arose as one man . . . So all the men of Israel were gathered against the city, united together as one man.” Of course, they still remained *many individual citizens* of the same nation. So again, the Bible itself sheds light on the meaning of oneness.

Comprehending God’s oneness

Scripture reveals two separate, distinct persons, both spirit, yet one in unity, belief, direction and purpose—members of the same divine family. “I and My Father are one,” said Jesus (John 10:30).

When we understand what the Bible teaches, we see that there is only *one* God, just as there is only one human race—one extended family descended from Adam of nearly 7 billion individuals. Just the same, the one divine family—the family of God—is open to an unlimited number of members.

The traditional human family is a microcosm of that one great divine family (compare Romans 1:20). If we comprehend this marvelous, wondrous biblical principle, we should be reflecting our ultimate destiny in our marriages, other family relationships and everyday lives. We should strive to reflect the love and unity of the divine family—God the Father and His Son Jesus—in our human families.

Who Was Jesus?

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1).

Except perhaps for the book of Hebrews, the Gospel of John gives the most complete explanation in the New Testament about the divinity of Jesus Christ. As previously noted, verses 1-3 and 14 of John 1 clearly explain that the Word was God and dwelt with the Father until He later became the *Messiah* or *Christ*, meaning “Anointed One.”

As British scholar F.F. Bruce commented regarding Jesus: “The New Testament indicates that he existed before he lived on earth as a historical character. We are thus encouraged to ask not only, ‘What was the mode of this earlier existence of his?’ . . . but also, ‘What is he said to have done in that earlier existence?’” (*Jesus Past, Present and Future: The Work of Christ*, 1979, pp. 11-12).

As *The New Bible Commentary: Revised* explains about the opening passage of John’s Gospel: “In the prologue the pre-existence and deity of Christ are expressed explicitly. The *Logos* [the Greek term rendered ‘Word’ here] was not only *with* God in the beginning, but *was* God (1:1), and it was this *Logos* who became flesh and is identified with Christ” (p. 928).

Several other passages in John’s Gospel reveal significant details that help us understand even more fully. Consider an account later in chapter 1: “The next day John [the Baptist] saw Jesus coming toward Him, and said, ‘Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is He of whom I said, “After me comes a Man who is preferred before me, for *He was before me*”’” (verses 29-30; compare verse 15).

John the Baptist was born before Jesus (Luke 1:35-36, 57-60) and began his ministry before Christ began His. Yet John still said of Jesus, “He was *before* me.” Why? Considering the whole of John 1, the reason must be that Jesus was the preexistent Word *prior* to His human birth (John 1:14).

His existence before Abraham

In dealing with accusations from the Pharisees in John 8, Jesus said to them, “Even if I bear witness of Myself, My witness is true, for I know where I came from [beside the Father in heaven] and where I am going; but you do not know where I come from and where I am going” (verse 14).

Later the apostle Paul commented on their lack of understanding: “The people of Jerusalem and their rulers did not recognize Jesus, or understand the words of the prophets which are read sabbath by sabbath; indeed, they fulfilled them by condemning him” (Acts 13:27, REB).

Just as in the first century, relatively few people today truly comprehend who Jesus was, where He came from, what He is doing and what He will yet do.

Later in John 8, the Jews gathered about Jesus asked Him, “Who do You make Yourself out to be?” (verse 53). They simply had no idea of the real identity of the One with whom they were speaking. It is the same today. Few people really understand the true origins of Jesus Christ.

He patiently explained, “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad” (verse 56). But how was this possible? The patriarch Abraham lived around 2,000 years before Jesus’ birth. So those who heard Him challenged, “You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?” (verse 57). To this question Jesus gave a stunning response: “Most assuredly, I say to you, *before Abraham was, I AM*” (verse 58).

We should pause for a moment to digest what Jesus said.

He was declaring that His existence preceded that of Abraham. Moreover, the phrase “I AM” was a well-known title of divinity to the Jews. This goes back to Moses’ first encounter with God at the burning bush.

A crucial encounter with Moses

Moses was concerned about how the Israelites would receive him and the commission God gave him, so he asked God, “Indeed, when I come to the children of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they say to me, ‘What is His name? What shall I say to them?’” (Exodus 3:13).

Observe the Creator’s reply: “And God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM.’ And He said, ‘Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you’” (Exodus 3:14).

Note also the next verse: “Moreover God said to Moses, ‘Thus you shall say to the children of Israel: “The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the

Jesus Was Sent by the Father

The preexistent Word, who later became Christ, was sent to earth by the Father in heaven. The Gospel of John bears record to this truth many times. “For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved” (John 3:17). Verse 34 adds, “For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God.”

Jesus said, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work” (John 4:34; compare John 5:30).

But where did Christ come from? The

book of John also makes this abundantly clear: “No one has ascended to heaven *but He [Christ] who came down from heaven*, that is, the Son of Man” (John 3:13). Jesus further said, “For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me” (John 6:38). And He also told people of His day: “You are from beneath [the earth]; *I am from above*. You are of this world; *I am not of this world*” (John 8:23).

Thus, Jesus was sent from the Father and returned to Him, where He now sits in glory and majesty (Hebrews 8:1; 12:2).

God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you. This is My name forever, and this is My memorial to all generations” (verse 15).

As is common throughout most English translations of the Old Testament, the word “LORD” here with capital letters is substituted for the Hebrew consonants *Y-H-W-H* (commonly known as the Tetragrammaton, meaning four letters). No one today knows for certain how to pronounce this name, but the most common pronunciation now is *Yahweh*. (A common, though errant, earlier rendering was *Jehovah*.)

The name *YHWH* is similar in meaning to “I AM” (Hebrew *EHYH* or *Eheyeh*). Both imply eternal, self-inherent existence (compare John 5:26). No one created God. We should understand that He has many names in Scripture, each of which tells us something about His wonderful, divine nature and character.

Given this background, therefore, when Jesus said in John 8:58 that He preceded Abraham and referred to Himself with continuous existence using the term “I AM,” there really should be no doubt as to just what He meant. The Jews well knew what He meant, which is why they immediately tried to stone Him to death

(verse 59). Jesus was saying that He was *the very God of Israel*.

Though God the Father is the prime mover behind the Hebrew Bible, it is through Jesus Christ that He created the universe.

Who was the God of the Old Testament?

The fact is, Jesus Christ is the “I AM” of the Bible. He was the guiding Rock who was with the children of Israel in the wilderness when they left Egypt (see Deuteronomy 32:4). Paul wrote: “Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed [accompanied] them, and *that Rock was Christ*” (1 Corinthians 10:1-4).

The “I AM” of the Old Testament is further described as abounding in “goodness and truth” (Exodus 34:6). Similarly, the New Testament tells us that Jesus was “full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). Jesus Christ is “the same yesterday, today, and *forever*” (Hebrews 13:8).



There are, it should be noted, places in the Old Testament where *YHWH* clearly refers to God the Father. For instance, in Psalm 110:1, which we've noted earlier, King David stated, "The LORD [*YHWH*] said to My Lord . . ." *YHWH* here is the Father speaking to David's Lord, the One who became Jesus Christ. Often, however, the name *YHWH* refers to the One who became Christ—and sometimes it refers to both the Father and Christ together, just as the name *God* often does.

Consider that except for Jesus, no human being has ever seen the Father (John 1:18; 5:37; 6:46; 1 John 4:12). Yet Abraham, Jacob, Moses and others all saw God (Genesis 18; 32:30; Exodus 24:9-11; 33:17-23). So the *YHWH*, the "I AM,"

A Mystery Solved: The Identity of Melchizedek

We have already seen that Jesus Christ is the mediator between God and man. His willing sacrifice for our sins uniquely qualified Him for this crucial role. Yet the preexistent Word also prefigured this sacred office during the time of the Hebrew patriarch Abraham.

He did so in the person of Melchizedek, priest of the Most High God. The book of Genesis only briefly mentions this mysterious person. But King David, and especially the New Testament book of Hebrews, does not miss His deep significance.

To understand Melchizedek's identity, we must let the Bible interpret the Bible. Our breadth of understanding is augmented enormously when we join these three accounts together and consider them as a whole.

First let's look at the Genesis account. After rescuing his nephew Lot from military capture, Abram, whose name was later changed to Abraham, encountered Melchizedek. "Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was the priest of God Most High. And he blessed him and said: 'Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High who has delivered your enemies into your hand.' And he [Abram] gave him a tithe of all" (Genesis 14:18-20).

It is interesting to note that Melchizedek greeted Abraham with bread and wine, later to become the symbols of Jesus Christ's Pass-

over sacrifice of His body and blood. Also, Melchizedek addressed God as "Possessor of heaven and earth." Around 2,000 years later, Jesus addressed the Father as "Lord of heaven and earth."

Psalm 110, one of David's psalms, is one of the most theologically significant. As pointed out in an earlier chapter of this booklet, it features both the Father and the Word in the opening verse: "The LORD said to my [David's] Lord, 'Sit at My right hand . . .'" It is Christ who now resides at the Father's right hand (Hebrews 8:1; 10:12; 12:2).

Keeping the general context of Psalm 110:1 in mind, notice verse 4: "The LORD has sworn and will not relent, 'You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.'" This is the same LORD who spoke to David's Lord (the preexistent Word) in verse 1, still speaking to the same Being. This certainly helps to indicate the identity of this mysterious Old Testament personage. Yet it is the book of Hebrews that gives us the strongest evidence.

Hebrews' commentary on Melchizedek

So important is this basic subject that one entire New Testament chapter is devoted to explaining the significance of just three verses in the book of Genesis. The topic is introduced in the last verse of Hebrews 6. The writer points

the Word, who later became Jesus Christ, was the One they saw. It was He who dealt directly with human beings as God in Old Testament times. Christ later died for our sins and became the ultimate mediator between God and man (1 Timothy 2:5), a role He had already partially fulfilled as the preexistent Word before His human birth.

So the Word was indeed the God of the Old Testament—and yet the Father fulfilled this role in a very real sense as well. For Jesus dealt with mankind on the Father's behalf as His Spokesman (compare John 8:28; 12:49-50). Moreover, in many passages in the Old Testament it can be difficult to separate these two great

out that Jesus has become "High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek," as King David foretold so long ago in Psalm 110.

Then in Hebrews 7, the author goes on to consider the amazing attributes and qualities of God's high priest of old. "For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, . . . first being translated 'king of righteousness,' and then also king of Salem, meaning 'king of peace,' . . . remains a priest continually" (verses 1-3).

Consider that Melchizedek means "King of Righteousness." It would essentially be blasphemy to apply this title to any human being because "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Only a divine Being would appropriately bear this awesome title.

Says *The New Bible Commentary: Revised*: "Note that Scripture pictures him [Melchizedek] as one who is a *king* as well as a *priest*. The combination of these two offices was to be a distinguishing characteristic of the Messiah" (1970, p. 1203, emphasis in original).

Melchizedek's next awesome title is "King of Peace." Of course, fallible human beings simply do not know the way to peace (Romans 3:10, 17), and to apply such a title to any man would, again, be virtually blasphemous. Jesus Christ Himself is the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6).

"Like the Son of God"

The equation between these two great per-

sonages becomes clearer as we read on in Hebrews 7. Verse 3 describes Melchizedek as being "without father, without mother, without genealogy, *having neither beginning of days nor end of life*, but made *like the Son of God*, [and one who] remains a priest continually." His priesthood never ceased! The only priest who could possibly have fit these qualifications was the preexistent Word, the great Being who was on hand before the very creation itself (John 1:1).

The description "without father, without mother" means far more than just the supposition that Melchizedek's family connections were simply omitted from the Genesis account. He had no physical human parents! In context, the phrase "having neither beginning of days nor end of life" makes that point crystal clear.

Finally, the phrase "*made like the Son of God*" ("bearing the likeness of the Son of God," REB) is further strong evidence of Melchizedek's identity. He was "like" the Son of God because He was not yet, in actuality, the Son of God—that is, until He was later begotten by God the Father through the agency of the Holy Spirit.

Melchizedek couldn't have been the *Father* because he was the "priest of the Most High God." He could only have been the eternal, pre-existent Word who later became Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

personages, whereas the New Testament is usually clear in this respect.

Of course, since Jesus came to reveal the Father (Matthew 11:27), the logical conclusion is that the Father was not generally known by those in Old Testament times except for a few of the Hebrew patriarchs and prophets. King David, for example, is one who understood.

Partially quoted earlier, Hebrews 1:1-2 states: “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.”

Though God the Father is the prime mover behind the Hebrew Bible, it is through Jesus Christ that He created the universe.

In this opening passage of the book of Hebrews the clear implication is that the

Father is the moving force behind the whole Old Testament. In context, verse 2 interprets verse 1. Though God the Father is the prime mover behind the Hebrew Bible, it is through Jesus Christ that He created the entire universe.

Also, the vital principle of the Bible interpreting the Bible helps us to understand the intent of Hebrews 1:1 in the light of other scriptures. Since God made the worlds through Christ and created all things by Him (Ephesians 3:9; Colossians 1:16; John 1:3), He dealt with man through the agency of the preexistent Word, Christ.

Jesus—both God and man

Jesus Christ today is the mediator between God the Father and man. But to perfectly fulfill that crucial role He had to have been both God and man. He was truly a man in every sense of that word or we have no salvation from our sins. The apostle Paul calls Him “the Man Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 2:5), as does the apostle Peter (Acts 2:22).

Paul tells us, in a verse quoted earlier from a different translation, that we should have the same humble, serving attitude of Jesus Christ, “who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped [i.e., held onto], but *emptied Himself*, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:6-8, New American Standard Bible).

Jesus’ manhood was full and complete in the sense that He lived a life as a physical human being that ended in death. He became hungry and ate, grew tired and rested, and walked and talked just like any other human being. There was nothing in His physical appearance to distinguish Him from other Jewish men of His time (Isaiah 53:2).

The essential difference was in the realm of the spiritual. Jesus continually received needed spiritual power from the Father (compare John 5:30; 14:10). In fact, He possessed God’s Spirit from conception, actually being begotten in Mary’s

womb through the Holy Spirit. Although tempted like every one of us, Jesus *never* transgressed God’s law. He never once sinned (Hebrews 4:15; 1 Peter 2:22).

One of the most insidious heresies in the 2,000-year history of Christendom is that Jesus Christ was *not* really a man—that He was *not* really tempted to sin. The apostle John condemned this teaching in the strongest terms (1 John 4:3; 2 John 7).

The Plurality of God

Throughout Scripture we come back to the reality that God has chosen to express His personal nature in terms of a family relationship. *Elohim* is the Hebrew word for God in every passage of Genesis 1 as well as in more than 2,000 places throughout the Old Testament.

Elohim is a noun that is plural in form but normally singular in usage—that is, paired with singular verbs—when designating the true God. For a comparable modern expression, consider the term *United States*. This proper noun is plural in form but singular in usage. It is used with singular verbs. For example, Americans say, “The United States *is* going to take action,” not “The United States *are* going to take action.” The plural form does signify multiple states—but, taken collectively, they are viewed as one nation.

It is the same with *Elohim*. The word *Eloah*, meaning “Mighty One,” is the singular form. *Elohim*, meaning “Mighty Ones,” is plural. And, indeed, there are two Mighty Ones, the Most High and the Word. But, collectively, as *Elohim*, the two are seen as one God. *Elohim* said, “Let *Us* make man in our image, according to *Our* likeness” (verse 26).

We should note that since *Elohim* is the name of the God family, each family member can be called by this name. (Some Bible writers also use the word *elohim* as a plural noun with plural usage to describe false gods. So one crucial factor in comprehending the meaning of this Hebrew word is determining what is intended by the context.)

When Adam and Eve made the momentous decision to disobey their Creator by eating of

the fruit God had forbidden them to eat, the divine reaction was, “Behold, the man has become like *one of Us*, to know good and evil” (Genesis 3:22). And God cut them off from the tree of life (verses 22-24).

The Hebrew word here translated “know” often means to learn or become aware of something through one’s personal experience. For Adam and Eve it was not enough to simply accept God’s command to not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. They instead chose to step into God’s place and determine for themselves what was good and what was evil. The psalmist notes that the ungodly question God’s knowledge: “And they say, ‘How does God know? And is there knowledge in the Most High?’” (Psalm 73:11).

The phrase “one of Us,” we should note, provides clear evidence that *more than one* constituted the “Us.” Moreover, to “become like one of Us” was actually our Creator’s original intention for all humanity, but it must be done *God’s* way and in *His* own time frame. That way is to submit ourselves to every word that proceeds from the mouth of God (Matthew 4:4).

Only our Creator has the right and wisdom to determine what is good and evil for us. He knows what’s best for us and never wanted us to learn what is evil through experimentation. He tells us, “The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; the statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes” (Psalm 19:7-8). He wants us to trust Him and His judgment.

This heresy began in the first century and it persists even today, continuing to lead people away from the truth of God. We need to recognize that if Jesus had not really been human, then His sacrifice for our sins would be null and void.

The Son of Man and the Son of God

Jesus Christ is called “the Son of Man” more than 80 times in the New Testament. It was the term He most commonly used in referring to Himself.

Christ repeatedly referred to Himself as the Son of Man in connection with His sufferings and sacrificial death for the sins of mankind (Matthew 17:22; 26:45; Mark 9:31; 14:41). Although of divine origin, He deliberately identified with our human plight—the sorrows and sufferings of the human race. The prophet Isaiah foresaw Him as “a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief” (Isaiah 53:3).

Sympathizing with our human frailties and difficulties, Jesus tells us: “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light” (Matthew 11:28-30).

Jesus Was a Jew

As all human beings, Jesus Christ was born in a particular place and at a specific time in history. Although His Father was God (through the agency of the Holy Spirit), His mother was a Jewish woman named Mary. Her husband, Joseph, was Jesus’ legal father or guardian. According to the genealogy from Mary, on His human side Christ is descended from the Israelite tribal patriarch Judah and his descendant King David (Luke 3:31, 33; compare Acts 2:30; 2 Timothy 2:8).

The biblical testimony is plain. The book of Hebrews tells us that “it is evident that our Lord arose from [the tribe of] Judah . . .” (7:14). And those descended from Judah are known by the abbreviated term *Jews*. The apostle John wrote that “He came to His own [the Jews], and His own did not receive Him” (John 1:11). Both a Samaritan woman and the Roman governor Pontius Pilate clearly recognized that Jesus was Jewish (John 4:9; 18:35).

We are further told that “the scepter shall

not depart from Judah” (Genesis 49:10). The scepter symbolizes the promise of kingship and salvation. Jesus, the King of the Jews, is the Messiah. Christ (the Greek term for Messiah) is the ultimate fulfillment of the ruler mentioned prophetically in 1 Chronicles 5:2: “Yet Judah prevailed over his brothers, and from him came a ruler.”

The Bible’s final book refers to Jesus as “the Lion of the tribe of Judah” (Revelation 5:5). On Jesus’ human side, David is called His father, meaning ancestor, in Luke 1:32. Romans 1:3 likewise says he “was born of the seed of David according to the flesh.” Thus, from numerous testimonies, He was certainly a Jew.

What ultimately counts, however, is that He is the Savior of all mankind because He died for all men, women and children, regardless of their race or other ethnicity (John 3:15-17). Indeed, in Christ we are told that there is no division between Jew and gentile—for all become one in Him (Galatians 3:28).

He also called Himself the Son of Man when referring to His role as the coming Ruler of humanity in the Kingdom of God (Matthew 19:28). He even used it when He described Himself as “the Lord of the Sabbath,” explaining how the seventh-day Sabbath should be observed with mercy and compassion (Mark 2:27-28; Matthew 12:8; Luke 6:5).

Then, when He came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, Jesus asked His disciples, “Who do men say that I, *the Son of Man*, am?” (Matthew 16:13). They replied by recounting several commonly held but erroneous beliefs about Jesus’ identity. Simon Peter responded by saying, “You are the Christ [the Messiah], *the Son of the living God*” (verse 16). Jesus observed that the Father Himself had revealed this wonderful truth to Peter (verse 17). And all of His apostles came to recognize the same truth, which is reiterated elsewhere in the New Testament (Matthew 14:33; John 20:31; Romans 1:3-4).

Indeed, while Jesus was human in the fullest sense, He was also more than simply human—for He was, in fact, the divine Son of God with all that name implies. Indeed, as we have seen, He was the Creator God made flesh. And when His human life was over, He returned to the divine glory He shared with the Father from eternity past. (To learn much more about who Jesus was and the events of His life, death and resurrection, be sure to download or request our free booklet *Jesus Christ: The Real Story* at www.GNmagazine.org/booklets.)

Understanding God Through Christ

“He who has seen Me has seen the Father” (John 14:9).

The Bible is full of often-overlooked keys that can resolve many of our misunderstandings about God and His Word. In reading the Scriptures, one may vaguely sense these things but somehow never clearly see them because of misleading misconceptions about Scripture.

Jesus Christ came to reveal God the Father (Matthew 11:27). Yet mainstream Christianity continually deemphasizes the role of the Father and focuses almost exclusively on Christ. In no way did such thinking originate with Jesus Himself. He told us to pray in this manner: *“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven”* (Matthew 6:9-10). Jesus always endeavored to acquaint people with the Father and point them toward Him.

Not truly comprehending the four Gospel accounts, the world suffers from a grievous misunderstanding of God the Father. The biblical reality is often the opposite of the way many, even those in the mainstream religious community, usually picture Him.

The Father is intimately concerned with the whole creation. Even the falling of a sparrow gains His attention (Matthew 10:29). Yet Christ said that human beings are of more value than sparrows (verse 31), and the Father is deeply concerned with His master plan for humanity.

He sends rain on the just and the unjust (Matthew 5:45). He is kind to unthankful and evil human beings (Luke 6:35). He is merciful (verse 36), putting up with much from a wayward mankind. He is patient towards us all, always hoping for full repentance (2 Peter 3:9).

God the Father is especially concerned with those called to eternal life now in this age—and particularly the vulnerable “little ones” who are in the first stages of conversion (Matthew 18:6-14). Those who are older in the faith are firmly advised to be cautious and to not offend “one of these little ones” (verses 7, 10).

Jesus, while human, demonstrated the way the Father thinks and lives. Truly He came to reveal the Father. It is through Christ Himself—through His life and work, through His sterling example—that we more completely comprehend the Father’s nature and character. Many often overlook this crucial fact.

Christ reflects the Father

The New Testament sheds much light on how we are to understand the Old

Testament, especially with regard to the Father and the Son.

Again, Hebrews 1:2-3, quoted in part earlier, tells us that God the Father “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; who [is] the brightness of His glory, and *the express image of His person . . .*” Christ was exactly like the Father.

In this particular verse *image* is translated from the Greek word *charakter*. This term means “‘a tool for [en]graving’ . . . [or] ‘a stamp’ or ‘impress,’ as on a coin or seal, in which case the seal or die which makes an impression bears the ‘image’ produced by it, and, *vice versa*, all the features of the ‘image’ correspond respectively with those of the instrument producing it” (*Vine’s Complete Expository*

Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words, 1985, “Image,” p. 319).

No wonder Christ told the apostle Philip, “He who has seen Me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). Christ is the express image of God the Father. We can gain much understanding from Jesus’ conversation with His apostles leading up to this remark.

Jesus had said to Thomas, “No one comes to the Father except through Me” (verse 6). Only through Christ could one know the Father and enter into a relationship with Him. Jesus continued, “If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and from now on you know Him and have seen Him” (verse 7).

It is easy to speedily read right over these words and not grasp their significance. The Bible is not a book



Like a coin struck with the likeness of a person, so Jesus Christ is stamped with the image or impression of the Father.

for speed-reading or careless skimming. Understanding its depth of meaning requires calm meditation and deep thought. We should make it a habit to pause to reflect on the meaning of what we read.

The disciples were not yet converted—not yet begotten of the Holy Spirit—and therefore did not comprehend the incredible meaning of what Jesus was saying. Christ had told Peter in another place, “When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren” (Luke 22:32, KJV). In instituting the foot-washing ceremony as part of the Passover observance, He had said to Peter, “You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand” (John 13:7, NRSV).

After Christ’s resurrection, God would send His Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, and then the disciples would begin to truly understand (John 14:16-17; 16:12-13). But let’s return to Christ’s discourse with the disciples.

Philip joined the conversation, saying to Jesus, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us” (John 14:8). Plainly Philip had not understood what Christ had just said to Thomas in the previous verse.

So now Christ responded: “Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? *He who has seen Me has seen the Father*; so how can you say, ‘Show us the Father’?” (verse 9).

Jesus gently rebuked Philip for his lack of understanding. Yet the other disciples were in the same boat. Even today most people don’t fully realize the spiritual impact of Christ’s words. Though They were two separate individuals, Jesus was the express image of the Father. Jesus Christ was exactly like God the Father—yet the Bible clearly shows that They were and are two separate beings.

We understand God the Father through Christ. We comprehend the Father’s nature and character through the Son—not through ancient philosophies or the incomplete, often-misleading knowledge of fallible human beings.

Comprehending the nature of spirit

Through relating people’s actual experience of Christ, the four Gospel accounts shed much light on how we are to comprehend God. Even the nature of spirit is to some degree revealed through Christ having come in the flesh.

Consider the spirit world and ask yourself: Do spirit beings have form? Do they have discernible spirit bodies? Do they possess personality? Do they have faces? Do they have voices?

God the Father can be seen, but Jesus is the only human being who has ever seen Him face to face in His full, glorified form.

Can human eyes see God? Under certain protective conditions, yes, as God testified of

Moses, “He sees the form of the LORD” (Numbers 12:8). Putting all the pertinent scriptures together, we see that the divine being whom Moses saw was the preexistent Word, the One who became Christ and not God the Father.

Unique in all Scripture, under protective measures Moses was even allowed to see the back parts of God in His glorified form (Exodus 33:18-23). However, he was not permitted to view God’s face in full glory because, since it shines as the sun in full strength, Moses would have perished on the spot (verse 20).

On another important occasion, after the giving of the Ten Commandments, Moses, his brother Aaron, Aaron’s two sons and 70 elders of Israel “saw the God of Israel. Under his feet there was . . . a pavement of sapphire, clear blue as the very heavens” (Exodus 24:9-10, REB). Presumably in this situation, too, the preexistent Word shielded them from the full intensity of His glory.

The face of God

Such questions become even more intriguing if we apply them to God the Father, “Lord of heaven and earth” (Matthew 11:25), Great Ruler over the entire universe. Christ gives us much insight as we explore the answers—not only by

His own testimony, but by His appearances to the disciples *after* His resurrection to eternal spirit life.

Obviously the angels in heaven can see the Father. The plain biblical evidence is found in Matthew 18:10. Jesus said, “Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven their *angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven.*”

In his book *The Face: A Natural History*, author Daniel McNeill asks: “Does the Christian God have a face? The Bible says he made people in his own image, which suggests he does” (1998, p. 140). That would be the normal conclusion of almost anyone not previously indoctrinated by erroneous philosophies that date back to ancient times.

The apostle John recorded much of what Jesus said about the Father. John 1:18 is a case in point: “No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, *He has declared Him.*” Again, Christ came to reveal the Father. God can be seen, but Jesus is the only human being who has ever seen Him face to face in His full, glorified form.

A little later in John’s Gospel account, Christ said to a Samaritan woman: “The hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. *God is Spirit*, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth” (John 4:21-24). God the Father is not physical; He is spirit—yet that does *not* mean He is without form and shape.

Christ stated: “And the Father Himself, who sent Me, has testified of Me. You have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His form” (John 5:37). Yet it is plainly implied from these passages in the book of John that the Father *can* be both seen and heard, but not by human eyes. He has been seen by only the Son (John 6:45-46) and the angelic host—as well as by a few human beings through God-given visions in their minds, including the prophet Daniel and the apostle John.

Because Jesus said, “He who has seen Me has seen the Father” (John 14:9), the resemblance between the Father and the Son must be strong in more ways than we may humanly imagine. Still, They are two distinctly separate beings who continually plan and confer with each other, working and fellowshiping together in perfect harmony.

What Does Christ's Resurrection Teach Us?

"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live" (John 11:25).

The apostle Paul tells us that "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Corinthians 15:50). So Christ's resurrection to eternal life was to a glorified spirit body (Philippians 3:21), of the same divine essence as the Father. Yet Christ's resurrection appearances took a wonderful variety of forms. The Gospel accounts show us that no one recognized Him unless He wanted them to.

Mary of Magdala was the first person to see Jesus after His resurrection. John records that she went to Jesus' tomb while it was still dark and realized that it was empty (John 20:1-2). She immediately became anxious and despaired because she believed Christ's body had been stolen.

Mary Magdalene's remarkable experience

Mary went to tell Peter and John, who then rushed to the tomb. But the only things they found there were Christ's burial wrappings. When God resurrected Jesus to spirit life, He apparently passed right through them as though they were not there.

We pick up the account in verse 14: "She turned around and saw Jesus standing there, and did not know that it was Jesus." Mary Magdalene did not recognize someone she knew well. She assumed He was the gardener. What followed next was a startling recognition.

"Jesus said to her, 'Mary!' She turned and said to Him, 'Rabboni!' (which is to say, Teacher)" (verse 16). The impossible dream came true—the unbelievable had happened!

This particular moment of recognition is perhaps unsurpassed in all of history. A weeping, distraught woman who thinks everything is lost suddenly realizes Her Savior is alive and well and standing before her! The wave of emotion that swept over her must have been indescribable. Jesus simply addressed her in the same way He had so many times before while He was still a human being.

Most of us have had the experience of unexpectedly seeing someone we know well whom we have not seen for a long time. The emotion we experience is diffi-

cult to adequately describe. But imagine if it were a loved one over whose brutal death we had just been mourning!

And much more than that, this woman—out of whom Jesus had cast seven demons—was the first human being in history to see the resurrected Christ in person and recognize who He was. What an honor!

But why her? Perhaps it was because she trusted in and was devoted to Jesus in a way that few human beings have ever been. She was also always demonstrably grateful for what Christ had done. Before her incredible healing, her life must have been one of sheer torment.



The resurrected Jesus passed right through thick walls and could suddenly appear and then vanish at will.

Christ's resurrection body

The resurrected Jesus passed right through thick walls and could suddenly appear and then vanish at will (Luke 24:31; Mark 16:12). Some argue that Christ's resurrected body was the same physical body that had died, equating these abilities with His miraculously walking on water while human. The Bible, however, assures us that Jesus was now again spirit, as He had been before in heaven with the Father (John 17:5)—unhindered by the limitations of physical human beings.

Paul explicitly states that, although "the first man Adam became a living being . . . made of dust" (1 Corin-

thians 15:45-47), "the last Adam [Jesus] became a life-giving *spirit*" (verse 45).

Indeed, He was once again "the High and Lofty One who inhabits eternity" with the Father (Isaiah 57:15). So how do we explain the variety of *humanlike* post-resurrection appearances recorded in the Scriptures? Let's read and study a few.

Later in Christ's conversation with Mary Magdalene in John 20:17, He said, "Do not cling to Me ['Touch me not,' KJV], for I have not yet ascended to My Father." Apparently Mary could have touched Jesus Christ as though He were any normal man. Obviously, Jesus appeared here in the form and shape of a normal human being.

That evening Christ appeared to a group of the original apostles. "He showed them *His hands and His side*. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord" (verse 20). But Thomas was not there on that occasion, and he would not accept the word of the others.

When Jesus next appeared to them eight days later (verse 26), Thomas was present. "Then He [Christ] said to Thomas, 'Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be

unbelieving, but believing.” Thomas’s reaction? “And Thomas answered and said to Him, ‘My Lord and *my God*’” (verses 27-28). Thomas now knew beyond a doubt that Jesus Christ was God!

It may have been these incredible occasions (and others like them) that prompted the apostle John to write in the opening words of his first letter, “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at *and our hands have touched*—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life” (1 John 1:1, NIV).

Remember, the Word became Jesus Christ (John 1:14). Again, it may be that, in the verse just quoted, John had the resurrected Christ even more in mind than the earlier human Jesus.

Appearing in physical form

Later Christ appeared to them again. “After these things Jesus showed Himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias, *and in this way He showed Himself*” (John 21:1). On this particular occasion He cooked breakfast for them

(verse 9) and afterwards told Peter three times to “feed My sheep” (verse 17).

This chapter does not say whether Jesus ate breakfast with them,

Jesus made doubly sure the disciples knew He had been resurrected to eternal life—and that it truly was Him, the same person they had been with for the last 3½ years.

but other Gospel accounts show that He did eat after His resurrection. “They gave Him a piece of a broiled fish and some honeycomb. And He took it and *ate in their presence*” (Luke 24:42-43). Peter later affirmed Christ’s appearances to the apostles, “who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead” (Acts 10:41). And He will yet eat and drink with His newly born family at the great marriage supper after the resurrection of the faithful at His return (Matthew 26:29).

Such passages have convinced many that Christ must still have His physical body. Yet it should be pointed out that in the Old Testament, long before the Word came in the flesh as Jesus, He, “the LORD,” appeared to Abraham in physical form and ate a meal with him (Genesis 18). It is obvious from these narratives, then, that God can manifest Himself in physical, tangible form. It is also clear that He can eat for celebration and enjoyment, though He does not *need* food and drink to sustain His eternal spirit life (John 5:26).

On the occasion when the risen Jesus ate with His disciples, He had stood in the midst of them and they were frightened because they “supposed they had seen a spirit” (Luke 24:37). Christ then said: “Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, *for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have*. When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet” (verses 39-40).

Yet again, many contend that this proves Christ’s risen body was physical. But

we’ve already seen from 1 Corinthians 15:45 that He was and is now *spirit*. The apparent contradiction is easily resolved when we consider why Jesus’ disciples were frightened. It seems likely that they initially thought He was an *evil* spirit, or demon, which evidently can’t assume physical form. In fact, this explanation is given in a letter attributed to the early church leader Ignatius of Antioch, written around A.D. 110 (Epistle to the Smyrnaeans 1:10). Christ, however, proved by His appearance in fleshly form that He was not a demon. It was really Him.

The apostles were to be witnesses of the resurrection and give proof of Jesus’ messiahship. Jesus made doubly sure they knew He had been resurrected to eternal life—and that it truly was Him, the same person they had been with for the last 3½ years.

We cannot casually dismiss all these passages as having no significance in terms of the nature of God. We may not fully understand them, but these events occurred (John 20:30-31; 21:24). We dare not limit God or what He can do. Again, we understand His nature and being through the Holy Scriptures—not through ancient philosophical concepts.

Is God a Trinity?

“Did the New Testament really teach the elaborate—and highly contradictory—doctrine of the Trinity?”—Karen Armstrong, A History of God

We have seen that God is revealed in the Scriptures as a *family*—comprising the Father and the Son in heaven, with many potential members of the same divine family now on earth. The Bible speaks of “the whole family in heaven and earth” (Ephesians 3:15).

To put it another way, two divine members of that family, the Father and the Son, reside in heaven, but the human children of God on earth even now help make up this family (Romans 8:14; 1 John 3:1-2). (To understand further, please request or download our free booklet *What Is Your Destiny?*)

But what about the Trinity? Many millions believe that God consists of three distinct persons or entities—the Father, Son and Holy Spirit—in one being. How do we choose between explanations regarding the nature of God?

Simply stated, only the Scriptures can give us the true answer. The fact that the word *Trinity* appears nowhere in the Bible also gives us reason to reflect. We must not cling to long-held religious traditions if they contradict the Scriptures. Our beliefs must rest solidly on the teachings of the Holy Bible. Jesus declared that God’s word is truth (John 17:17; compare Psalm 119:160).

Historical evidence

The fact of the matter is that the Bible does *not* teach the Trinity. The opening words of *The Oxford Companion to the Bible* under the article “Trinity” are enlightening: “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 [New Testament] canon” (Bruce Metzger and Michael Coogan, editors, 1993, p. 782).

The term *later* is a vital key in understanding why general Christian belief has been burdened with the Trinity doctrine. Theologians after the first century originally conceived the doctrine, and others added to and elaborated on it over the years that followed.

Notice this admission in the *New Bible Dictionary*: “The term ‘Trinity’ is not itself found in the Bible. It was first used by Tertullian [one of the early Catholic church theologians] at the close of the 2nd century, but received wide currency and formal elucidation *only in the 4th and 5th centuries*” (1996, “Trinity”).

The same dictionary explains that “the formal doctrine of the Trinity was the result of several inadequate attempts to explain who and what the Christian God

really is . . . To deal with these problems the Church Fathers met in 325 at the Council of Nicaea to set out an orthodox biblical definition concerning the divine identity.” However, it wasn’t until 381, “at the Council of Constantinople, [that] the divinity of the Spirit was affirmed.”

Another theological source admits that there was “an impression of *binitarianism* [that is, *two* in unity, the Father and Son] given by much second- and third-century thought . . . Pluralist thinkers . . . maintained the full co-presence of the two (*later* three) distinct entities within the Godhead” (Alan Richardson, editor, *A Dictionary of Christian Theology*, 1969, p. 345).



Centuries after the apostles were dead and the Bible completed, theologians at the First Council of Constantinople formalized the idea that the Holy Spirit is God with the Father and Son.

Indeed, the second-century bishop Irenaeus, an earlier church father, stated unequivocally, “There is none other called God by the Scriptures except the Father of all, and the Son, and those who possess the adoption [i.e., sonship as God’s children]” (*Against Heresies*, Book 4, preface; compare Book 3, chap. 6). We find no mention here of the Holy Spirit being a third person as God. Rather, the concept here is that of human beings becoming part of the family now consisting of God the Father and God the Son.

We see, then, that the doctrine of the Trinity wasn’t formalized until long after the Bible was completed and the apostles were long dead in their graves. It took later theologians several centuries to sort out what they believed concerning the Holy Spirit. Regrettably, the Trinity doctrine has been a major

barrier to clear comprehension of the biblical truth that God is a *divine family*.

Continuing with the account in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*: “While the New Testament writers say a great deal about God, Jesus, and the Spirit of each, no New Testament writer expounds on the relationship among the three in the detail that *later Christian writers* do” (p. 782). The scholars being quoted here are, of course, somewhat understating what is obvious to those who comprehend the biblical explanation of God.

Spurious addition in 1 John 5:7-8

Some Bible translators of past ages were so zealous to find support for their belief in the Trinity in the Scriptures that they literally *added* it. A case in point is 1 John 5:7-8. It reads in the King James Version, also known as the Authorized

Version: “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.*” The words in italics are simply not a part of the accepted New Testament manuscripts. Regrettably, in this particular passage the New King James Version reads essentially the same.

Most Bible commentaries tell us that this is a spurious addition to the biblical text. Consider the words of *The New Bible Commentary: Revised*: “Notice that AV [the Authorized Version] includes additional material at this point. But the words are clearly a gloss [an added note] and are rightly excluded by RSV [Revised Standard Version] even from its margins” (1970, p. 1269).

In the New Revised Standard Version, 1 John 5:7-8 correctly and more concisely reads, “There are three that testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood, and these three agree.” John personifies the three elements here as providing testimony, just as Solomon personified wisdom in the book of Proverbs.

“The textual evidence is against 1 John 5:7,” explains Dr. Neil Lightfoot, a New Testament professor. “Of all the Greek manuscripts, only two contain it.

What About Matthew 28:19?

Matthew 28:19 is a biblical passage sometimes misunderstood with regard to the Trinity doctrine. Jesus is quoted as telling His disciples, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in [‘into,’ Greek *eis*] the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

Remember the important principle that the Bible interprets the Bible. What this particular passage shows us is that the process of baptism and entering God’s family involves the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. It is *not* a description of the nature of God.

Notice Acts 2:38: “Then Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’ After real repentance and being baptized, the example from Scripture is that a minister lays his hands on the repentant person and he or she receives the Holy Spirit directly from God (Acts 8:14-17).

Important as it is, baptism alone is not suf-

ficient. It must be followed by the biblically mandated laying on of hands for the receiving of the Holy Spirit—the seed of eternal life (Acts 19:1-6). We cannot partake of God’s nature (2 Peter 1:4) without first being begotten of the Father by the Holy Spirit, which imparts that divine nature.

Christ’s instruction in Matthew 28:19 presumes that, before being baptized, believers will learn of God the Father, His Son and the Holy Spirit. At baptism, they enter *into* a personal family relationship with God the Father and the Son *through* the Holy Spirit, thereby receiving the *name* of God (compare Ephesians 3:14-15).

Note again that all three—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—are acknowledged as being involved in this process. But that does not mean all three are divine persons in a Trinity. To claim that Matthew 28:19 establishes one God in three persons goes far beyond the actual words of the verse. And other verses show such a notion to be utterly false.

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).

The Expositor’s Bible Commentary also dismisses the King James and New King James Versions’ additions in 1 John 5:7 as “obviously a late gloss with no merit” (Glenn Barker, Vol. 12, 1981, p. 353). *Peake’s Commentary on the Bible* is very incisive in its comments as well: “The famous interpolation after ‘three witnesses’ is not printed in RSV and rightly [so] . . . No respectable Greek [manuscript] contains it. Appearing first in a late 4th century Latin text, it entered the Vulgate [the 5th-century Latin version, which became the common medieval translation] and finally NT [New Testament] of Erasmus [in the 16th century]” (p. 1038).

Again, *Trinity* did not come into common use as a religious term until after the Council of Nicaea in A.D. 325, several centuries after the last books of the New Testament were complete. It is *not* a biblical concept.

Why the Holy Spirit is sometimes called “he” and “him”

Many people assume that the Holy Spirit is a personal entity, based on references to the Spirit as “he,” “him” and “himself” in the New Testament. This confusion arises from two factors—the use of gender-inflected pronouns in the Greek language and bias on the part of some translators.

Greek, as do the Romance languages deriving from Latin (Spanish, French, Italian, etc.), invokes a specific gender for every noun. Every object, animate or inanimate, is designated as either masculine, feminine or neuter. The gender is often unrelated to whether the item is indeed masculine or feminine. For example, in French the word *livre*, meaning “book,” is of the masculine gender and is referred to by a pronoun equivalent to the English “he.” And in Spanish, *mesa*, or “table,” is in the feminine. Clearly, although these nouns have gender, their gender does not refer to actually being male or female.

In the English language, in contrast, most nouns that do not refer to objects that are male or female are referred to in the neuter sense, with the pronoun “it.”

In Greek, both masculine and neuter words are used to refer to the Holy Spirit. The Greek word translated “Helper,” “Comforter” and “Advocate” in John 14-16 is *parakletos*, a masculine word in Greek and thus referred to in these chapters by Greek pronouns equivalent to the English “he,” “him,” “his,” “himself,” “who” and “whom.”

Because of the masculine gender of *parakletos*, these pronouns are grammatically correct in Greek. But to translate these into *English* as “he,” “him,” etc., is grammatically *incorrect*.

By the same token, you would never translate a particular French sentence as “I’m looking for my book so I can read him.” While this grammatical construction makes sense in the French language, it is *wrong* in English. Thus the supposition that the Holy Spirit is a person to be referred to as “he” or “him” is incorrect.

Only if the *parakletos* or helper were known to be a person could the use of a gender-inflected pronoun justifiably be used in English. And the term *parakletos* certainly *can* refer to a person—as it refers to Jesus Christ in 1 John 2:1. Yet the Holy Spirit is nowhere designated with personhood. So personal pronouns should not be substituted for it.

Neuter in nature, not personal

Indeed, there is absolutely *no* justification for referring to the term “Holy Spirit” with masculine pronouns, even in Greek. The Greek word *pneuma*, usually translated “spirit” but also translated “wind” and “breath,” is a grammatically neuter word. So, in the Greek language, pronouns equivalent to the English “it,” “its,” “itself,” “which” or “that” are properly used in referring to this word for “spirit.”

Yet when the King James or Authorized Version was produced (early in the 1600s), the doctrine of the Trinity had already been accepted for more than 1,000 years. So naturally the translators of that version usually chose personal rather than neutral pronouns when referring to the Holy Spirit in English (see, for example, John 16:13-14; Romans 8:26).

Notice, however, that in some passages in the King James Version the translators properly used neuter pronouns. For example, Romans 8:16 says, “The Spirit *itself* [not *himself*] beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.” Matthew 10:20 and 1 Peter 1:11 are other places in the King James Version where the proper neuter pronouns are used.

Regrettably, later English translators of the Bible have gone even further than the King James translators in referring to the Holy Spirit as masculine rather than neuter. Thus the Holy Spirit is almost always referred to as “he” or “him” in the more modern versions. This reflects *not* linguistic accuracy, but the doctrinal bias or incorrect assumptions of Bible translators.

The Holy Spirit Is Not a Person

*“Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,”
says the LORD of hosts” (Zechariah 4:6).*

In the preceding chapter we saw that the teaching of the Trinity originated well after the New Testament was written rather than with the Bible writers themselves. How, then, do we define the Holy Spirit if it is not a person?

Rather than describing the Holy Spirit as a distinct person or entity, the Bible most often refers to it as and connects it with God’s divine *power* (Zechariah 4:6; Micah 3:8). Jewish scholars, examining the references to it in the Old Testament Scriptures, have never defined the Holy Spirit as anything but the power of God.

In the New Testament, Paul referred to it as the spirit of power, love and a sound mind (2 Timothy 1:7). Informing Mary that Jesus would be supernaturally conceived in her womb, an angel told her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you . . . ,” and he defined this as “the *power* of the Highest,” which “will overshadow you” (Luke 1:35).

Jesus began His ministry “in the *power* of the Spirit” (Luke 4:14). He told His followers, “You shall receive *power* when the Holy Spirit has come upon you” (Acts 1:8).

Peter relates that “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with *power*” (Acts 10:38). This was the same power that enabled Christ to perform many mighty miracles during His ministry. Likewise, Jesus worked through the apostle Paul “in mighty signs and wonders, *by the power of the Spirit of God*” (Romans 15:19).

The Holy Spirit is the very nature, presence and expression of God’s power actively working in His servants (2 Peter 1:4; Galatians 2:20). Indeed, it is through His Spirit that God is able to be present everywhere at once throughout the universe and affect it at will (Psalm 139:7-10).

Again and again the Scriptures depict the Holy Spirit as the power of God. Furthermore, it is also shown to be the mind of God and the very essence and life force through which the Father begets human beings as His spiritual children. The Holy Spirit is not God, but is rather a vital aspect of God—the divine substance of the Father and Christ as well as the agency through which They work.

Divine inspiration and life through the Spirit

In its article about the Holy Spirit, *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* describes it as

the “manifestation of divine presence and power perceptible especially in prophetic inspiration” (Vol. 3, 1992, p. 260).

Repeatedly the Scriptures reveal that God imparted divine inspiration to His prophets and servants through the Holy Spirit. Peter noted that “prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21).

Paul wrote that God’s plan for humanity had been “revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets” (Ephesians 3:5) and that his own teachings were inspired by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:13). Paul further explains that it is through His Spirit that God has revealed to true Christians the things He has prepared for those who love Him (verses 9-16). Working through the Spirit, God the Father is the revealer of truth to those who serve Him.

Jesus told His followers that the Holy Spirit, which the Father would send, “will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you” (John 14:26). It is through God’s Spirit within us that we gain spiritual insight and understanding. Indeed, we come to receive the very “mind of Christ” (1 Corinthians 2:16)—also referred to as the “mind of the Spirit” (Romans 8:27).

The Holy Spirit as a person is conspicuously absent from Christ’s teaching in general.

Christ had this spiritual comprehension in abundance. As the Messiah, He was prophesied to have “the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD” (Isaiah 11:2).

As the Son of Man on earth, Christ portrayed in His personal conduct the divine attributes of Almighty God through completely living by His Father’s biblical standards through the power of the Holy Spirit (compare 1 Timothy 3:16).

Now returned to the spirit realm, Christ wields the omnipotent power of the Holy Spirit along with the Father. The Holy Spirit, we should understand, is not only the Spirit of God the Father, for the Bible also calls it the “Spirit of Christ” (Romans 8:9; Philippians 1:19). By either designation, it is the *same* Spirit, as there is only one Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13; Ephesians 4:4).

The Father imparts the same Spirit to true Christians through Christ (John 14:26; 15:26; Titus 3:5-6), leading and enabling them to be His children and “partakers of the divine nature” (Romans 8:14; 2 Peter 1:4). God, who has eternal life in Himself, gives that life to others through the Spirit (John 5:26; 6:63; Romans 8:11).

Impersonal attributes of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is spoken of in many ways that demonstrate that it is not a divine person. For example, it is referred to as a gift (Acts 10:45; 1 Timothy 4:14). We are told that the Holy Spirit can be quenched (1 Thessalonians 5:19), that it can be poured out (Acts 2:17, 33), and that we are baptized with it (Matthew 3:11).

People can drink of it (John 7:37-39), partake of it (Hebrews 6:4) and be filled with it (Acts 2:4; Ephesians 5:18). The Holy Spirit also renews us (Titus 3:5) and

must be stirred up within us (2 Timothy 1:6). These impersonal characteristics are certainly *not* attributes of a person.

It is also called “the Holy Spirit of promise,” “the guarantee of our inheritance” and “the spirit of wisdom and revelation” (Ephesians 1:13-14, 17).

In contrast to God the Father and Jesus Christ, who are consistently compared to human beings in Their form and shape, the Holy Spirit is consistently represented, by various symbols and manifestations, in a completely different manner—such as wind (Acts 2:2), fire (verse 3), water (John 4:14; 7:37-39), oil (Psalm 45:7; compare Acts 10:38; Matthew 25:1-10), a dove (Matthew 3:16) and an “earnest,” or down payment, on eternal life (2 Corinthians 1:22; 5:5; Ephesians 1:13-14, KJV). These depictions are difficult to understand, to say the least, if the Holy Spirit is a person.

In Matthew 1:20 we find further evidence that the Holy Spirit is not a distinct entity, but God’s divine power. Here we read that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit. However, Jesus continually prayed to and addressed God the Father as His Father and *not* the Holy Spirit (Matthew 10:32-33; 11:25-27; 12:50). He *never* represented the Holy Spirit as His Father. Clearly, the Holy Spirit was the agency or power through which the Father begot Jesus as His Son.

Paul’s example and teaching

If God were a Trinity, surely Paul, who recorded much of the theological underpinnings of the early Church, would have comprehended and taught this concept. Yet we find no such teaching in His writings.

Moreover, Paul’s standard greeting in his letter to the churches, as well as individuals to whom he wrote, is “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” Yet in each of his greetings he *never* mentions the Holy Spirit. (The same can also be said of Peter in the salutations of both his epistles.)

The same greeting, with only minor variations, appears in every epistle that bears Paul’s name (see Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:3; 2 Corinthians 1:2; etc.) The Holy Spirit is *always* left out of these greetings—an unbelievable and inexplicable oversight if the Spirit were indeed a person or entity coequal with God the Father and Christ.

This is even more surprising when we consider that the congregations to which Paul wrote had many gentile members from polytheistic backgrounds who had formerly worshipped numerous gods. Paul’s epistles record no attempt on his part to explain the Trinity or Holy Spirit as a divine person equal with God the Father and Jesus Christ.

In all of Paul’s writings, only in 2 Corinthians 13:14 is the Holy Spirit mentioned along with the Father and Christ, and there only in connection with the “fellowship of the Holy Spirit” (NIV) in which believers share—not in any sort of theological statement on the nature of God. God’s Spirit, says Paul, is the unifying agent that brings us together in godly, righteous fellowship, not only with one another but with the Father and Son.

Yet here, too, God’s Spirit is not spoken of as a person. Notice that our fellow-

ship is *of* the Holy Spirit, not *with* the Holy Spirit. As 1 John 1:3 tells us, “Truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.” The Holy Spirit is not mentioned.

Paul states that “there is one God, the Father, . . . *and* one Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 8:6). He makes no mention of the Holy Spirit as a divine person.

Other biblical perspectives

Jesus likewise never spoke of the Holy Spirit as a divine third person. Instead, in numerous passages He spoke only of the relationship between God the Father and Himself (Matthew 26:39; Mark 13:32; 15:34; John 5:18, 22; etc.). The Holy Spirit as a person is conspicuously absent from Christ’s teaching in general. Of particular interest in this regard are His many statements about Himself and the Father, especially when He never makes similar statements about Himself and the Holy Spirit.

We should also consider that, in visions of God’s throne recorded in the Bible, although the Father and Christ *are* seen, the Holy Spirit is *never* seen (Acts 7:55-56; Daniel 7:9-14; Revelation 4-5; 7:10). Jesus is repeatedly mentioned as being at the right hand of God, but no one is mentioned as being at the Father’s left hand. Nowhere are three divine persons pictured together in the Scriptures.

Even in the final book of the Bible (and the last to be written), the Holy Spirit as a divine person is absent from its pages. The book describes “a new heaven and new earth” (Revelation 21:1) wherein “the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them” (verse 3). Christ, the Lamb of God, is also present (verse 22). The Holy Spirit, however, is again absent—another inexplicable oversight if this Spirit is the third person of a triune God.

Clearly, the Holy Spirit, from the evidence found in the Bible, is *not* a person in a supposed Trinity. Regrettably, the unbiblical doctrine of the Trinity obscures the scriptural teaching that God is a family—a family which, as we will see, is our ultimate destiny!

Understanding “the Image of God”

“So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them” (Genesis 1:27).

The purpose of human life is indelibly etched into the first chapter of the first book of the Bible, where man is first mentioned: “Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness’” (Genesis 1:26).

God created each species of the plant and animal kingdoms “according to its [own] kind” (verses 11-12, 21, 24-25), but human beings, verse 26 essentially tells us, were patterned after the “*God* kind.” The image of God is what makes man unique among all His physical creation. This is what renders men, women and children truly human.



“In the day that God created man, He made him in the likeness of God. He created them male and female.”

Our Creator first declared His great purpose, then brought it to fruition: “So God created man *in His own image*; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them” (verse 27). Genesis 1 focuses on the fundamental purpose of human life, while chapter 2 lays out important details. These two beginning chapters complement each other.

Created to rule

After initially declaring His grand design of making mankind in His own image, the Creator said, “Let them have dominion [rule] over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, [and] over all the earth” (verse 26).

Then, after creating two human beings (male and female) in His own image, He restated His purpose and made it plain that their progeny are an integral part of this great project: “Then God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion [again, rule] over the fish

of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth” (verse 28).

God created the human family to grow and expand to the point that it would eventually populate the entire earth. Mankind’s initially revealed purpose was to rule the physical creation—and, in the long run, far more than just this good green earth. God *rules* what He creates, and the ultimate purpose of human life involves *corulership* in the one divine family.

But we start small. First we learn to rule and discipline *ourselves*. Then we learn to cooperate with others and properly manage whatever our present circumstances have provided us.

What is the image of God?

The Bible does not define the meaning of “the image of God” in so many words. In a sense it’s a mystery, yet the *key* mysteries and secrets of the Bible may be unlocked for those whom God calls, for He reveals to them His truth.

Jesus said, “I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and *have revealed them to babes*” (Matthew 11:25). God’s truth comes by revelation from Him, not from human wisdom. Yet certain commonsense principles do enable us to better understand the Bible.

As we mentioned before, we can best comprehend biblical passages when we consider them in their context. Genesis 5 mentions *likeness* and *image* of God again. As we read the opening verses, we begin to discern their broader meanings. The chapter begins: “This is the book of the genealogy of Adam. In the day that God created man, He made him in the *likeness* of God. He created them male and female, and blessed them and called them Mankind in the day they were created” (verses 1-2).

Humanly, the genealogy of Genesis 5 extends down through the centuries all the way from Adam to Noah and his three sons—more than 1,600 years. But it *actually* begins with the Creator Himself. In Luke’s genealogy of Christ, which stretches back to the beginning of mankind, he refers to Adam as “the son of God” (Luke 3:38).

As Paul later explained, “we are the offspring of God” (Acts 17:29). We came forth from God, *not* in the same way that the land animals and sea creatures were created. They were *not* made in the image of God. We human beings were! In making this point clear, God emphasized the alternate term “likeness.” But what does that mean?

Again, the context helps. This is perhaps the most important principle governing biblical studies and easily the most abused. Continuing the genealogy: “And Adam lived one hundred and thirty years, and begot a son *in his own likeness, after his image*, and named him Seth” (Genesis 5:3).

In context with verses 1 and 2, what conclusions may we draw from the statement in verse 3? It is reasonable to deduce that, although God is spirit rather than flesh (John 4:24), man bears considerable resemblance to His Maker, just as Adam’s son resembled *him*.

How are we made in God’s image?

Are men, women and children made in God’s image in other ways? Consider the gift of human life itself. The Creator breathed into man’s nostrils the breath of life (Genesis 2:7). The gap between the living and the nonliving is enormous.

How great is the chasm even between human and animal awareness of the world? Consider your innate capacity to imagine, to think sequentially in words and images. Man’s incredible powers of imagination and abstract thinking, though often misused, are an important reflection of our being made in the image of God. Our Creator imagines, and we imagine. God said at the time of the Tower of Babel, “This they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have *imagined* to do” (Genesis 11:6, KJV). What an incredible testimony to our human potential direct from the Creator Himself!

Language and the ability to communicate are other vital aspects of God’s image. But men, women, boys and girls have this precious capacity for language in an unusual way. Adam and Eve possessed it at the time of their creation.

Writes Steven Pinker, author of *The Language Instinct*: “Language is no more of a cultural invention than is upright posture . . . Language is a magnificent ability unique to Homo Sapiens [the human species] . . . The complexity of languages from the scientist’s point of view is part of our biological birthright” (1994, pp. 18-19).

So great was Adam’s linguistic ability and mental capacity that he could name all the animals, presumably with names never conceived of before (Genesis 2:19). The theory of evolution typically pictures early man as nothing more than a crude grunter. How far from the truth of God!

Our first parents understood the principle of cause and effect—the probable consequences of present actions. Although Satan the devil in the form of the serpent imparted lethal misinformation to Eve in Genesis 3, she was well able to reason out the possible consequences of future actions. She reasoned that partaking of the fruit God had forbidden her and Adam to eat would make her wise like God and enable her to live forever.

But what Eve lacked was the *moral* perception to think through the implications of her actions, particularly as to how they would affect the human race, which was to spring from her and Adam.

Still in God’s image?

Most of us are aware of the tragic events that began in Eden—how Adam and Eve sinned and were driven from the garden and how the wholesale transgression of God’s law continued to multiply over the centuries until only one righteous man, the patriarch Noah, was left on earth.

Universal sin, we learn from the Bible, brings universal destruction. So only righteous Noah and his family were saved from the Flood by building and entering the ark according to God’s instructions. Our Creator decided to start over with Noah and his progeny.

But as a safeguard to curtail man’s predilection for violent behavior, God

instituted capital punishment—to be administered under certain restraints that were later amplified when the law was formally codified (Genesis 9:5).

Consider the setting for this provision. After the judgment of the Flood, God renewed the human race (verse 7), and a new epoch of man’s history soon commenced. At this juncture God again reminded man of the incredible legacy He had given him: “Whoever sheds man’s blood, by man his blood shall be shed; *for in the image of God He made man*” (verse 6).

However depraved human behavior had become, God had still created men, women and children in His own image and likeness—and would in due time carry out His great plan of salvation. In God’s eyes, man’s redemption through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ was already as good as accomplished (see 2 Timothy 1:8-9; Romans 4:17).

Although humanity had not lived up to the glorious legacy of God’s image and had fallen far short of His standards—“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23)—our Creator, in His awesome mercy and love, would not be deterred from His great plan for mankind.

Partaking of the Divine Nature

“He has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4, NIV).

In previous chapters we examined scriptures that discuss the biblical description of the very nature of God. However, no knowledge has any permanent value unless we put it to use. Knowing and believing that God exists is of little value if we continue to behave as if He didn’t. As His Word tells us, “Even the demons believe—and tremble!” (James 2:19).

Let’s now focus on one other crucial aspect of the story—how God relates to His human creation and what He wants us to achieve spiritually with His help.

Remember that Jesus is the mediator between God the Father and man, as well as the captain of our salvation (Hebrews 2:10). He is the One whom the Father appointed to help us bridge the character gap between our human fallibility and the awesome perfection resident in Them. We are told to become perfect just as our Heavenly Father is perfect (Matthew 5:48). We are challenged to attain His image of spiritual maturity.

We must in the fullest sense become “*partakers of the divine nature*” (2 Peter 1:4) so that our personal conduct reflects *the character of God Himself*. This impacts on the very purpose for our existence.

The image of God in the New Testament

Genesis 9:6 substantiates the truth that men, women, boys and girls continued in the image of God even after sin had entered man’s world. Several millennia later Christ’s apostles confirmed this basic biblical teaching. New Testament scriptures reaffirm that human beings are still in the image and likeness of God (James 3:9; 1 Corinthians 11:7). But even more important for our salvation, Jesus Himself is “*the image of the invisible God*” (Colossians 1:15; compare 2 Corinthians 4:4). Since sin has deeply marred God’s image in us, the creation of the spiritual likeness—the character—of God must be attained through Jesus Christ.

It is the righteous and sinless Christ who justifies men and women who have sinned and brought the death penalty on themselves (Romans 6:23). Paul tells us that we, who once “were alienated and enemies in [our] mind by wicked works,” are now “reconciled [by Christ] in the body of His flesh through death, [that He might] present [us] holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight—if indeed [we] continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast” (Colossians 1:21-23).

Step by step

Though we have fallen far short of our great potential, Christ—who is much more “the image of God” than we are—provides a way for us to be reconciled to the Father. This is the only way we may achieve the enormous goal of reflecting the character of God in our lives.

Salvation is a *process*. We progress spiritually one step at a time. The first step is heartfelt, genuine *repentance*—remorse over our sins and committing to turn our lives around, fully accepting the blood of Christ as payment for our transgressions against God’s spiritual law.

The next big step is baptism, followed by the receiving of the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands of God’s ministry. This constitutes a formal beginning for the Christian life of overcoming sin with the help of our great High

Priest, Jesus Christ. From then on, provided we follow Christ’s example and overcome our human nature, we are destined to attain our goal of ultimate salvation in the Kingdom of God. (For further knowledge of these important spiritual steps, request or download our free booklets *The Road to Eternal Life, Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion* and *You Can Have Living Faith*.)

If we take these steps, then continue to grow in grace and knowledge, enduring in faith to the end, God will perform the final step through our resurrection to everlasting life. Paul explains: “For since by man [Adam] came death, by Man [Christ] also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive” (1 Corinthians 15:21-22).

Human beings in the flesh are incomplete, an unfinished species. However, everlasting life is ours if we become converted and continually go before the throne of

Jesus Christ, Our Merciful High Priest

What is Jesus doing right now? What is one of His most important roles? How is He serving His brothers and sisters on earth?

Remember that Jesus Christ is the mediator between God and man (1 Timothy 2:5). One of the major themes of the book of Hebrews is to show how Christ carries out His sacred role as our High Priest—how He is “bringing many sons [and daughters] to glory” (Hebrews 2:10).

Many in Christendom rely on a false “grace” that is merely a license to sin—unaccompanied by true repentance, obedience and overcoming. Apparently many know little or nothing about Christ’s present role as our merciful High Priest.

The primary scriptures

“Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren [referring to the Word becoming flesh], that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God [the Father], to make propitiation [an atoning sacrifice] for the sins of the people” (verse 17).

Sin has seriously damaged the human race. “Sin is the transgression of the law” (1 John 3:4, KJV). Sin separates us from God (Isaiah 59:1-2) and threatens our eternal reward. It is the implacable enemy of every human being and must be conquered. This task is not easy and

never has been.

But Jesus knows what it’s like to have human nature, to be tempted to sin, to be tempted to transgress God’s spiritual law. “For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted” (Hebrews 2:18).

Christ did whatever was necessary to resist the pulls of the flesh and temptations to sin. He never underestimated them. He prayed and fasted, but mostly He continually looked to and relied on the Father for help.

By never once transgressing God’s law, “He condemned sin in the flesh” (Romans 8:3). In contrast, sin has tainted us, and one of our major goals as Christians is to learn to overcome its entanglements. Yet we cannot do this apart from our Savior, who told us, “Without Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5).

Notice Hebrews 4:14-16: “Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in

our time of need” (NIV).

Christ is the author and captain of our salvation. “Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession [with the Father] for them” (Hebrews 7:25). He now sits at the Father’s right hand “to appear in the presence of God for us” (Hebrews 9:24).

What to do when we sin

Christians are to strive against sin and learn to conquer it with Christ’s help and intervention. But it takes a lifetime of overcoming, marked by more failures than we would care to admit to others. Psalm 130 asks, “If You, LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?” (verse 3).

The apostle John encourages us enormously with these words: “But if we walk in the light as He [the Father] is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin [nothing to overcome], we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. *If we confess our sins* [to God], He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:7-9). A biblical proverb says that the righteous man falls seven times and seven times gets up again (Proverbs 24:16).

However, this wonderful truth is *not* a license for us to sin. John cautions us: “My children, I am writing this to you so that you should *not* commit sin. But if anybody does, we have in Jesus Christ one who is acceptable to God and [as our High Priest] will plead our cause with the Father” (1 John 2:1, REB).

Here John expresses the same basic truth as the book of Hebrews—a truth mostly lost to mainstream Christianity. One rarely hears of it in most pulpits. Many have no idea of what sin is. Some don’t want to discuss sin because it makes people feel bad. Sadly, much of Christianity is mistakenly assumed to be only a celebration of what Christ has done for us—saved us from our sins without any need for us to overcome with God’s help.

Paul reaffirms the wonderful truth that “it is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, *who also makes intercession for us*” (Romans 8:34). Both the Father and Son are actively involved in fulfilling Their purpose of *bringing others into the divine family*. It’s your destiny.

Will you repent and accept this marvelous calling? Or will you cling to historical misconceptions shown to be false in the light of God’s Word? The choice is yours.

grace to seek the spiritual help we desperately need. Our Advocate and High Priest is always there to help us when we stumble or fall on the way (1 John 1:7-9; 2:1-2). No human being can attain salvation without the continued application of God's grace through Christ's atoning sacrifice.

Although He created us as physical, flesh-and-blood beings, God made us with the potential of ultimately becoming spirit as He is spirit. The Bible says so. Paul continues: "And so it is written, 'The first man Adam became a living being.' The last Adam [Christ] became a life-giving *spirit* . . . The first man was of the earth, made of dust; the second Man [Christ] is the Lord from heaven . . . And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, *we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man*" (1 Corinthians 15:45-49).

Moreover, Christ, as we've seen, bears the image of the Father. Thus we will be the same kind of beings as both the Father and Christ, not just created spirit beings like angels, but spirit-born *divine* beings who are part of *Elohim*, the universe-ruling family of God!

God's Nature and Character

In any discussion about who and what God is, we must not lose sight of the most important truth about God—that God the Father and Jesus Christ the Son are beings of *infinite love*. John perfectly summarized Their divine character and nature when he wrote that "God *is* love" (1 John 4:8, 16).

The love of God is selfless, outflowing concern for the good of others. When He showed His glory to Moses, God revealed Himself as "the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin" (Exodus 34:6-7, NIV).

Love is the foundation of the character and law of God. It is the basis of everything that God has revealed to mankind in the Holy Scriptures (Matthew 22:35-40). Paul called love the greatest Christian attribute (1 Corinthians 13:13). It is the first aspect of the fruit of God's Spirit that he mentions (Galatians 5:22). Love is the bond of perfection, binding everything together in perfect unity (Colossians 3:14, NIV). It is the fulfilling of God's

divine law (Romans 13:10).

This amazing quality of godly love even encompasses love for one's enemies (Matthew 5:44-45; Luke 6:35).

Upon repentance, we can begin to exhibit this kind of love through the Holy Spirit. God wants us to learn to think as He thinks and do as He does.

In exercising this kind of love, we express the image of God (reflecting His character), even though we are still human. Paul encourages us to "let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:5), who perfectly personified God's love to the point of giving His own life for us.

One of the Bible's best-known passages tells us that "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). God not only wants to grant us the priceless gift of eternal life, but He also wants to share all things with us in His divine family (Hebrews 2:6-8; Romans 8:16-17). Time and time again the Scriptures reveal that God perfectly personifies love.

When we properly understand the Scriptures, we see this wonderful truth again and again in the pages of the Bible. God promises that true Christians shall attain His very image in the ultimate sense. This promise is variously restated in many places in the New Testament. One such instance is the encouraging wording of Romans 8:29: "For whom He [God the Father] foreknew, He also predestined *to be conformed to the image of His Son*, that He might be the *firstborn among many brethren*."

Jesus is the captain of our salvation. He went before. He knows the way. He guarantees that many will join Him in divine glory. But we ourselves must make every effort to ensure that we make our own personal calling and election sure.

Reaching our fantastic destiny

It is the "new man" of the inner heart and mind that lives *spiritually* in the image of God now (Ephesians 4:22-24; Colossians 3:10). It is this inner transformation that will eventually lead to our ultimate and complete change to the full image of God. However, no one can accomplish this character transformation alone. "Without Me you can do nothing," said Jesus (John 15:5). The spiritual image of God can be renewed in us only through the living presence of Christ in our lives.

In a tremendously inspiring passage, Paul wrote, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20, KJV).

Everlasting, abundant life in the Kingdom as part of the God family is our ultimate destiny. That is what Christ makes possible (John 10:10). That is why God created us in His image. That is why it is so important to understand the truth about the nature of our Creator. (To learn more about the astounding future God has planned for you, download or request a copy of our free booklet *What Is Your Destiny?*)

John wrote: "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called the children of God! . . . Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He [Christ] is revealed, *we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is*" (1 John 3:1-2).

Finally, Paul also makes it clear that believers are "children of God" and "heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ" (Romans 8:16-17). He explains that "the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (verse 18).

In other words, says Paul, in the resurrection believers will be on the same plane of existence as God and Christ—having been transformed into the same kind of beings They are. Amazingly, this is the astounding potential destiny of *all* humanity, and, though we will number in the millions, even billions, we will be perfectly joined together as one. For at that momentous time we will all partake of the divine nature in the ultimate sense—being divine members of the very family of God for all eternity!

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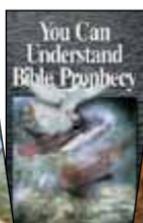
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