

GODHEAD COURSE

Lesson 8

Monotheism in the Gospels

A widespread idea among Christians is that the O.T. did not clearly reveal who God is. It is true that Jesus came to give a fuller revelation of God's character to humanity, but it is often also taught that through His teachings we learn that the God of the Bible is a Trinity.

Is this so? What did Jesus teach? Do His words and teaching support the Trinitarian theology? Are His teachings in harmony with O.T. Scriptures?

This lesson will examine the identity of God according to the gospels and its main figures:

1. John the Baptist
2. The Jews
3. Jesus the Christ

1. JOHN THE BAPTIST

The man God ordained to declare the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies, proclaiming that the Messiah's coming was at hand, was John the Baptist. He was the one prophesied as the "...voice of one crying in the wilderness" *Isaiah 40:3 / Matthew 3:3*

His purpose and mission in life was to prepare the way for the Lord.

His birth was a miracle. An angel came from heaven and announced to his parents what was to take place (Luke 1:7).

Jesus described John as:

- "*The greatest of all the prophets*" *Luke 7:28*
- The promised Elijah that was to come—the "second" Elijah. *Matthew 17:10-13*

Surely, John the Baptist knew who God was and worshipped the true God of heaven. If John was the one who came in the spirit and power of Elijah, it is only logical to believe that he worshipped the same God Elijah worshipped!

Did John believe in a triune monotheistic God? The fact that he was a first-century Jew indicates that he did not worship a trinity.

The Bible presents a very significant detail in Acts 19:1-3 answering this question:

"And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples,

*He said unto them, **Have ye received the Holy Ghost** since ye believed? And they said unto him, **We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost.***

*And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptised? And they said, Unto **John's baptism.**" Acts 19:1-3*

These twelve people (Acts 19:7) were baptised into John's baptism. Whether John himself, or someone else baptised them is irrelevant at the moment. The point is that these people had not even heard of the Holy Ghost.

If John worshipped a triune God; wouldn't he have at least mentioned God the Holy Spirit? Presumably he or his disciples, would have told the people being baptised about the God they were to worship.

It is rather illogical to believe that John worshipped a trinity when those baptised into his baptism had not even heard of the Holy Spirit, let alone, God the Holy Spirit.

Looking objectively at this account, one must accept the fact that John the Baptist, *the promised Elijah*, like the first Elijah, did not worship a trinity. Rather, he would have worshipped the same God his fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob worshipped.

2. THE JEWS

Did the Jews worship a trinity, a three-in-one God? Who was their God?

It is very helpful to know the answer to these questions when studying the gospels, especially when reading conversations relating to this topic between Jesus and the Jews of His day. Consider a conversation between Jesus and a scribe:

"Which is the first commandment of all?" Mark 12:28

Jesus' answer began with the words:

"The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord." Mark 12:29

To a Jew, this was the most important verse to memorise. Every Jew knew it by heart. Notice the scribe's reply to Jesus:

*"Well, Master, thou hast said the truth: for there is **one God**; and there is none other but **he**:
And to love **him** with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with*

all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.” Mark 12:32, 33

This was the confession of a monotheistic belief – *“There is one God ... none other but he.” Mark 12:32*

Keep in mind that the scribe was not a 21st century, Trinitarian Christian. He was a first-century Jew. Jesus was a first-century Jew as well. Before reading Jesus’ reply to the scribe, one must understand what the scribe believed and what he meant by his words.

Any 21st century Trinitarian can say “Amen” to what both Jesus and the scribe said. A Trinitarian who fully understands the trinity would believe in one God, and refer to this one God as “He” or “Him”!

It is incorrect to suppose that the singular terminology used in the Bible in relation to God is proof against the trinity.

It is incorrect to argue that use of the terminology “He, Him...etc.” instead of “they, them...etc.,” when referring to God, serves as evidence against the trinity doctrine.

The Trinity belief is monotheistic. Therefore, any arguments about the oneness of God will harmonise with it. It is important to accurately understand any concept of God, so as not to misrepresent it. To say that the trinity doctrine is polytheistic is to set up a straw man argument and attempt to defeat it. That is not the way to arrive at the truth.

Which Monotheistic God?

Returning to the discussion between Jesus and the scribe, to what Monotheistic God were they referring? Were they referring to a triune Monotheistic God or to One individual (one being) Monotheistic God called “God the Father”?

The answer to this question requires another question: Did the 1st century Jews worship a triune Monotheistic God or a One Individual Monotheistic God?

It has already been established that O.T. Jews did not worship a trinity, neither did John the Baptist. The Jews at the days of Jesus should be no different.

Notice the following conversation between Jesus and the Jews:

*“... Then said they to him, We be not born of fornication; **we have one Father, even God.** Jesus said unto them, If God were your Father, ye would love me: for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me.” John 8:41,42*

Which God were they talking about? Were they talking about a trinity?

*“Jesus answered, If I honour myself, my honour is nothing: it is **my Father** that honoureth me; of whom **ye say**, that **he is your God.**” John 8:54*

Jesus told the Jews: “The one that you say is your God, is my Father! It is your God who honours me.”

Jesus was born as a Jew and lived thirty-three years among first-century Jews. He mingled with them and worshipped in the same synagogue where they worshipped. He knew what they believed. That is why He told them:

“My Father is the one who you, the Jews, say is your God!”

Did the Jews worship a triune God? Not at all !

The first-century Jews believed in one monotheistic God. Jesus’ testimony to them was that the One they worshipped was his Father.

I AM

Continuing the discussion another misunderstood verse comes up:

“Then said the Jews unto him, Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham?

*Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, **Before Abraham was, I am.***

Then took they up stones to cast at him: but Jesus hid himself.” John 8:57-59

Did Jesus claim the name of God as His? He did.

Was Jesus the One who spoke to Moses out of the burning bush? He was. He was the Angel of the Lord referred to as Jehovah (Lord) and Elohim (God). The Angel of the Lord who appeared to Moses is the Son of God, He is the Word of God and Voice of God and in Him is found the name of the Father: “*My Name is in Him.*” Exodus 23:21.

Christ was the One who spoke to Moses saying “*I AM THAT I AM*” Exodus 3:14. Although, He was speaking the words of His Father. All things proceed from the Father. Back then, in the O.T., He spoke the words of God, and in the N.T. He did the very same thing.

This is not foreign to the N.T. John tells us that Jesus is the Word of God, who was with God in the beginning, and was God (divine).

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

Moreover, while on Earth, He testified that He spoke the words of His Father:

*“Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you **I speak not of myself**: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works.” John 14:10*

*“For I have not spoken of myself; but **the Father** which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak. And I know that his commandment is life everlasting: whatsoever I speak therefore, even **as the Father said unto me, so I speak.**” John 12:49-50*

Jesus made the thoughts of God audible. He was the mouthpiece of God, His Father, in both the Old and New Testament and He continues to be the Word and Voice of God to the human race today. Very often, people will use Jesus' claim to the name of God (I AM), as proof that Jesus is a part of a 3-in-1 triune God. But this conclusion is not correct.

Jesus was pointing the first-century Jews to the fact that He had been the One who had appeared to Moses and spoken with him. He was revealing the fact that He had existed before Abraham, using this encounter with Moses as the example, since every Jew knew this story well. In this He demonstrated His divinity, and His identity as the *Voice and Word* of God. This is not the same as claiming to *be* the one true God of the Bible, the Ancient of Days. This, Jesus never did.

Jesus and the Woman at the Well

Jesus met a Samaritan woman at Jacob's well, and told her the things she has done. The woman thought that He must be a prophet, and asked:

“Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.” John 4:20

Jews and Samaritans had different understandings of where and whom to worship, thus the woman's question. Jesus responded:

*“Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship **the Father**. Ye worship ye know not what: **we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews**. But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship **the Father** in spirit and in truth: for **the Father** seeketh such to worship **him**. God is a Spirit: and they that worship **him** must worship **him** in spirit and in truth.” John 4:21-24*

Jesus told the Samaritan woman two things:

- 1) The Jews know the true identity of God by saying “*salvation is of the Jews.*” John 4:22
- 2) Whom she should worship, or, who the God of the Jews is. He said, “*...the true worshippers shall worship the Father*” John 4:23

In this conversation, just like in the one before it, the term *God*, used by the Jews and Jesus, did not refer to a triune, monotheistic God; it referred to God the Father.

The Scriptures are clear on whom the Jews worshipped in the first century. They worshipped God the Father.

- The Jews said the Father was their God.
- Jesus told the Jews my Father is your God.
- Jesus told the woman at the well to worship the God of the Jews—the Father.

In Jesus' day John the Baptist and all the Jews did not believe in a triune monotheistic God, they believed in one, individual, monotheistic God, who according to scripture, is the Father of Jesus Christ

Jesus and the Scribe

The scribe said to Jesus:

*“Well, Master, thou hast said **the truth**: for there is **one God**; and there is none other but **he**.” Mark 12:32*

- Who did he have in mind? To whom was he referring?
- Was the scribe referring to a triune, monotheistic God, or was he referring to God the Father, as a singular monotheistic God?

It is obvious from Scripture the scribe was referring to God the Father alone, not to a unity of three persons. He believed in a singular, monotheistic God. This is what every first-century Jew believed.

“And when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly, he said unto him, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God. And no man after that durst ask him any question.” Mark 12:34

This would have been a perfect opportunity for Jesus to clarify to the scribe, and to us, the readers, that the one God of the Bible is a unity of three persons. However, instead of a clarification or a correction, Jesus gives an affirmation. “Thou art not far from the kingdom of God.”

Moreover, notice how Mark records the account forty years after the crucifixion:

*“And when Jesus saw that he answered **discreetly**, he said unto him ...” Mark 12:34*

This is what Mark had been taught. Mark believed the scribe answered wisely or *discreetly*. Not only that, but he believed Jesus thought the scribe’s answer was correct.

John Mark, the author of the gospel of Mark, was recording what happened. It clearly expresses Mark’s understanding of the situation. Mark believed that Jesus was pleased with the scribe’s answer in that Jesus thought the scribe’s answer was wise and prudent.

The majority of researchers believe Mark was written about thirty-six years after the crucifixion around 70 A.D. If he was a Trinitarian, then he would not have thought the scribe’s answer was wise. The insight this passage gives of Mark’s thinking indicates that he was not a Trinitarian and that Jesus approved of the scribe’s understanding of a singular monotheistic God, and made no attempt to correct him. This passage leads to the understanding that the God of the Bible, referred to by Mark, the scribe, and Jesus, is none other than God the Father.

3. JESUS CHRIST

Notice who God is according to Jesus:

a) The Only True God

As Jesus prayed to His Father in John 17:3, He said,

*“And this is life eternal, that they might know **thee** the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.” John 17:3*

According to Jesus, eternal life is based upon knowing and having a relationship with *two* Persons or Beings; God and Jesus. Notice that Jesus referred to His Father as the only true God. Also, there is only one, true God, meaning, one God of all and above all; one Source of all life and being. In His prayer, Jesus did not present this one true God as a unity of three persons, but as a single individual, His own Father.

b) Prayer

Jesus taught the Samaritan woman to pray to the Father (John 4:23,24}, and when the disciples asked Him to teach them how to pray, He began by saying:

*“After this manner therefore pray ye: **Our Father** which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. **Thy kingdom** come. **Thy will** be done in earth, as it is in heaven. ... For **thine** is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.” Matthew 6:9, 10, 13*

By this Jesus taught that the Father is the God of heaven and earth. One prays to the Father asking His kingdom come and will be done, as all things belong to the Father.

c) Lord of Heaven and Earth

*“In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, **O Father, Lord of heaven and earth**, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight.” Luke 10:21*

According to Jesus, His Father is the Lord of heaven and Earth.

d) Jesus Never Claimed to be God

Jesus never claimed to be the God of the Bible. He claimed to be divine, equal with God, and took the Father's name ("I Am") upon Himself. He also clearly stated who He is — the *Son* of God.

One cannot approach the scriptures with preconceived ideas. It causes him to see what he wants to see and to ignore the rest.

Many quote some of Christ's words but ignore other words which shed a different light on what they are trying to prove. For example:

- *"I and my Father are one" (John 10:30) ignoring "my Father is greater than I" John 14:28*
- *"Before Abraham was, I am" John 8:58 ignoring "I am the Son of God" (John 10:36)*
- *Jesus said, "I am the way, truth and the life" (John 14:6), and that He gives life to whomever He wills (John 5:21); but He also said "For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself;" John 5:26*

Two divine Beings give eternal life, and are involved in the redemption of man, yet One received His life from the Other. In other words, the Father is the Source of all life and being, including the life of Jesus, who is the Saviour and the Author of life to the human race. (Hebrews 12:2)

Notice also the following words of Jesus. As you read them, please ask yourself *"Who is the God referred to"* in these verses:

- *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved." John 3:16. 17*
- *"And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Matthew 27:46*
- *"Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God." John 20:17*

The purpose of Christ's earthly mission was to reveal God to humanity. In these passages, the following characteristics of God are clearly revealed:

- He has an only-begotten Son.

- He is the God of Jesus.
- He is the Father of Jesus.

Jesus was speaking as a man, but did He mean what He said? Is it possible to build a theology and faith on the teachings of Jesus while he was on earth?

Jesus declared that God the Father is not only *our* God, but *also His* God. Before and after His resurrection, He testified that the Father was His God.

Jesus also said:

“Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed.” John 6:27

The term “God the Father” is not a name. Other translations say:

- “... for him did the Father seal-- *even* God.” (YLT)
- “... for him the Father, *even* God, hath sealed.” (ASV)
- “... for him has the Father sealed, *even* God.” (Darby)
- “... for him the Father, *even* God, hath sealed.” (RV)

While on earth Jesus identified the God that sealed him as His Father. He clearly declared that His Father is the Only True God. He is *my God and your God*. Yet when speaking about Himself, Jesus declared Himself to be the Son of God:

“Then said they all, Art thou then the Son of God? And he said unto them, Ye say that I am.” Luke 22:70

“Say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God?” John 10:36

Jesus clearly stated in no uncertain terms who God is and who He is. Here are a few other witnesses in the gospels who testified that Jesus is the Son of God:

- a. God the Father (Matthew 3:17, 17:5)
- b. Demons (Luke 4:41, 8:28)
- c. Followers of Jesus
 - i. Martha (John 11:27)
 - ii. Peter (Matthew 16:16)
 - iii. Roman Soldier (Matthew 17:54)
 - iv. All the disciples (Matthew 14:33)

- v. John (John 1:1) - States that Jesus is the divine Word of God which was with God before time began.

The gospels clearly reveal the Sonship and divinity of Jesus. Jesus claimed to be divine when:

- He claimed to be the I AM
- He claimed equality with God by claiming to be the Son of God:
*“But Jesus answered them, My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.
“ Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that **God was his Father**, making himself equal with God.” John 5:17-18*
- He asked His followers to believe in Him in the same way they believed in God, making Himself equally the object of true faith:
*“Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe **also** in me.”
John 14:1*

He wanted His disciples to have the same faith in Him as they have in God. He put Himself on an equal level with God when it comes to our faith.

Jesus is equally divine with His Father. He is God in that He has the God nature. The Scripture do not shy away from calling Jesus God, Jehovah, and Elohim; neither should we.

Thomas called Him: *“my Lord and my God” John 20:28*

He is God. Yet all throughout the Scripture, the O.T. prophets, John the Baptist, the Jews, Jesus, and His followers maintained the singular oneness of God, who is identified as the Father of Jesus Christ.

The gospels clearly reveal that Jesus is divine and God by nature, yet at the same time they explain *why* He is called God. It is not because He is the God of the Bible, neither is it because He is a third part of the God of the Bible. He is called God because He is the Son of God, the Word of God and the presence of God, as we saw earlier. This is what we discovered in the O.T. as well, two divine Beings yet one God.

Jesus' teachings in the gospels are in perfect harmony with what the O.T. taught regarding monotheism. They both testify that the monotheistic God of the Bible is God the Father, not a triune God.

The aim of these first studies is to examine what the Scripture teaches about the one God of the Bible. Hence, the verses that have to do with Jesus' sonship or with the identity of the Holy Spirit have not been examined yet. The topics of Christ's sonship and the Holy spirit will be address in later studies.

A correct understanding of who the one God of the Bible is lays a solid foundation on which the identity of Jesus and the Holy spirit will be easily built.

Two Divine Beings, Yet One God

The gospels reveal two divine Beings, yet one God. They reveal One who is identified as “*the only true God*” (*John 17:3*) and the ultimate Source of all things, including the life of the Son; while the other divine Being is identified as:

- The Son of God
- The Word of God
- Equally divine with God

In the Gospels, we learn about the same “One True God” we found in the O.T.; the source of everything including His Son.

The two Beings:

Old Testament

- Jehovah and His Angel
(Exodus 14:19, 24)
- Jehovah and His Son
(Proverbs 8:22-30, 30:4)
- With Jehovah being *the God of*
His Son (Psalms 45:6, 7)

Gospels

- God and His Messenger
(John 17:25, 26)
- God and His Son
(John 17:3)
- With God the Father being *the*
God of His Son (John 20:17, etc)

We’ve also learned why the Son of God is divine:

Old Testament

- He is the Son of Jehovah
(Proverbs 8:22-30: 30:4)
- He is the presence of Jehovah
(Isaiah 63:9)
- He is the Voice or Word of
Jehovah (Exodus 23:22)
- He has Jehovah’s name in Him
(Exodus 23:21)

Gospels

- He is the Son of God
(John 10:36)
- He is the presence of God
(“*I and My Father are one.*”)
(John 10:30)
- He is the Voice or Word of God
(John 1:1: 12:49)
- He has God’s name in Him (I
am) (John 8:58)

Both the O.T. and the N.T. gospels testify of the relationship between God and His Son.

They both testify of two divine Beings, yet one God of all and one Source of all, whom we have come to know as God the Father.