

Glimpses of Our God

The Triune God

Lesson #1 for January 7, 2012

Scriptures: Deuteronomy 6:4; Philippians 2:6; Matthew 28:19; Genesis 1:26-27; John 14-16.

1. One of the 28 fundamental beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists is the belief in the Trinity.

There is one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a unity of three co-eternal Persons. God is immortal, all-powerful, all-knowing, above all, and ever present. He is infinite and beyond human comprehension, yet known through His self-revelation. He is forever worthy of worship, adoration, and service by the whole creation. (Deuteronomy 6:4; Matthew 28:19; 2 Corinthians 13:14; Ephesians 4:4-6; 1 Peter 1:2; 1 Timothy 1:17; Revelation 14:7.)

2. There are three great “monotheistic” religions in the world: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam; all descended from Abraham. Or, is Christianity not a “monotheistic” religion but rather, a “polytheistic” religion as Muslims contend? The followers of the ancient polytheistic pagan religions worshiped all sorts of things.
3. How can we claim to be a monotheistic religion if we worship “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit”?
4. Is the idea of a Triune God important to you? Why? Are all Three Members of the Godhead equally “real”? Or, do you think They are different in Their essence? Has the Son’s essence changed now that He has become like one of us? Do we understand anything at all about God’s essence?
5. Are Father, Son, and Holy Spirit just three aspects of one “Person”? Or, are They three different Beings? Was a “Trinity” necessary so Jesus could come down to this small planet? If They are three different Beings, when we get to heaven, will we be able to hug Each One of Them? Would you dare?

We need to realize that the Holy Spirit, who is as much a person as God is a person, is walking through these grounds, that the Lord God is our keeper, and helper. He hears every word we utter and knows every thought of the mind.—*Ms 66*, 1899, p. 4. (Talk, April 15, 1899); *Ev* 616.5; *FLB* 52.2; *2SAT* 136.6

6. How would you describe the roles of Each of the Members of the Godhead?
7. In Scripture, there are three separate but interrelated types of evidence for the Trinity, or tri-unity of God: (1) evidence for the unity of God, that God is One; (2) evidence that there are three Persons who are God; and (3) subtle textual hints of God’s three-in-oneness. *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*, for December 31.
8. How many examples from the Old Testament can you find for the idea of the Trinity? Or, even of the work of the Holy Spirit? Or, the Son? (Exodus 31:3; 1 Chronicles 28:12; Job 33:4; Genesis 18:3; Daniel 7:13) Does the Holy Spirit seem to be just a manifestation of God’s power?
9. So, how is it that God can be Three and yet One? Following certain passages from the Old Testament, (for example, Deuteronomy 6:4) conservative Jews believe that God is One. They do not believe that He could ever become a human being.
10. Read also Exodus 3:13-15. Does this sound like God is one or more than one? Why does God use a verb as His name? The expression “I Am” or “I Am Who I Am” or even “I Will Be Who I Will Be” is an attempt to translate the Hebrew word *YHWH* which means something like “To Be,” or “The Eternal,” or “The Self-Existing One.” Doesn’t God sound like a Single Being?
11. Read Genesis 1:26,27. What are the implications of the expression: Let *Us* make man in *Our Own* image? Males and females are not the same. So, how can they both be in the image of God? Or, is this passage not talking about physical appearances? Or even functions? How do we reconcile verses like Genesis 1:26,27 with Deuteronomy 6:4? In what sense are married couples “one”?
12. Compare Isaiah 6:8. Why does the Bible, and especially the Old Testament, go back and forth between referring to God as One and then as more than One? Why did God use “I” and then “We”

or “Us” or “Our” almost in the same sentence?

13. Read Genesis 2:24, *GNB*: “That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united with his wife, and they become one.” The word translated *one* in this passage is the same as the word *one* used to describe God’s essential oneness. Do we expect husbands and wives to become “essentially one”? The Hebrew word *echad* is not a mathematical term. It talks about a complex unity with separate parts which are distinct.
14. Almost no one who has any belief in the Bible challenges the divinity of the Father. Few challenge the divinity of the Holy Spirit. But, Christ’s divinity or deity has been challenged down through the millennia. Why is Christ’s deity important? How can He be fully God and fully man at the same time?
15. Let us now look specifically at evidence for the divinity of Christ. Read Philippians 2:6. Christ did not demand to remain a divine Being during His time on this earth. He was willing to become fully and completely human so that no one around Him was able to recognize from His appearance or behavior that He was anything other than an ordinary human being. What about John 10:18?

Jesus declared, “I am the resurrection, and the life.” In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived. “He that hath the Son hath life.” [1 John 5:12] The divinity of Christ is the believer’s assurance of eternal life.—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 530 (1898); *Evangelism* 616.2.
16. Clearly, Jesus did not make a big show out of the fact that He knew that He was God. In His life as a human being, how soon did He learn that? Who taught Him that? (*DA* 70.1) Read Matthew 13:41; Mark 2:5-10; Matthew 25:31-46. Is it important to know that Jesus Christ was fully divine?
17. The Jews believed that illness was the result of sin, either the person’s own sins or perhaps the sins of his/her parents. (John 9:1,2) Thus, it was clear to them that any person who suffered from a serious disease was a serious sinner. In Mark 2:5-10, Jesus made a direct attack on their erroneous beliefs; and at the same time, He proved that He was God by first “forgiving” the paralyzed man’s sins and then “proving” that He could forgive sins by asking the man to get up and walk away! If you believe that someone’s disease is caused by his sins, then to heal that disease requires the Healer to forgive those sins!
18. Jesus did accept the worship of His followers. However, that did not come primarily until after His resurrection. (See Matthew 14:33; 28:9; Luke 24:50-52; John 9:35-38) Contrast the behavior of Paul. (Acts 14:8-18) And He arose from the grave, the second death, by His own power. (*DA* 785.2)
19. Jesus must have been very careful in His acceptance of worship. We see that He allowed that kind of worship only from close associates or friends. Is that because only those people recognized His true identity? Or, because He did not want to stir up too big a controversy by allowing a public proclamation of His deity? He did not readily accept worship until after His resurrection.
20. Read John 19:7 and Matthew 26:63-65. What did Caiaphas know about Jesus’s claims to divinity? Was it based on His resurrection of Lazarus from the dead? Didn’t Jesus recognize that making such a claim during His trial would inevitably lead to His crucifixion?
21. Is that powerful evidence of His deity? Or, is it powerful evidence that He believed in His deity? Is there an essential difference? Didn’t Jesus recognize that if He acknowledged His deity at that point, He would be condemned?
22. How did the lives of the disciples change after His resurrection when they finally came to grips with the fact that Jesus was God?
23. Our Christian friends, the Jehovah’s Witnesses, do not believe in the divinity of Christ or the Holy Spirit. To them, Christ is a created being and there is only one God, the Father. Some prominent early Seventh-day Adventists had similar beliefs. Why do we baptize people in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit? If we forgot to mention all Three, would the baptism be incomplete or invalid?
24. What is the role of the Holy Spirit in the Godhead? Read Genesis 1:2. Can we be certain that this verse is a reference to the Holy Spirit?
25. The Holy Spirit is closely linked with the incarnation of Christ on this earth. Consider these specific

details noted in the *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*, for January 3:

1. When announcing the birth of Christ, the angel tells Mary that her Child will be called “holy” because the Holy Spirit will come upon her (*Luke 1:35*).
2. Jesus claimed that the Spirit of the Lord was upon Him, anointing Him to preach (*Luke 4:18*).
3. He also claimed to be driving out demons by the Spirit of God (*Matt. 12:28*).
4. The Spirit, who is to carry on Christ’s work after His departure, is another Counselor of the same kind (*John 14:16*).
5. Jesus breathed out the Holy Spirit upon His followers (*John 20:22*).
6. New Christians will have both the indwelling Holy Spirit (*John 14:17*) and also the Spirit of Christ (*Gal. 2:20, Col. 1:27*).

26. How did each Member of the Trinity participate in the baptism of Jesus? What was God trying to tell us by that event? Was that the first time the Godhead had come down to earth to work together?

When they [Israel] came to Sinai, He took occasion to refresh their minds in regard to His requirements. Christ and the Father, standing side by side upon the mount, with solemn majesty proclaimed the Ten Commandments.—*Historical Sketches*, p. 231. (1866); *Evangelism* 616.3.

27. The New Testament apostles often spoke of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit together. (See Matthew 28:19,20; Acts 2:33; 1 Peter 1:1-3; 2 Corinthians 1:20-22; 2 Corinthians 13:14)
28. Christ is repeatedly described as being seated at the right side of God the Father, in the place of honor, and then being given the Holy Spirit. Why was Christ given the Holy Spirit? Was it because the Holy Spirit is now to do in Christ’s place what Jesus could not do after becoming human? Why did Jesus describe the Holy Spirit as “another Comforter”? (John 14:16) Note that the expression means “another of the same kind.”
29. Without a doubt, John 14-16 is the most exhaustive and comprehensive description in the entire Bible of the Three Members of the Godhead and Their roles. What should we learn from these three chapters?
30. Jesus was talking about the essential functions of the Three Members of the Godhead and Their relationship to His personal, human life and death. This is the core of the gospel. It should not surprise us to see Jesus involving all Three Members of the Godhead because each of Them is fully engaged in that process.
31. What difference would it make to our salvation if Christ were not fully divine?
32. Back in the beginning of the cosmic conflict, the angels offered to come and die in Jesus’ place. (1SP 46.1) But, He said it would not “pay the debt.” What does that mean? If the questions in the cosmic conflict are about God and His character, would the life and death of an angel answer those questions?
33. If Christ were not fully God, then all we have is the Lord shifting the punishment for our sins from one party to another, as opposed to taking them upon Himself. The whole point of the gospel is that it was God Himself on the cross bearing the sins of the world. Anything short of this would denude the atonement of everything that made it so powerful and effective.
- . . . If Jesus were merely a created being, and not fully God, how could He—as a creature—bear God’s full wrath against sin? What created being, no matter how exalted, could save humanity from the violation of God’s holy law? [Or even God’s wrath?]
- Were Jesus not divine, then God’s law would not be as sacred as God Himself, because the violation of it would be something for which a created being could atone. The law would be only as sacred as that created being, and not as sacred as the

Creator. **Sin itself would not be so bad if all it took to atone for it was the death of a creature and not the death of the Creator to atone for it.** The fact that it took God Himself, in the Person of Christ, to remedy sin presents powerful evidence of the seriousness of sin. *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*, for January 5.

34. Consider what is being said in the paragraphs above. Did the Creator die? Could the Creator die? Could Jesus as a human die while His divinity not die? What really happened in the Garden of Gethsemane and on Calvary? Was the divinity of Jesus dead on Calvary? Or, only quiescent?

In Him dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. When Christ was crucified, it was His human nature that died. Deity did not sink and die; that would have been impossible. (21MR 418.5; 5BC 1113.2; LHU 76.2; 7ABC 446.2; UL 260.2)

35. Ellen White made it very clear that Jesus refused to exercise His divinity at any time while here on this earth as a human being. He depended on His Father and the Holy Spirit even for the miracles that He performed. Isn't that because He had chosen to live and die as a human being, not as God?
36. We must admit that there are many aspects of the incarnation, life, and death of Jesus Christ that are hard for human beings to comprehend. Why would people worship a Man born in a remote corner of the Roman Empire who died an ignominious death but then three days later arose to life?
37. The Jews could not believe that their Messiah could die a criminal's death. The Greeks with their carefully thought-out philosophical arguments could not wrap their minds around this one.
38. Even Christians found this story hard to accept. Christian heresies sprang up, mostly concerned with the deity of Christ but especially with the atonement. Such groups as the Ebionites taught that Jesus was just a man, a prophet at best. Others taught that Jesus really was God but that He only *appeared* to be human during His ministry. He only *appeared* to suffer on the cross. This view was called docetism, a word rooted in the Greek verb that means "to seem." Arianism taught that Christ was "sort of" divine but that He was a created being. *Adult Teacher's Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*, page 15.
39. The challenge for many people is to understand how Three can be One.

The atomic theory, the idea that matter is composed of innumerable submicroscopic units we call atoms, is one of the pillars of modern science. It was a Greek, Democritus (circa 450 B.C.), who coined the term *atomos*, meaning literally uncuttable. The atom, Democritus believed, was the hidden, indivisible unity underlying the multiplicity of the things that we see around us.

As scientists began to rediscover and confirm Democritus' hypothesis in modern times, they made further discoveries. The atom, that primal unity, was, in fact, a name for a complex relationship between the particles that composed it. The protons [and neutrons] were not more "atomic" than the electrons, or vice versa. If you were lacking either of them, you were lacking an atom.

In the same way, the Old Testament of the Bible informs us that God is One. But as we look into this fact further, we discover that this unity is the product of a harmonious relationship among Three distinct Beings, all equally divine and all coeternal. While the atom can be, and has been (in contradiction to its name), split, this triune God really is the indivisible unity underlying all reality. *Adult Teacher's Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*, page 13.

40. The idea that God can be Three and yet One will always be difficult for finite human beings to grasp. But, shouldn't we humbly recognize that we will never fully understand all there is to know about God? No doubt, this is one subject that we will discuss at length when we get to heaven.

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