

# God Is . . . What?

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Questions about what God is have been debated, sometimes violently, since men began searching for God. Obviously, we cannot see God, but if He has described Himself in the pages of the Bible, why should what He is be so difficult to fathom? Why argue about what the Bible says directly or implies in its terminology, visions, analogies and symbols?

Deuteronomy 29:29 says, "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law." Paul adds in I Corinthians 2:10-11 that God has revealed to us the mystery of His purpose by His Spirit.

Of course, Paul writes to converted people. Plainly, God does not hide Himself or what He is from those to whom He specifically reveals Himself and His Son (John 6:44; Matthew 11:27). So clear is God's revelation of Himself that Paul says that even the unconverted can understand much about Him through observation of His creation. "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in [to, *margin*] them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead [divine nature, *margin*]" (Romans 1:18-20).

Jesus' own testimony shows He came to reveal the Father. When asked by Philip to show them the Father, He replies, "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'?" (John 14:9). After combining Jesus' revelation of the Father with revelations through the prophets and apostles, a clear picture emerges of what one needs to know about God relative to salvation.

In His inspired revelation of Himself and His purpose, does God reveal Himself to be a trinity? Notice these quotations from a few authoritative sources: "Though 'trinity' is a second-century term found nowhere in the Bible, and the Scriptures present **no finished trinitarian statement**, the NT does contain most of the building materials for later doctrine" (*The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, "Trinity," p. 914. Author's emphasis throughout.).

"One does not find in the NT the trinitarian **paradox** of the coexistence of the Father, Son, and Spirit within a divine unity, the mystery of the three in one, yet one does find there the data that serve as the foundation of this **later** dogmatic formulation" [*The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, "God (NT)," p. 1055].

"The new element is the historical Jesus, at once the representative of humanity and of God. As in philosophy, so now in theology, the easiest solution of the problem was the denial of one of its factors: and successively these efforts were made, until a solution was found in the doctrine of the Trinity, which satisfied both terms of the equation and became the fundamental creed of the church. Its moulds of thought are those of **Greek philosophy**, and into these were run the Jewish teachings. We have thus a **peculiar** combination—the religious doctrines of the Bible, as culminating in the person of Jesus, run through the forms of an **alien philosophy**" (*The Encyclopedia Britannica*, 11th ed., vol. 6, p. 284).

"The New Testament teaching upon this subject is not given in the way of formal statement. The formal statement, however, is legitimately and necessarily **deduced** from the Scriptures of the New Testament, and these, as has been suggested, cast a light backward upon the intimations of the Old. . . . It is admitted by all who thoughtfully deal with this subject that the Scripture revelation here leads us into the presence of a deep mystery" (*Unger's Bible Dictionary*, p. 1118).

What is wrong with the Bible's own description of God? The problems arise when one tries to blend alien, human, philosophical thinking with the Bible's own clear statements about God. To this odd mix is added man's unwillingness to believe "the simplicity that is in Christ" (II Corinthians 11:3). Would a loving God inspire the Bible to be difficult for His people to understand?

The contents of the Bible is the revelation of God to the converted. Reveal means "to make known through divine inspiration; to make (something secret or hidden) publicly or generally known; to make manifest, expose to view, divulge." Jesus says in Matthew 11:25, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes." What makes His statement especially interesting is that it is part of His response to a question asking who He was (verses 2-3).

His identity is plainly revealed in what He said about Himself. But the Jewish leadership rejected His teachings, while the humble, unlearned and simple accepted and believed it. Rather than being a denunciation of true scholarship, Jesus emphasizes the attitude of the "babes." Thus He denounces the leaders' intellectual pride which led them to reject His clear revelation of God, in contrast to the "babes" whose humility enabled them to accept it.

In Genesis 1:26 Moses writes that man is created in God's "image" and "likeness." Any reliable lexicon mentions that "image" and "likeness" reinforce each other in a manner common to Hebrew. It means we are like God in form and implies that, like Him, we have a spiritual capacity which animals do not have.

Genesis 2:24 shows that two human personalities can become one flesh. Why, then, can God not be one with two distinct personalities who work independently yet in complete harmony? Paul adds in I Corinthians 6:17, "But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him." If a human can be one with God and remain entirely distinct, why cannot another spirit being with a separate personality be one with Him?

Another approach to this is through the Bible's use of parables (Greek, *parabole*). Parable is closest in meaning to "similitude." Generally, but not always, parables are introduced with the words, "The kingdom of God is like. . . ." In Hebrews 9:9 and 11:19, *parabole* is translated "figure," "figurative" or "symbolic," meaning a comparison is used to show parallels, so that from the human, temporal and material realm we may understand the eternal and spiritual reality.

Jesus consistently referred to God as "Father," Himself as "Son" and whoever does the will of God as brother, sister or mother (Mark 3:35). Paul adds in Romans 8:14, "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God," and in verses 16, 17 and 19 he switches between "children" and "sons."

John says, "We are children of God; and . . . we shall be like Him" (I John 3:2), implying we will one day be more like Him than we are today, though even now we are in His image and likeness. Many more scriptures show this family parallel, but Ephesians 3:14-15 plainly states the truth: "For this

reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole **family** in **heaven** and earth is named." Already a Family exists in heaven—not the angelic family, but the Family in which we are sons and daughters. We are the part of that heavenly Family but still on the earth.

Jesus and the apostles use so many family parallels that the lesson is overwhelming. Do families consist of one member? Of course not! Why would Jesus and the apostles even use such an analogy over and over if an honest parallel of kind between the human, physical family and a godly, spiritual one did not exist?

The fourth word of the Bible is the first-mentioned name of God, *elohim*, and it acts almost as God's signature, authenticating His authorship of the book. Appearing around 3000 times, of which 2300 refer to God, *elohim* is also used of idols, men, angels and judges. Though its root means "to swear," the concepts of might and authority are implied, and the biblical writers use it in the sense of "mighty ones" or "authorities."

In form *elohim* is plural, but its use in the Bible indicates a singular body, group, class or family that contains more than one part. We can easily see that angels, judges and idols are distinct, powerful bodies, groups, classes or families of beings with more than one personality within them. Why should the usage of *elohim* be any different when applied to God?

*Webster's Dictionary* defines "class" as "a group of people of the same rank or status in a community; a comprehensive group of animals or plants." It defines "family" as "a group consisting of parents and their children; a harmonious group bound together by common interests."

"Family" need not be used strictly in the sense of blood relationship. It can also be correctly used to indicate a multi-member group, related by occupation, species, status, responsibility, kind, etc. It is in this sense that the Bible frequently uses *elohim*. Angels are a family of created spirit beings, one kind. Judges are a group of individuals with common authority and responsibility. As Paul says in I Corinthians 8:5, "There are many gods and many lords," false gods are a group—all are one category—because they share one common trait: They are all false.

Occasionally, *elohim* is used in a singular sense. In *All the Divine Names and Titles in the Bible*, Herbert Lockyer states, "Yet the word in this singular form is not full enough to set forth all that is intended. . . . It is a repository of truth concerning the Persons [plural] of the Godhead in the essential unity, and a mode of expressing the abundance and diversity of transcendent attributes combined in the Deity" (p. 6). Parkhurst in his *Hebrew Lexicon* writes, "*Elohim* is plurality in unity. Accordingly Jehovah is at the beginning of creation named *Elohim*, which implies that the divine Persons [plural] had sworn when they created."

If this was all we had, we would already have strong evidence of God being a Family of individuals, living and working in harmony on a common plan toward a common goal. But there is much more! And, contrary to popular belief, it does not require a doctorate to understand—just normal intelligence.

John's gospel begins, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God" (John 1:1-2). "With" means "used to indicate that two or more persons or things are together, near each other, in agreement, harmony etc.; in the company of; accompanied by."

The next verse says, "All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made." Paul adds in Colossians 1:16, "For by Him 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." These verses reveal the Word, who became Jesus Christ, as the agent of creation, performing the work necessary to carry it out. He is not only God but *with* another who is also God. "Through Him" implies that this other Being authorized the works of creation carried out by the Word. Does this not indicate two distinct personalities, both called God by inspiration, working in harmony to accomplish a work?

Psalms 45 is a Messianic prophecy: "You are fairer than the sons of men; grace is poured upon Your lips; therefore God has blessed you forever. Gird Your sword upon Your thigh, O Mighty One, with Your glory and Your majesty. And in Your majesty ride prosperously because of truth, humility, and righteousness; and Your right hand shall teach You awesome things. Your arrows are sharp in the heart of the King's enemies; the peoples fall under You. Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom. You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness more than Your companions" (verses 2-7). The word for "God" used once of the Messiah and later for the Messiah's God, is *elohim*! Paul quotes this psalm in Hebrews 1:8-9 to prove that Jesus ("through whom also He made the worlds," verse 2) is worthy of the worship of angels. To worship anything less than God breaks the first commandment! This shows Jesus to be God before and after His incarnation.

Philippians 2:6-7 adds more to our understanding of this: "[Jesus Christ], being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant, and coming in the likeness of men." Phillips renders it, "For he, who had **always been God by nature**, did not cling to his privileges as God's equal, but stripped Himself of every advantage by consenting to be a slave by nature and being born a man." Moffatt translates, "Though he was **divine by nature**, he did not set store upon equality with God, but emptied himself by taking the nature of a servant; born in human guise and appearing in human form." As in other scriptures, He was God, divine by nature, with—beside, accompanying—a different personality also called God!

This explains why Genesis 1:26 uses the plural pronouns "Us" and "Our" to refer to their antecedent *elohim*. Two divine personalities were working as one. They were equal in that both were God but not equal in authority, even as husband, wife and child are equal in their humanity but not equal in authority. Jesus said it Himself: "My Father is greater than I" (John 14:28).

In John 8:58 Jesus identifies Himself as the "I AM." Furthermore, He also says man has "neither heard His [the Father's] voice at any time, nor seen His form" (John 5:37), and only Jesus Christ who came from God has seen the Father (John 6:46). Yet Israel heard God speak the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1), and Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu and seventy of the elders of Israel saw the God of Israel (Exodus 24:9-10). There can be only one conclusion: They saw God, the One who became Jesus of Nazareth, not the other personality of the Godhead, called later "the Father."

In addition, the very hope of a Christian is in vain if Jesus Christ did not rise from the dead (I Corinthians 15:12-19). But we know He did rise (verses 3-4). Who resurrected Him, then, if not a distinct and separate Being? The same reasoning holds true with His ascension. Where? To sit at the Father's right hand (Hebrews 1:3)!

The Bible is full of similar examples which clearly show God consisting of two Beings cooperating in family harmony. In John 17:20-22, part of Jesus' prayer before His crucifixion, He prays that we

would all be one with the Father as He and the Father are one. When He made that prayer, He and His Father were certainly distinct personalities, yet they were one, and we will be one as they were before and are now again after His crucifixion and resurrection. They are of one nature, one mind and one Family (Kingdom). They are *elohim* working in complete cooperation and harmony.

His prayer implies that the oneness, at least its fullness, will occur when we are changed and inherit His Kingdom. Will we be enveloped in God and lose our personal identity? Revelation 3:12 says we will be given a new name. We give names to things and personages to establish personal identity or to distinguish one from another! Revelation 21:24 shows kings of nations, as part of the Kingdom of God, clearly identifiable as individuals. John saw nation *s*, meaning he saw national characteristics in individuals who have inherited the Kingdom of God and taking their place within the divine Family.

The overwhelming evidence is that God is one, a Family at work fulfilling its purpose of bringing multiple billions into itself. What a tremendous burden will be lifted from all creation when God, by grace and awesome creative power, molds the division and conflict of man's realm into the oneness of God!