

THE FIRST PRINCIPLES OF THE ORACLES OF GOD

PART 1

Youth Conference 1999

The Book of Hebrews tells us that we must all begin by laying down “the first principles of the oracles of God” and then go on to strong meat (Hebrews 5:12-14). It is thus important for us as young people to make sure that these foundations are in place. We also know from the words of Christ himself that eternal life is not possible without knowing him and his Father (John 17:3). Is the “knowing” here only personal, or is it doctrinal understanding? One of the purposes of this Workbook is to demonstrate that knowing God and His Son involves both aspects, and that it is wrong to separate them. In this study we will make it our goal to learn more about the LORD God and Jesus Christ. The more we know about our Heavenly Father and our Saviour, the better able we will be to love and serve them. Additionally, it is also crucial that we know what the Bible says about our own nature and mortal condition. This, too, means more to us than doctrine in isolation. Such knowledge has a personal impact on the way we live our lives in Christ.

It is to these ends that Youth Conference 1999 is directed. Part 1 of the Workbook will tackle the general theme of the Oneness of God, while Part 2 will explore the subject of the nature of man. Because these topics do not derive from any particular biblical book, as is usually the case with Youth Conference, we have divided the study into ten thematic units. These ten units also represent the ten discussion groups to be held, Lord willing, two times a day for the five weekdays of the Conference. Each of the two Parts of the Workbook will have five sections. Here is the breakdown of Parts 1 and 2:

Part 1

- Introduction: principles of biblical interpretation
- Study 1: The One God
- Study 2: The Only God
- Study 3: The Fatherhood of God
- Study 4: The Power and Dominion of God
- Study 5: Jesus Christ: Son of God and Son of Man

Part 2

- Study 6: Man: a living soul
- Study 7: The mortality of man and death state
- Study 8: The end of the wicked
- Study 9: Resurrection and Judgment
- Study 10: The reward of the righteous

The introductory section on interpretation lays out some guidelines for the sound exposition of both first principles and wrested Scriptures. This section is intended to be of use for both Parts of our study. Each of the ten individual studies includes some background exposition to get you

started, along with a few explanations of the technical aspects of the Hebrew and Greek. The main focus, however, will be on the questions, through which it is hoped you will make many important discoveries yourself. As usual, completed Workbooks will provide the basis of our discussion during Conference. So remember to write down all the verses and record all the necessary information in your Workbooks in preparation for the discussion. Where the Workbook asks you to list verses of particular categories, you may want to go beyond this and discuss these passages in your notes. If you haven't enough room in the Workbook to write down your answers, you can always insert loose-leaf sheets where needed. As many of the themes intersect, you should familiarize yourself with all the questions in each Part, as you will likely come across answers to other questions while working on specific questions in different sections. This will save you time and avoid duplication. Finally, you needn't try to fill up the space below each question in your first attempt; leave room for additional material that you encounter later in your study.

First principles, wrested Scriptures and exhortation

One of the advantages of this year's topic—given its potential range—is that we will have greater scope than normal to go as far as we want in our studies beyond the bare minimum of the Workbook. Even within the Workbook there are many opportunities for the more advanced students to take individual elements of the study to great depths. Another additional benefit of our studies is that we will learn just how inter-related first principles are. Thus, although we are focusing on the two broad themes of the Oneness of God and the nature of man, we will also touch on all the other major first principles, including the death state, resurrection, baptism, the devil and the Kingdom. We will gain a greater appreciation for a whole range of biblical teachings and themes, and one of our goals will be to build up a powerful repertoire of verses that for used in our discussion at Youth Conference, and to teach and defend the Gospel.

The study will also have a very practical element with regard to our witness to those around us. The main intent of the study is positive, and the best way to learn how to discern false, unbiblical teachings is to have a very clear idea of what biblical Truth is. This is why we will start with and focus on the positive teachings. Throughout the notes, however, we will also tackle some of the important “wrested Scriptures” that are used to support the unbiblical notions of the Trinity and the immortal soul. This will help us prepare ourselves to contend for the faith once given to the saints (Jude 3), and to give an answer of it to everyone (1 Peter 3:15).

No Youth Conference would be complete without the all-important exhortational benefit. For this reason, the studies will also be geared to themes that will encourage us in our walk to the Kingdom. Each Study is set up so that we start with the milk of the first principles and then go on to more spiritual matters: the meat of the Word. This may be how many of the discussion groups at Conference progress as well.

Finally, we also plan to prepare a historical overview of the corruption of the original teachings on God and the nature of man, along with the recovery of their truth in the time since the Reformation. This material will be made available at the Youth Conference, Lord willing.

Study tools and other suggested sources

As always, our Workbook study is intended to involve, first and foremost, you and your Bible. There is no question that the best way to fill your mind and heart with the Word is to read and study it yourself. Thus, your most important tool will be a good, literal Bible translation with a comprehensive cross-referencing system. Literal translations include the KJV, NKJV, RV, RSV and NASB. In addition, it would be helpful to have access to several other less-literal Bible versions for comparative purposes, including the NIV. You will find some doctrinal bias in all mainstream versions, so keep an eye out for alternative (and often more literal) renderings in the margin or footnotes. It is also important to realize that the KJV and NKJV are based on the Textus Receptus (Received Text), while most modern versions are based on “eclectic” Greek texts (that is, texts based on a wide range of textual authorities, including many more ancient than those available in 1611). There is a debate over which textual tradition is best, but, with the exception of John 1:18, you will find a greater number of potentially Trinitarian corruptions in the Received Text, including the infamous *comma Johanneum* (1 John 5:7). Our advice here is to compare between the versions for yourself.

In addition to your most basic and precious tool, you will want to add the venerable Young’s and Strong’s Concordances. Also, if you can get hold of a copy, R.A. Torrey’s *Treasury of Scriptural Knowledge* will greatly expand the number of cross references available to you. To these tools we can add Bible dictionaries. Of course, computer-aided Bible programmes have now become standard tools of the Bible student, and allow us to carry out a wide range of studies. Even the free On-Line Bible is valuable, as with it you can do one thing a standard concordance cannot: phrase and multiple word searches.

As we have said, we recommend that in your initial study you limit yourself to the Bible and Bible study tools. After you have completed Part 1 of the Workbook, however, you may want to refer to two helpful Christadelphian works. The first is Percy E. White’s *The doctrine of the Trinity: analytically examined and refuted* (Torrens Park: CSSS, 1996). This work originally dates from earlier in the twentieth century, but still offers much of value, including sections on history and wrested Scriptures. The second and much more recent work is James H. Broughton and Peter J. Southgate’s *The Trinity: true or false?* (Nottingham: “The Dawn” Book Supply, 1995). This well-researched book covers first principles, wrested Scriptures and the historical development of the doctrine of the Trinity. In addition to these sources, there is a range of Christadelphian pamphlets and articles on the Trinity and kindred subjects. Brother Aleck Crawford’s computer index to Christadelphian writings is a very helpful tool for uncovering articles by topic in Christadelphian magazines. But, for your own good, don’t touch these sources until you’ve first gone through the Workbook yourself!

Working together

As many have found when preparing Youth Conference Workbooks, Bible study can also be very profitable and enjoyable as a collaborative effort. While the emphasis should remain on your own personal study, you may find it helpful to spend some time working on these notes informally with other young people in your area. Perhaps the topics can also be put on the CYC

schedule for more formal consideration. For those living in the Great Lakes Region, a Study Day is also planned, Lord willing. Of course, not everyone is blessed with living near large numbers of Christadelphian young people. If you are in this category—or even if you’re not—on-line discussion and help will be available through the Youth Conference Web site. Finally, if you have any difficulties with the Workbook that others around you aren’t able to deal with, please feel free to contact either of us (Brother Simeon Guntrip or myself, Brother Steve). We both live in Cambridge, UK and can be contacted by e-mail at sf@sguntrip.freemove.co.uk (Simeon) or sds28@cus.cam.ac.uk (Steve). Bear in mind that Simeon is mainly responsible for Part 2, while I am mainly responsible for Part 1. Also, any specific questions relating to Hebrew should be directed to Simeon, and those relating to Greek to myself. Finally, we would like to thank Sisters Mary Jane Abel and Julie Snobelen for their help in proof-reading and working through Part 1 to test our questions. We hope you all enjoy your studies. May God bless you as you study His Word.

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THE FIRST PRINCIPLES OF BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

Sound principles for interpreting the Word of God

Before beginning our study of some of the major doctrinal first principles, it will be important for us to consider a series of “first principles” for interpreting the Word of God. Truth comes through a correct reading of the Bible, just as false doctrine derives from corrupt scriptural interpretation. Thus if we are to arrive at a right understanding of God’s Word, it is imperative that we develop right methods of interpretation.

We must first of all found all our interpretation on the firm conviction that the Bible is the inspired Word of God (2 Timothy 3:15-17). When we embrace the divine origin of the Scriptures, we accept that it is both without error and free from contradiction. Christ himself confirmed that “Scripture cannot be broken” (John 10:35), and we read elsewhere that God’s Word is “true from the beginning” (Psalm 119:160). The Bible is also for us our only standard in doctrine; it is how we test teachings to determine whether they come from God. As it says in the prophecy of Isaiah: “To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them” (Isaiah 8:20). Let’s never forget this principle!

It’s also important that we seek God’s blessing on our study of His Word through the power of prayer. Let’s all pray with the Psalmist: “Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law” (Psalm 119:18). We must pray that our motivations are pure, that we are only interested in discovering what the Word has to say, and that we will not let our own biases and preconceptions get in the way. Let’s also pray that we do not learn merely to debate and to boast of our own knowledge. God’s Word—not ourselves—is the final arbiter, and all biblical truth is knowledge from God, not man. A humble perspective is crucial. Neither should our study of the Bible be merely academic. The Bible’s teachings will, in fact, become part of us, because the Word is living and active (Hebrews 4:12).

Moreover, we need to continue to read and study God’s Word daily, for the more we fill ourselves with the Word, the better able we will be to understand its teachings. The more familiar we become with Scripture, the more readily we will be able to discern what is, and what is not, biblical teaching. Above all, we need to develop biblical discernment: the ability to tell the difference between sound and faulty interpretation. This skill only comes with time and by immersing ourselves in the Word. Let it never be said that we teach for doctrines the commandments of men (Matthew 15:9)!

Deriving God’s teachings directly from His Word

One of the most important principles of biblical interpretation should also be one of the most obvious: we must take teachings *from* the Bible, not bring them *to* it. It is because so many in the past have knowingly or unknowingly failed to heed this principle that so many false doctrines abound. Simply put, the crucial difference boils down to “exegesis” versus “eisegesis:”

Exegesis: deriving God's teachings out of Scripture

Eisegesis: bringing our ideas to Scripture

The word *exegesis* is a Greek term for interpretation and can be roughly translated as “leading out of.” In other words, proper biblical interpretation derives meaning *from* the Word. We read the Word, seek to understand its meaning and then obtain God’s teachings from it. When this process is reversed, people force their ideas *into* Scripture. This is *eisegesis*: a “leading into.”

Those who have a familiarity with the methods of science will recognize a similarity between correct exegesis and what is called the empirical approach. Good scientists observe nature and draw their ideas from it—they do not enforce preconceived notions on it. So it is with the Bible.

A classic case of eisegesis is the attempt by Trinitarians to re-interpret the Bible in light of the *later* doctrine of the Trinity. The post-biblical development of the Trinity is well-documented and it is evident that the complete doctrine did not arrive until the end of the fourth century AD. Thus any attempt to read the Scriptures in light of this post-biblical doctrine is eisegesis: a reading into the Word of ideas that weren’t developed until much later. Instead, when we seek to derive our teachings from the Bible alone, we see—as we will in this study—that the Bible from the beginning to end only teaches that God is One.

Let’s look at a helpful example. Many Trinitarians, coming at the Bible with a preconceived idea that God is triune, read 2 Corinthians 13:14 as teaching the Trinity:

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

Since they assume that the Bible teaches the Trinity, many Trinitarians automatically and uncritically read this verse in a Trinitarian manner. Yet there is absolutely nothing in the vocabulary or structure of this passage that positively teaches anything of the sort. When we draw our beliefs from the text, we see in this case that it speaks about the grace of Christ, the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit—period. There is nothing here about co-equality or consubstantiality of divine beings, or that Christ, God and the Holy Spirit are three persons in the Godhead. In fact, a closer analysis reveals that not only does the verse not follow the standard order of the Trinitarian formula “Father, Son and Holy Spirit,” but the Father is not mentioned separately, as He must to avoid confusion, since in the Trinity “God” is supposed to be all three. Finally, the verse does not say that the three mentioned are one being.

It is difficult for many people to rid their minds of ideas that are so pervasive. But this is exactly what we must do if we want to read the Bible as it was read by its original recipients. We must test constantly every teaching and ask: does this come from the text, or from an external or later source? This is a skill that no Bible student or good historian can be without. Again, a key is the belief that the Bible alone offers Truth. This brings us to our next (and related) principle.

Basing doctrine solely and only on the Word of God

One of the fundamental differences between biblical Truth and the orthodox corruption of it is that the former relies entirely on the Word, while the latter is forced to resort to the fallible word of men. Many orthodox commentators claim to hold to the principle of *sola Scriptura* (Scripture alone), but in the end fall back on the Creeds and Church tradition. In the case of the Trinity, which is not found in the Bible, this is crucial. In order to prop up and fill out their unbiblical teaching, Trinitarians use the Nicene (325), Constantinopolitan (381) and Athanasian (fifth century) Creeds. No supplementary authority is needed according to the Apostle Paul, who said that the believer could be perfect, or complete, with the Bible alone (1 Timothy 3:17).

What this means is that our Bible study must be exactly that: *Bible* study. Once we become dependent on authorities and commentaries we are in danger of relying on (or worse yet, becoming dependent on) the word of men. When we become reliant upon such “authorities” we fall into the above-mentioned trap of eisegesis. This does not mean that we must never dip into a commentary. It does mean, however, that we must rigidly subordinate human teachings to the Word of God. If we never forget this priority, we’ll be in good shape.

The Unity of Scripture

Since all Scripture has God for its Author, we can have confidence that it is always consistent with itself. The inspired unity of the Word of God provides us with another important tool of biblical interpretation: we should interpret difficult and obscure verses by those more easily understood. In doing this, we start with a stable and certain foundation. We move from the simple to the more difficult, from what is understood to what is not, and from the known to the potentially unknown. In other words, we let the Bible interpret itself.

We can contrast this sound principle with the practice of selecting a verse, isolating it from its immediate and general context, applying a meaning to it and then using this interpreted verse as normative for the rest of the passages on this teaching. This is the method many orthodox scholars use to impress unbiblical doctrines onto the purity of the Word.

Thus Trinitarians will lift a verse such as John 20:28 out of its immediate and general contexts, and claim that as Christ is therein referred to as “God” he must be “very God of very God”—never mind that nowhere else in the Bible is there support for such a notion. Instead of isolating a verse like this and applying a post-biblical idea to it, we must first look at the immediate context of the passage for clues as to what the verse may and may not be teaching. In this case we find a very relevant detail in the same chapter: in verse 17 Christ says that he himself has a God.

Next, we analyse the language of John for further light. Once again, we are not let down: in John 17:3 Christ clearly states that the Father alone is the *True* God. These two details, then, tell us how we must not interpret John 20:28. With this example, we are given guidance on how we should interpret the verse when we move to both the wider context of the Gospel according to John and the general context of the entire Bible, where we see that in the special case of men acting as representatives of God, they can take on this designation in an honorary sense. An important clue is given in John 10:34, which is in turn a quotation from Psalm 82:6. These verses tell us that Israelite judges were called Gods. But is this all? No. John 10:36 adds a crucial

element where Christ reinforces the teaching that he is in the special category of “Son of God.” In other words, if men acting as God’s representatives can be called God, how much more the perfect representative, who is also His only Son!

This example has relied on the fact that the Bible is a unity and that it is its own best interpreter. We need to approach Scripture holistically. For this we use our cross references and concordances to find other occurrences of concepts and other uses of pivotal words.

Using both the Old and New Testaments

One sound principle that derives from our understanding that the Bible is a unity is that we must base scriptural teachings on both the Old and New Testaments. We need to be able to see how doctrines are initially presented in kernel form in the early parts of the Old Testament and then elaborated and given more detail throughout the later Old Testament books and all of the New Testament. Some orthodox interpreters may claim or imply that completely new revelations are given in the New Testament and that these completely supersede those given in the Old, but the New Testament is based on the Old and is perfectly consistently with it.

Biblical teachings are introduced in the earlier Old Testament books—especially Genesis—and then expanded throughout Scripture. Thus, when studying biblical doctrine in a systematic way (and these notes are no exception), we start in the Old Testament to discover the foundations and then work our way through to the New Testament to trace the elaboration of teachings first presented in the Old. We see this, for example, in the case of the Messiah. Teaching on the Messiah is first specifically introduced in Genesis 3:15, then elaborated further in the Abrahamic Covenant and into the Prophets, and finally presented in its most detailed form first in the Gospel accounts and then in the New Testament Epistles. It is only when we view the entire range of teaching from Old Testament to New that we can grasp the fullness of the doctrine. To do this, we need to make effective and thorough use of cross references and a concordance to trace the “Bible echoes” that sound throughout Scripture.

If we were to start with the New Testament, as many orthodox commentators do, we would be bypassing the crucial background to teachings given in the Old Testament. Thus when we encounter passages where the term God is applied to Christ (such as John 20:28), we would be missing the important principle laid out in the Old Testament that men and angels can be called God when acting for Him. Similarly, it would be wrong to begin a study of Satan with the New Testament, since the word *satan* is Hebrew and teachings about “the adversary” are first presented in the Old Testament. In each case, our understanding would be incomplete.

Yet another example comes in Revelation 14:10-11, which is used by many to support the doctrine of eternal hellfire torment. But this passage includes a direct quotation from Isaiah 34:10, which is embedded in a highly symbolic chapter dealing with the destruction of Israel’s enemies. A close examination of the passage reveals that the burning pitch and smoke from the destruction of the nations (verse 1) is not meant to last forever any more than the mountains will really melt with blood (34:3), or the heavens will literally roll up like a scroll (34:4). Elsewhere in the Old Testament we see that the imagery of unquenchable fire and everlasting destruction is

meant to depict completeness and finality. Illuminating material in Jeremiah 17:27 and Nehemiah 2:3,13 describes the “unquenchable” fire as having gone out. In the first fulfilment of Isaiah 34:10, ancient Israel’s enemies were consumed; they are certainly not burning to this day.

Here we see a related principle. Often a wrested Scripture in the New Testament will be based on a quotation or allusion taken from the Old. Trinitarians like to argue that Matthew 1:23, which speaks about the meaning of the name Emmanuel, shows that Jesus was literally himself “God with us.” Yet this verse is a direct quotation from Isaiah 7:14, the first fulfilment of which was the birth of Hezekiah (or, perhaps, a son of Isaiah himself). This first fulfilment shows that the birth of the child was a sign that God was with the people, not that the child himself was God. Thus, without the Old Testament, our information on doctrine is incomplete and thus potentially misleading. Orthodox theologians notoriously ignore or gloss over the Hebraic roots of biblical doctrine. If we do the same, it will be to our own doctrinal peril.

Discerning between biblical styles

The Bible is written in several different styles or genres, including prose, historical narrative, poetry, parable, symbolic prophecy and epistolary exhortation. While most principles of biblical interpretation hold true in all these genres, each still needs to be approached in subtly different ways. Care must be taken to identify the style of a particular passage, as the very manner of writing itself can convey important elements of the meaning. We need to be particularly vigilant when interpreting parabolic, poetic and symbolic portions of Scripture.

Let’s consider the genre of parables. In the Gospel accounts we are told that Jesus characteristically taught in parables (Matthew 13:34; Mark 4:33-34). We are also told that when Jesus used this manner of teaching, he was often misunderstood—even by the disciples (Mark 4:10-13; John 10:6). Moreover, citing from Isaiah 6:9-10, Jesus said (when discussing his parables) that the spiritually undiscerning would see and not perceive, and hear and not understand (Mark 4:12). It is thus imperative for us to strive to understand how parables work if we are to fathom some of the more important aspects of Christ’s teaching. The same goes for poetry and symbolic prophecy.

First, we must approach these genres with a different set of expectations than the more literal prose passages in Scripture. Thus, when reading highly symbolic and spiritual portions of the Bible, such as the Gospel according to John, we take the spiritual tone into account in our interpretation. Unfortunately, many Trinitarians fail to allow for John’s profound and spiritual style, which includes many “hard sayings”—such as Christ’s comparison of himself to manna from heaven to be eaten—and this helps explain why a high number of Trinitarian proof-texts come from this book. John even records Christ’s statement that he had been using “proverbs” or “figures of speech” (John 16:25).

Second, we should accumulate a repertoire of secure biblical identifications of metaphors or symbols. For example, Christ interprets the Parable of the Sower in Mark 4:14-23 and the symbol “many waters” is identified within the Book of Revelation as referring to “peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues” (17:15). We then use these secure identifications as

building blocks in our interpretation of the other elements of parables and prophecy. This is yet another example of the tried and proven method of using Scripture to interpret Scripture. Third, where such help is not given, we must search out the internal logic of metaphors and symbol. Again, how symbols are interpreted elsewhere in Scripture should help give us a feel for this. There is no substitute for sound familiarity with the Word!

Historical background

No biblical passage exists in a vacuum. As we have noted above, each verse is situated within a textual and thematic context. We need to take into account how the language and concepts are used in a particular book and within the Bible as a whole. But each passage is also located in a historical context. Most of the historical background we will need can be taken from the Bible itself. But it is sometimes helpful to turn to historical and archaeological sources for additional insight. This is not the same as turning to an *interpretation* given in a commentary, although such historical sources are often found in commentaries.

Thus sources on Jewish customs of the first century AD will be immensely valuable in bringing into sharper relief discussions about Judaizers in the New Testament Epistles. Similarly, historical detail on idolatry in Old Testament times can help us understand what the prophets of Israel and Judah were up against in their battles with false worship. It is also helpful to know when interpreting John 20:28 that the Roman Emperor Domitian, during whose reign John likely wrote his Gospel account, insisted on being addressed as “Our Lord and God.” Not so for the early Christians! Their Lord and Saviour was Jesus Christ.

In some cases, a statement in the Bible will be made against a current pagan teaching. An excellent example of this is Isaiah 45:7, where the LORD says: “I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things.” No biblical statement is empty and aimless, and this one is no exception. In this case history tells us that the contemporary Persians held to the principle of cosmic dualism: the idea that there is a God of Good and a God of Evil in constant combat. The passage in Isaiah challenges this false notion with the Truth: Yahweh is the source of all. In fact, the immediate textual context (45:5-6) and the chapters around this passage (*cf.* 41:4, 44:8, 46:9) bring home this point with power and clarity: there is no God beside Yahweh.

“Wrested Scriptures”

In our studies we will be considering some of the Scriptures wrested to support false teachings. The term “wrested Scriptures” comes from 2 Peter 3:16, where Peter speaks about the unlearned and unstable wresting the Scriptures to their own destruction. There are some general things we can say about our approach to interpreting such contested passages.

First, there is absolutely no question that the best way to deal effectively with “wrested Scriptures” is to know the positive teachings of Scripture through and through. If we have a secure knowledge of what the Bible really does say, we’ll have no difficulty when faced with a Scripture wrested to support something the Bible does not teach. We must not treat wrested

Scriptures as a series of isolated challenges to be tackled one at a time. Rather, we have to be able to deal with them as part of a holistic approach to the Bible—an approach in which we know the positive teachings so well that the apparent problem passages fit neatly into the general teachings of the Word. This is well in accord with the principle that the secure passages should interpret those less easily discernable. Second, we should use the interpretative principles outlined above. These are equally valuable for studying wrested Scriptures.

Third, we should look for patterns. Are those who argue for a particular false doctrine overly reliant on one part of Scripture, while ignoring the rest? Think, for instance, of the suspiciously high number of wrested Scriptures Trinitarians strive to use in the Gospel according to John (it should also be noted, however, that many of the key passages that oppose this doctrine come from John also). Is there an unwarranted emphasis on the New Testament, as opposed to the Old? Remember what we said above: all the major doctrines first appear in the Old Testament. Thus any suggested teachings—such as the ideas that God is three or that the soul is immortal—that are not directly founded in the Hebrew Old Testament have to be treated with a great deal of scepticism. Many false teachings are formed partly as a result of a neglect of either the Old or New Testaments: God’s Truth is found throughout the Bible.

Fourth, it is valuable to have a working knowledge of the relevant false doctrine. Few will expect you to have a detailed and exhaustive knowledge of other people’s beliefs, but it is important that you don’t misrepresent them. For example, we need to remember that the doctrine of the Trinity holds that the One God exists as three co-equal and co-eternal persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Orthodox Trinitarians believe that God is three persons, not one person. They also believe that the three persons cannot be confounded; thus, the Father is not the same person as the Son, and neither the Father nor the Son is to be identified as the person of the Spirit. Trinitarians who are at all aware of the orthodox Trinitarian position (and not all are) will not take kindly to you speaking about Christ being “part of” God. Instead, they believe he is one of three persons in the Triune Godhead. Trinitarians may misrepresent us, but let’s make sure we don’t misrepresent them. When we make the effort to understand what they believe, we will have a better chance of gaining their respect. But such knowledge of false teachings can also be of great practical help, since often Trinitarians will attempt to use verses that even they, when pressed, will admit do not support their teaching. Such is the case with John 10:30, as we will see.

Fifth, make sure that you identify and expose any specific unbiblical concepts that are being foisted on the text of the Bible. Of course, the entire notion of such doctrines as the Trinity and the immortality of the soul are foreign to the Bible, but we also need to identify specific aberrations on the way to demonstrating the unscriptural nature of these doctrines. For example, the Bible never talks about God’s “essence” or “substance,” much less of the Father and Son sharing in them. These are Greek philosophical ideas that were introduced as the Trinity was being formulated in the fourth century AD, and a Trinitarian should be asked to give proof that these ideas are in the Bible (which they won’t be able to do). Thus any claims by Trinitarians that a verse shows that the Father and Son are united in “essence” has to be rejected out of hand. Hebraic thought did not concern itself with philosophical questions about essence. On the other hand, there are many examples in both Old and New Testaments to show that the Father and Son are united in will and purpose.

Sixth, when confronted with a wrested Scripture we must ask: is there really a problem? Or are we simply in awe of an interpretation we have heard an orthodox apologist present? Unfortunately we are sometimes more aware of a false interpretation of a verse than the true one. Thus we all know how the orthodox interpret Luke 10:18: “I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven.” The orthodox reading of this passage is so well known that we may be partly in awe of it and may see problems where none exist. We can’t allow the popularity of an incorrect reading of a passage set the agenda. Here we must remember the principles we have presented above. In addition, we have to ask whether the orthodox interpretation relies at all on Church tradition. In this case, since the Bible knows nothing of an angelic revolt, we know it must. Finally, remember that since the Bible quite clearly does not teach such things as the Triune God or the immortality of the soul, any attempt to use passages to support these unbiblical teachings will be strained, forced and amount to nothing more than a grasping at straws. Be confident of God’s Truth.

Finding the Truth in the biblical balance

Unbiblical teachings often involve either a subtracting from the Truth of the Bible, or an unwarranted addition to it. Correct doctrine can be seen as placed on a continuum with complete unbelief at one end and extreme unthinking orthodoxy on the other. The chart below illustrates this using the examples of teachings on the person of Christ and belief in the nature of man:

Subtracting from	The Truth	Adding to
A mere man (Humanitarianism)	Son of God and Son of Man	God the Son (Trinitarianism)
No immortality No hope beyond grave	Conditional immortality Resurrection	Natural immortality Heaven after death

Modern Unitarians place exclusive stress on Christ’s humanity and reject the clear teaching of the Bible that Christ is the literal Son of God. This position is called humanitarianism. On the other hand, Trinitarians deny that Christ literally came in the flesh and instead make him into “very God of very God.” In doing this, they have added an idea that is foreign to the Bible. The Truth lies somewhere between these two extremes as the Word depicts Christ as both Son of God and Son of Man.

In the case of the nature of man, some people who claim to believe the Bible argue that there is no literal resurrection or eternal life. For them, there is no immortality and no life beyond the grave for the faithful. This is known as annihilationism—a view held by the Sadducees. Of course, the Scriptures emphasize that complete annihilation is the ultimate destiny of the wicked, but annihilationists go beyond this and take away eternal life from the righteous as well. At the other end of the spectrum lies the idea that human beings possess immortal souls and are thus naturally immortal—including the wicked. For those holding this position, eternal life is received immediately in heaven upon death. Lip service is paid to resurrection, which is logically irrelevant when one accepts this unbiblical teaching. Once again, the Truth avoids both these

extremes and teaches that immortality is a reward conditional upon belief and obedience through grace. Resurrection offers hope to those who die faithful in the Lord.

Applying these principles

These are some of the basic principles we need to employ to interpret the Bible. Let's sum up:

1. The Bible is the inspired and inerrant Word of God
2. We must take our ideas *from* the Bible, not bring them *to* it
3. Teachings must be obtained from the Bible alone
4. The Bible interprets itself
5. Consider the immediate, then the general and finally the entire biblical context
6. Use clear passages to illustrate those less easily understood
7. Allow for the literary style and genre
8. Consider the historical background

Some additional principles are important when evaluating wrested Scriptures:

1. Be sure of the positive teachings of the Bible
2. Look for suspicious patterns
3. Ask: is there really a problem?
4. Determine whether ideas are being taken away from or added to the Truth

In the following sections of the Workbook we will put these interpretative guidelines (and a few others we'll introduce later, including Hebraic parallelism) to work as we lay the foundations of the First Principles of the Oracles of God.

THE ONE GOD

God is One

The first foundation principle we want to establish is the Oneness of God. This simple yet profound Truth was declared to the Israelites through God's representative Moses:

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD.”

Deuteronomy 6:4

This passage can also be translated (perhaps more meaningfully): “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.” However we read it, the statement is clear in its intent: God is One.

What Hebrew Divine Name is translated as “the LORD” and “LORD” in this verse?

What Hebrew term is translated as “God” in this verse?

What Hebrew word is used for “one” in Deuteronomy 6:4? What other words is it related to?

How else is this word translated in the Old Testament?

Deuteronomy 6:4 is repeated in the New Testament. Where? What is the context?

What Greek word is used for “one” where Deuteronomy 6:4 is cited in the New Testament?

The declaration of Deuteronomy 6:4 is followed by a command for the Israelites to love Yahweh with all of their very beings:

“And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul,
and with all thy might.”

Deuteronomy 6:5

It is no accident that this command comes after the declaration in verse 4. It is obvious that God's Oneness relates to the command to give Him complete dedication and love.

Deuteronomy 6:5, also, is repeated in the New Testament. List these examples and their contexts.

In the space below, consider the ways in which Deuteronomy 6:4 and 6:5 relate to each other in the context of ancient Israel.

What should these two verses mean to us today?

The “One God” verses

In addition to Deuteronomy 6:4 and its quotation in the New Testament, the Bible states that God is One several other times—possibly as many as twenty-two times in total. Using your concordance and cross references, find as many of these examples as possible. Don’t worry if you can’t find more than twenty examples or are unsure of some occurrences (at least one of the examples is obscured by translation). But do aim for at least fifteen. Hint: most of the verses are in the New Testament.

Before you begin, three further points are in order. You will find a large number of verses (particularly in Isaiah) that use the term “Holy One” to refer to God; these verses do not use the word “one” in the original Hebrew, so don’t include them in your list. Also, do not include verses that speak of God as being the “only God” or “God alone.” We’ll be dealing with these examples in the next study. Finally, we will be mentioning some of these verses later in this and other sections of the Workbook, so don’t look ahead!

Old Testament

Deuteronomy 6:4

New Testament

The One God and the many other “gods”

When the Israelites were told that their God was One, the nations around them were caught up in the false belief system of polytheism. This, quite plainly, is a big difference. In this section we want to concentrate specifically on the differences between believing in One God and many gods. In Study 2 we'll be looking more specifically at the immorality and vanity of idolatry, along with the non-existence of the pagan gods—so save your thoughts on these topics for then.

What specifically does the Old Testament say about polytheism (the belief in many gods)?

In what ways does worship and devotion to the One God contrast with worship and devotion to many gods? Provide some illustrative passages from the Bible.

In addition to countering the false pagan belief that there are many gods, why else do you think it was important for the Israelites to know that their God was One?

What impact would polytheism have had on the unity of the Kingdom of Israel?

What does the New Testament have to say against polytheism?

How can we be diverted from the worship of One God to the distracting devotions of many other “gods” today—secular and otherwise?

How does God’s Oneness guarantee the unity and consistency of Scripture? What else does His Oneness guarantee?

One God has created us all

In the first five studies of this Workbook, we will see that the principle of the One God relates to many other scriptural teachings and themes. One such example is the principle that One God has created us all. A key verse in this regard is Malachi 2:10:

“Have we not all one father [*'ab 'echad*]? Hath not one God [*'el 'echad*] created us? Why do we deal treacherously every man against his brother, by profaning the covenant of our fathers?”

Malachi’s message concentrates on the fact that the brotherhood of the Israelites is guaranteed by creation and God’s Oneness. Notice also the treachery that Malachi speaks about in verse 11.

Elaborate on the point that Malachi is making about the One God in the context of his overall argument in chapter 2. Consider, among the other details, how marriage comes into the theme.

Another important verse that deals with God’s Oneness and humanity’s unity is Job 31:15:

“Did not he that made me in the womb make him? And did not one [*'echad*] fashion us in the womb?”

This verse again establishes the equality of humans on their creation by a single God (*cf.* Isaiah 43:1). God’s Unity and the unity of mankind are inextricably linked. The same God is Lord over all people, whatever their background or social standing (*cf.* 31:13). Notice also that Job draws from the principle outlined in 31:15 ideals of social justice (31:16-40).

Explain in more detail how the principles in Job 31:15 and those in 31:13-14,16-40 are linked.

What should our own attitude to others be like in light of Job 31:15 and the surrounding verses?

This particular aspect of the teaching about God's Oneness is also extended into the New Testament, where the Oneness of God guarantees the salvation of both Jews and Gentiles, as well as unity among the members of the ecclesia. Look up the New Testament verses that declare that the same God is over all and discuss below what impact this should have on our humility and willingness to work together.

Note on Hebrews 2:11

It is possible that Hebrews 2:11, which says that "both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one," refers to the common origin of Christ and the sanctified believers in the One God, in which case Job 31:15 and Malachi 2:10 would offer scriptural precedents. Others, however, believe that the "one" here is Adam, and point to the possible analogy of Acts 17:26. This analogy only works, however, if one accepts the reading "of one" (*cf.* RSV and NIV) over the other possible reading "of one blood" (*cf.* KJV and NKJV). There is some uncertainty as to which is the correct reading. By looking at the overall argument, you may want to consider which interpretation of Hebrews 2:11 is correct.

Finally, God's Oneness is linked in Galatians 3:20 with God's Covenant. The argument of the Apostle Paul is rather difficult here, but see if you can determine the point he is making in this chapter about mediation, the Covenant and the One God. Compare also Malachi 2:10, which mentions both God's Unity and the Covenant.

The Promise: "There shall be One Yahweh"

The Israelites were given a precious revelation that the True God was One. In contrast, the nations around them had corrupted themselves in idolatrous polytheism. Because they had this privileged knowledge of the One True God, Israel was not only placed in a unique situation, but also found themselves in a position of great responsibility. They were to be a kingdom of priests (Exodus 19:5-6) and a light to the Gentiles (Isaiah 42:6, 49:6). The Covenants of Promise also stress that the nations will be blessed through Israel. There are many passages in the Old

Testament that show that one of God's main objectives was to reveal Himself to the nations around Israel. Identify and discuss some of these passages. (Don't include here verses in which Yahweh is shown to be the Only True God; we will look at these in Study 2).

The world around us is also in great darkness, with most not knowing the light of the Gospel. What should we do with our privileged knowledge of the One True God? Provide scriptural examples and consider such passages as Matthew 5:14-16 and 28:19.

One of the primary purposes of God will be to fill the whole earth with the knowledge of His Glory (Numbers 14:21; Isaiah 11:9; Habakkuk 2:14). Although some of this knowledge is made available now in God's Word and in the witness of prophecy, it is evident that most of this work will be accomplished in the Kingdom. In fact, the Bible teaches that the revelation of God as One to Israel in Deuteronomy 6:4 will ultimately be expanded to cover the entire earth. This is made clear in Zechariah 14:9:

“And the LORD shall be king over all the earth: in that day shall there be one LORD, and his name one.”

Thus we see that there is a prophetic aspect to the Oneness of God: from the time of the Kingdom onward, everyone will know that Yahweh is One. The Unity of God, so important in the teaching given to ancient Israel, will also be a central element of the coming Kingdom of God.

Discuss the meaning of Zechariah 14:9 within the context of the entire chapter. Note also the association of ideas between verse 9 and verse 7, which speaks of that day being “one day” (*i.e.* a singular or unique day).

Find and discuss other verses from the Old and New Testaments that speak about knowledge of the One True God being one day extended to all nations. A few examples are: Psalm 86:9-10 and Malachi 1:11.

Wrested Scriptures

This first study has demonstrated the clarity and unmistakable nature of the Bible's teaching that God is One. Unfortunately, most people do not possess this saving knowledge. Millions upon millions of the earth's inhabitants today, including Hindus and Buddhists, are polytheists. Millions also still cling to animism, believing that animals and the rest of nature are divine. Others, including the vast majority of Christians, claim to believe the Bible yet assert that God exists as three persons. To support this teaching, which is forced on the Bible from ideas of non-biblical origin, Trinitarians both ignore and distort the clear verses on the One God, and look to others in an attempt to argue that the One God is made up of the three persons Father, Son and

Holy Spirit. The Bible emphatically demonstrates that the Holy Spirit is the Mind and Power of God, and we will touch on this subject in Study 4. In this section, we will examine some verses used by Trinitarians to support their belief that the Father and Christ are united in the One God.

John 10:30

Many (but not all) Trinitarians use John 10:30 as a chief prop for the doctrine of the Triune God:

“I and *my* Father are one.”

It is claimed that Christ is here saying that the Father and he together are the One God. But there are a number of serious problems with this interpretation, as even honest Trinitarians concede.

First, the Greek of this passage provides much help. The verse reads literally: “I and the Father, we are one.” Christ’s use of the first person plural (“we are”) shows that he is referring to two separate individuals. Trinitarians believe that Father and Son are two separate persons in the Godhead, yet as the next two Studies will show, the Bible quite plainly teaches that only the Father is the One God, and that when Christ is speaking of the Father, he means the One God.

The word that Christ uses for “one” in John 10:30 is *hen*. This is the neuter form of the Greek word for “one,” and is distinct from the masculine word for “one” (*heis*) that is used exclusively for descriptions of the One True God (e.g. Mark 12:29). In *no* examples of the term “one [*heis*] God” in the New Testament is Christ ever included. Two verses, at least, specifically *exclude* him from the One God (1 Corinthians 8:6; 1 Timothy 2:5). Moreover, 1 Corinthians 8:6, 1 Timothy 2:5 and Ephesians 4:5-6 all use *heis* separately of God the Father and the Son, and hence show that each of them is a unique being. Consider Ephesians 4:5-6: there is “one [*heis*] Lord [*i.e.* Christ]” and [*i.e.* in addition] “One [*heis*] God and Father of all.” These examples eliminate any possibility that the Bible teaches the Trinity. This consistent and precise usage shows that if Christ wanted to say he and his Father were One God, he would have used *heis*.

It is also important to look at what the verse omits. In this case, since John 10:30 does not mention the Holy Spirit, the verse cannot be used to support the Trinity. At the most, it can only be used to argue for the deity of Christ. We will see that it by no means does this either.

Having some of the more technical aspects of the verse outlined, and having seen what the verse cannot mean, you are now asked to complete the correct interpretation of John 10:30 by focusing on what positive teaching the verse is meant to highlight. To begin, look at the surrounding context both for evidence that confirms what the Bible says elsewhere of the Father and Christ, and for material that directly contradicts the Trinitarian interpretation of the verse.

When we encounter a potentially difficult verse, one of our first actions is to see how similar language is used in other, less difficult contexts. In this case, such similar language provides us with the correct interpretation of John 10:30. Starting with John, find other examples of this language of unity and show how they explain the meaning of Christ's words in John 10:30.

Many Trinitarians try to bolster their reading of John 10:30 by arguing that the Jewish leaders who heard this statement believed Christ was declaring himself to be God (10:33). But are we to take the testimony of Christ's enemies always as truth? And how often did the Jewish leaders correctly understand Christ's teachings? (Note that it was them, not the disciples, who made the assumption). What does Christ say to correct their misinterpretation of his simple, yet profound, words? It is ironic that Trinitarians here make the same mistake as the Jewish leaders.

What spiritual lessons can we derive from this verse and the similar language used elsewhere?

John 5:17-18

In a similar passage in John 5:17-18, Christ says: "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work" (verse 17). After saying this the Jews sought to kill him, because they believed that Christ had

broken the Sabbath and had made himself equal with God (verse 18). Trinitarians argue that the comments are made by John and thus teach in a positive way that Christ was equal with God.

First, we can say that if this interpretation is true, the language is rather sloppy, since God to Trinitarians means all three: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. If the Bible taught the Trinity, would the third person always be left out of such passages? Can the verses really be used in the way Trinitarians want them to be used? Apply the principles you have learned thus far to explain what is really going on in these two verses (hint: did Jesus *really* break the Sabbath?).

THE ONLY GOD

The Only True God

The Bible not only declares that God is One, but it also stresses that He is the *Only* God. In the Bible God's Oneness and Uniqueness are, in fact, strongly interrelated teachings. It should be easy for us to remember this since in English, as with many other languages, the words for "one," "only," "alone" and "none" (the latter from "not one;" as in "there is none [not one] else") are based on the same root. In Latin, the word for one (*unum*) can also mean "only" or "alone." (Incidentally, *unum* gives us "unity," "unify," "unique" and "uniqueness"). Something similar is true in Hebrew. First, it is thought that the Hebrew word for one (*'echad*) originally meant "only" in the early history of the language. Indeed, *'echad* is translated "only" four times in the KJV. Second, the standard word for "only" in biblical Hebrew, *yachid*, is related to *'echad*.

After the declaration in Deuteronomy 6:4 that God is One, the Israelites are commanded:

Thou shalt fear the LORD thy God, and serve him, and shalt swear by his name. Ye shall not go after other gods, of the gods of the people which *are* round about you: (for the LORD thy God is a jealous God among you) lest the anger of the LORD thy God be kindled against thee, and destroy thee from off the face of the earth.

Deuteronomy 6:13-15

God commanded the Israelites through Moses in no uncertain terms that they were not to worship any other gods. But this is not all. In Deuteronomy 4:35-39 the Israelites had also been told that the LORD was the Only True God: "the LORD he *is* God; *there is* none else beside him" (verse 35). Nothing could be clearer: the other so-called gods simply don't exist. But Deuteronomy 4:35-39 is not just a simple statement meant to be accepted on its own merit. The Israelites were given ample reasons to accept this truth.

Read Deuteronomy 4:1-40 and explain exactly why the Israelites had good reason to accept that their God was the Only God. Note also verse 40 and what this says about the Israelites' responsibility and appropriate response to this knowledge.

What should our own response be to the knowledge and evidence that our God is the Only God?

As further evidence that God's Oneness and Uniqueness are linked, Deuteronomy 6:4 and 4:35 are cited together in the same place in the New Testament. Where?

We learn from Isaiah 43:10 that there has only ever been One True God and that there only ever will be ("before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me"). See if you can uncover more expressions of God's eternity in the Bible.

Deuteronomy 4:39 ("the LORD he is God in heaven above, and upon the earth beneath") also teaches that God is present everywhere (omnipresent). Find other passages that also teach this.

The "Only God" verses

The Bible is filled with passages that teach that the LORD is God alone. Find and list as many of these passages below as you can.

Old Testament

New Testament

The Only God of Prophecy

In the forty-third chapter of Isaiah, God backs up His declarations that he is the Only God with the unshakeable evidence of prophecy. First, God had promised Israel that He would bless them if they obeyed Him and curse them if they did not (Deuteronomy 28). But He also said that He

would always be with Israel and promised to bring them out of captivity once they were led into it (*cf.* Isaiah 43:5-6). In short, as Isaiah 43 demonstrates, Yahweh said that whether they obeyed Him or not, they were to be His witnesses to the surrounding nations:

Let all the nations be gathered together, and let the people be assembled: who among them can declare this, and show us former things? Let them bring forth their witnesses, that they may be justified: or let them hear, and say, “It is truth.” “Ye *are* my witnesses,” saith the LORD, “and my servant whom I have chosen: that ye may know and believe me, and understand that I *am* he: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me.” Isaiah 43:9-10

The evidence of prophecy provides us with one of the best arguments for the existence of God. But it is more than this: fulfilled prophecy doesn’t just show that there is a God, it reveals that the God of the Bible is the Only True God. No other God and no other religion offers this kind of powerful evidence. We have not been left without witnesses, and fulfilled prophecy is one of the greatest.

Find other examples in the Bible of fulfilled prophecies demonstrating in unmistakable fashion to both Israel and the nations that the LORD is the Only God. Note especially the examples where prophecy is linked with evidence and belief in the God of Israel. Discuss also how much responsibility is placed on those who receive the sure word of prophecy.

The Only God with power to act

In this and the next three sections we will discuss the implications of belief in the Only God for both idolatry and the unscriptural teaching of fallen angels. God has expressed many reasons for His actions in the world, and one of these reasons is so believers and unbelievers alike will see that He is the Only True God. The powerful plagues brought against Egypt were in part intended

to show the Egyptians that their many gods were powerless against the One God Yahweh. The Egyptian gods each had their sphere of activity, and each plague challenged these gods while revealing that the Only God Yahweh was, as Jethro said to Moses, “greater than all gods” (Exodus 18:11). These confrontations were doubly crucial since they were both meant to show that there was no God but Yahweh the God of Israel, and to confirm the faith of the Israelites. Identify other such contests and confrontations in the Bible between the LORD and the false gods of the nations.

Discuss the ways in which these confrontations confirmed the reality of the True God and the imaginary nature of the false gods. Consider also exactly what these encounters revealed to the Israelites and the nations about the LORD.

The Only God and idolatry

An unavoidable corollary to the teaching that there is only one True God is that all other so-called Gods are just that: they have no existence in reality. The Bible presents a forceful and sustained attack on the practice of idolatry. Given how rampant pagan idolatry and polytheism were in ancient times, this teaching stood alone as a beacon of light in a dark world.

What does the Bible say about the wickedness and immorality associated with idolatry? How

does this contrast with the moral teachings of Yahweh?

Find verses that show that the Lord commanded Israel to be completely separate from paganism.

What analogies can you see between pagan immorality and today? What lessons can we learn from our own need to be separate today?

Providing examples from the Bible, describe the condition and fate of pagan idolaters.

What does the Bible say would happen to the Israelites if they descended into the worship of strange gods?

Although the Bible occasionally speaks of false gods in an ironic fashion as if they exist, the general tenor of the passages on idolatry shows without question that they do not. Using the the biblical pronouncements against idolatry, demonstrate that the Bible clearly states that the pagan gods do not exist in reality. In particular, what arguments do God and His prophets use to show that the pagan gods are worthless vanities? (Note: this is not an empty question. As we will see below, even some who claim to believe the Bible argue that the pagan gods are real).

Look up the original Hebrew and Greek words for idol, idols and idolatry.

What do these meanings reveal about the nature of pagan worship?

The Bible on several occasions speaks of the false pagan gods as “no-gods.” Find some examples and explain their significance.

Read Jeremiah 10:11. This verse is written in Aramaic, rather than Hebrew. Why might this be?

The Bible in five places refers to the LORD as the “true God.” Find these examples and explain their significance to a world enslaved in idolatrous worship. (You may also want to look up the Hebrew and Greek words for “true” see how they are used elsewhere).

Using the descriptions given in the Old and New Testaments, contrast the characteristics of the Only True God on the one hand, and false idols on the other. Include all references.

The Only True God

False gods

Identify some of the false gods of the New Testament world, and the problems they posed for Gentile Christians.

What kind of false gods do we have to contend with today, and what should be our response to them?

Biblical monotheism

In our first study, we examined the scriptural teaching that God is One. In this study, we have looked at the wealth of evidence in God's Word that stresses that the One God is also the Only God. These teachings are the two cornerstones of biblical monotheism. The word monotheism is based on two Greek words, *monos*, which means "only" or "alone," and *theos*, the standard word for God. The term also has a biblical flavour, since the expression *monos theos* (Only God) appears more than once in the New Testament. Trinitarians accept the second principle, but effectively reject the first, as they believe that God is actually three. For this reason true, biblical monotheism cannot be equated with the claimed monotheism of the Trinitarians, whatever their protests. In contrast, the Jews, while they do not accept Jesus as Messiah, nevertheless do hold firmly to the monotheism so plainly taught by the Hebrew Bible.

Look up the Greek word for only (*monos*), which is used in Jude 25. How else is it used in the

New Testament?

List the occasions *monos* is used of God in the New Testament:

Some higher critical scholars claim that while the early Israelites believed that God was One, and that He was their God, they believed that the gods of the other nations existed as well. Later, these same critics contend, Israel moved from this position to true monotheism and rejected the existence of other gods. The view that one should worship a single powerful God, while acknowledging the existence of other gods, is called henotheism (Gk *hen* + *theos*). This was a common position in the ancient world, so it is possible that some syncretistic Israelites did believe this. Nevertheless, it is clear from the Bible that this was not the original teaching given by God through Moses and the Prophets. Let's consider why.

First, our study has shown that the ideas of God's Oneness and Uniqueness are inseparable. The one cannot exist without the other. Second, some of the important verses that teach that the LORD is the Only God appear quite early in the history of the Israelites (*cf.* 1 Samuel 2:2), which destroys any notion that monotheism was a gradual development. Finally, as is quite clear from the many passages about idolatry (including all the early ones), the Bible flatly denies that the pagan gods have any real existence. There is another way in which biblical monotheism can be corrupted. This is the focus of our next section.

The One God versus “cosmic dualism”

Given the pagan and polytheistic beliefs of her neighbours, there was always the danger that the Israelites would begin to attribute some unexplained malign phenomena to lesser deities; we know this happened in Galilee in New Testament times when some attributed certain forms of illness to demons. The Persians actually developed this notion into a belief system in which two

Gods—one of light and good, another of darkness and evil—were locked in mortal combat. The Bible, of course, teaches nothing of the sort. In fact, it openly opposes this idea, which is called “cosmic dualism.” The key verse here is Isaiah 45:5-7:

I *am* the LORD, and *there is* none else, *there is* no God beside me: I girded thee, though thou hast not known me: That they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that *there is* none beside me. I *am* the LORD, and *there is* none else. I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these *things*.
Isaiah 45:5-7

A modern manifestation of this spiritual dualism is seen in the orthodox Christian belief in the satan (the adversary) as a fallen angel who is prince of a host of demons. This unbiblical doctrine is nothing other than a Christianized form of polytheism and it directly contradicts what we have just read from Isaiah 45. That is it not unfair to call belief in fallen angels a kind of polytheism is made evident by the fact that many who believe in demons argue that they in fact are the pagan gods of the Old Testament (see, for example, John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*). Thus, incredibly, they believe the pagan gods are real!

The Bible, conversely, says that there is Only One God and that He is the source of everything. Here we are reminded again that all first principles are linked inseparably together, including the teachings about God and the satan. The principle that everything comes from and is controlled by God is called “monism” (after the Greek word *monos*). We can call the pure, biblical teaching on this “Hebraic monism.” This is the third necessary element of biblical monotheism.

The only “dualism” that the Bible knows is that between the spirit and the flesh—not good spirit versus evil spirit. Romans 6 and 7 amply reveal this. And here is another key: to explain all the actions in the world, whether for good or ill, we need look no further than to God and His angels on the one hand, and humanity on the other.

Many verses in the Bible show that everything that does not come from sinful humanity—both what is good, such as healing, and what appears to us as “evil,” including disease, plagues and calamities—comes from God. These verses are also very valuable evidence to use when contending against belief in the satan and demons as a fallen angels, who are seen by some people in New Testament times as the source of many forms of illness. Find examples of these verses and list them here.

How do these passages fill out both our understanding of God's activity in the world and the purpose of calamity?

“Him only shalt thou serve”

The Bible often states that the LORD is a jealous God, and that He does not tolerate worship due to Him being given to others. The ancient Israelites were commanded to worship and serve only Yahweh, and the same injunctions apply to us. Many times, as in Deuteronomy 28, God promised blessings for obedience and curses for rebellion. When we come to realize that the LORD is the Only God, and that the idols are “nothings,” we accept all this as right and just.

Find examples of passages that teach that we must serve only God.

The biblical teachings on the True God and false gods are not just presented for their own sake. They are given so that men and women can avoid the evils of falsehood and the vanities of idolatry—all of which lead people away from the True God. On the positive side, these teachings are part of the divine purpose to fill the earth with the knowledge of the Only True God. There are other reasons why belief in only one God is crucial to us as believers. For example, since there is only One True God, we can and must only appeal to Him. He is the only one mighty to save. Also, because He is the Only God, the LORD is also the only One that can keep promises and covenants (2 Chronicles 6:14).

How should our knowledge that Yahweh is God alone should affect our personal, spiritual lives?

The LORD is a universal God

During the reign of King Ahab of Israel, Ben-Hadad II of Syria (Aram) laid siege against Samaria (1 Kings 20:1-12). After receiving instructions from a prophet of the LORD, Ahab's army defeated the Syrians (20:19-21). While Northern Israel was preparing for another attack, Ben-Hadad's advisors told him "Their gods *are* gods of the hills; therefore they were stronger than we; but let us fight against them in the plain, and surely we shall be stronger than they" (20:23). Here the Syrians were expressing a common notion in the ancient world, namely, that of local deities. Not only were the Syrians surmising that Yahweh was limited in his power and range, but they were also implying that He was not God alone. The prophet of the LORD returned to Ahab and brought God's powerful reply:

Thus saith the LORD, "Because the Syrians have said, 'The LORD *is* God of the hills, but he *is not* God of the valleys,' therefore will I deliver all this great multitude into thine hand, and ye shall know that I *am* the LORD."

1 Kings 20:28

And so it was. It is clear that God wanted to make certain that both the Syrians and King Ahab understood that He was God of the hills and the valleys and, indeed, everything else.

Something similar happened during the Assyrian siege of Jerusalem during the reign of King Hezekiah of Judah (2 Kings 18:17-19:37). The crafty propagandist Rabshakeh taunted the people on the city walls with this challenge:

Hath any of the gods of the nations delivered at all his land out of the hand of the king of Assyria? Where *are* the gods of Hamath, and of Arpad? Where are the gods of Shepharvaim, Hena, and Ivah? Have they delivered Samaria out of mine hand? Who *are* they among all the gods of the countries, that have delivered their country out of mine hand, that the LORD should deliver Jerusalem out of mine hand?
2 Kings 18:33-35

But Hezekiah was a man of faith and he knew that the LORD was all-powerful. Thus in his prayer to God (2 Kings 19:15-19), he affirmed that Yahweh was God alone “of all the kingdoms of the earth” and that it was He who had “made heaven and earth.” He also recognized that the Assyrians had cast the gods of the defeated nations into the fire, because “they were no gods, but the work of men’s hands.” Finally, he appealed to God to save them, so “that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou *art* the LORD God, *even* thou only.” It was righteous Hezekiah’s supreme desire that the LORD should be vindicated and made known to all nations. Hezekiah’s prayer, we know, was answered (2 Kings 19:35). Psalms 46-48 were composed as part of the victory celebrations. These Psalms make several references to God’s power, His exaltation and his universal reign over the nations. Psalm 47:2 declares: “For the LORD Most High [Yahweh Elyon] *is* terrible; *he is* a great King over all the earth.” Thus both these battles with the so-called gods of the nations serve to show that the LORD is a universal God, One Who reigns over all creation and is always in full control.

Find and discuss passages that show that the LORD is a universal God (*e.g.* verses that teach he is God of all the earth).

When the Israelites behaved wickedly, it brought disrepute on the Name of their God. When they were faithful, it brought glory to His Name. How do these dynamics apply to us today?

The Promise: “That God may be all in all”

As we have just seen, the LORD is already, and has always been, a universal God. Nevertheless, at the present His rule is not universally extended over all people, because most of the world still lies in unbelief, rebellion and wickedness. It will only be in the Kingdom age that worship and knowledge of God will become universal. Only then will He be unchallenged as the Only God. The Bible tells us that Christ will reign in the Kingdom until he has brought everything under the subjection of his Father. At the appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Millennium, all other “gods” and powers are to be overcome. After the destruction of the apocalyptic Babylon, for example, will come the declaration: “Hallelujah! For the Lord God Almighty reigneth!” (Revelation 19:6). The Word also tells us that the purpose of God is to fill the earth with the knowledge of His glory.

In the last study we saw in Zechariah 14:9 that the Lord will be “King over all the earth.” This common scriptural theme that Yahweh’s rule will one day be universal is also found in Psalm 72, where the Psalmist says that His rule will stretch “from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth” (72:8). Another passage that teaches this is 1 Corinthians 15:24-28, where we read that God the Father (15:24) is supreme and will eventually be “all in all” (15:28). Therefore, it is only with the work of Christ and the Saints in the Kingdom that both God’s rule and the knowledge of His glory will be universal in the fullest sense. Then He will not only be the Only True God (which He already is), but also the Only God worshipped and served by all.

Find some passages that speak about God's ultimate purpose with this earth:

Find passages that speak about the extension of God's *spiritual* authority over the earth in the Kingdom:

Find and discuss passages that speak about the extension of God's Kingly rule over the earth in the Kingdom:

Wrested Scriptures

In the face of an overwhelming array of biblical evidence, Trinitarians claim that Jesus is “very God of very God.” The term “very” used in this expression means “true;” thus, Trinitarians attempt to use the biblical language of the “true God” in an unbiblical way to apply to Christ. Of course, the only real support they have for this belief comes from the Creeds and post-biblical tradition. Still, they twist Scripture in a futile attempt to find justification for it in the Word of God.

1 John 5:20

One such passage used by Trinitarians is 1 John 5:20, which they claim says that Christ is the True God:

And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, *even* in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life.

The contention here is that the antecedent to “true God” is Jesus Christ. In our next study we will establish that the Only True God is the Father, but you should already have sufficient tools to show what this verse is really teaching if you follow these steps:

1. Identify how many individuals are spoken about in this verse.
2. Analyze the language and structure of the verse very carefully. Pay particular attention to the use of the preposition “in.”
3. Compare the structure of 1 John 2:22 to see if “this” or “he” must refer back to the immediately preceding noun in this passage or 1 John 5:20.
4. Look at the surrounding context for clues.
5. See how the term “true God” is used elsewhere, first by John and then by others. Remember that Scripture does not contradict itself.
6. For the positive interpretation of the verse (*i.e.* what the verse is really saying), don’t neglect the poignant message of verse 21, which is unquestionably linked with verse 20.
7. Finally, consider what spiritual lessons we can take from 1 John 5:20-21.

Philippians 2:6

Trinitarians also (mis)use Philippians 2:6 to support their belief that Christ is “very God.” Study this verse and its context to determine its positive teaching. Look for the biblical source of the language used in this passage, as this will illuminate its meaning. You will also want to compare other translations of the verse (see especially the RSV and NASB). After explaining this verse in context, outline the exhortation for us in chapter 2 as a whole.

THE FATHERHOOD OF GOD

“One God, the Father”

With the principles of God’s Oneness and Uniqueness firmly in place, we can proceed to the next important teaching: that the Father alone is the True God. While this principle is brought out with the greatest clarity in the New Testament, it is, like all first principles, firmly rooted in the Hebrew Scriptures. Once again, it was taught to the Israelites through Moses when he asked:

Do ye thus requite the LORD, O foolish people and unwise? *Is not he thy Father that hath bought thee? Hath he not made thee, and established thee?*

Deuteronomy 32:6

Similarly, in Malachi, the literary device of Hebraic parallelism, in which two synonymous concepts are grouped in a couplet, also reinforces the fact that the Father is God alone:

Have we not all one Father? Hath not one God created us?

Malachi 2:10

These examples of God as Father in the Old Testament, and others like them, are of a more general nature. But the LORD was also to become Father in a more specific and literal sense when the Messiah, His Son was born. This is prophesied in the Davidic Covenant:

I will be his Father, and he shall be my son.

2 Samuel 7:14

Study this verse and its surrounding context carefully. Who is the speaker? How does the language of this passage and its immediate context tell us that only Yahweh is the One True God?

God as Father in the Old and New Testaments

With the principle that the Father alone is the LORD God firmly in place, we can go on to elaborate this theme. Both the Old and New Testaments teach that God is Father. While this teaching is consistent throughout the Bible, there are two crucial distinctions between how the term “Father” is used in each Testament. In this section we will determine these differences.

Evidence for God’s Fatherhood in the Old Testament is fivefold. First, in general terms, God calls himself the Father of His people Israel. Second, although Jesus had not yet come into existence, God refers to Himself prophetically as the Messiah’s Father. As a subset of this category, God is on two occasions referred to as the Father of Solomon (who in this case also acts as a type of the Messiah). Third, sometimes God’s people are referred to as His sons or children, even when the term Father is not used. Fourth, this is likewise true of a few prophetic references to Christ as Son. Fifth, various Hebrew proper names express the Fatherhood of God:

Abi: “My Father [is Yah]”

Abia/Abiah/Abijah (Hebrew: *'Abiyyah*): “My Father is Yah” or “Yah is Father”

Abiel: “Father of Might”

Eliab: “My God is Father”

Joab (Hebrew: *Yô'ab*): “Yah is Father”

Find as many verses as you can in the Old Testament where God is referred to as Father in a general sense (*e.g.* Malachi 2:10) and prophetically of Christ (*e.g.* 2 Samuel 7:14):

General sense

As Father of the Messiah

Using a concordance, count up the number of times the word father appears in the following (you should already have most or all of the amount for the second column from the previous

page):

OT: total uses of word 'father'	OT: God as Father	NT: total uses of word 'father'	NT: God as Father

Notice the sharp contrast between the two Testaments. What two main reasons account for this? Discuss these reasons and the implications they have for Bible teaching.

See how many verses you can find where Christ is referred to prophetically as God's Son or Firstborn in the Old Testament (this excludes the verses where the term "Father is specifically used). *Notice how often Christ is referred to as the firstborn or Son of God in the New Testament.*

Find as many verses as you can in both Testaments where God's people or believers are referred to as His sons or children (this excludes the verses where the term "Father" is specifically used):

Old Testament:

New Testament:

What do these passages tell us?

New Testament epistolary salutations

The greetings given by Paul, James, Peter, Jude and John at the beginnings of their Epistles offer a wealth of evidence that the Father is God alone. Even the Book of Revelation includes an example. The salutations in the Pauline Epistles, especially, follow a distinctive pattern, including the main salutation: “Grace *be* unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and *from* the Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 1:3), along with surrounding statements that also contrast God and Christ (*cf.* 1 Corinthians 1:1 and 4).

Write out the salutations of the Epistles and Revelation, along with any relevant surrounding verses. Hebrews does not contain a salutation; still, God and Christ are distinguished in 1:1-2. Another exception is 1 John, which nevertheless still distinguishes between God and Christ (*cf.* 4:9-10,15, 5:5,20). Also, 3 John does not refer to either God or Christ in its salutation.

Romans

1 Corinthians

2 Corinthians

Galatians

Ephesians

Philippians

Colossians

1 Thessalonians

2 Thessalonians

1 Timothy

2 Timothy

Titus

Philemon

James

1 Peter

2 Peter

2 John

Jude

Revelation

What patterns emerge from the above examples?

A note on 2 Peter 1:1

Material from the salutation to 2 Peter may appear to be a solitary exception to the general pattern that only the Father is called God, as the words: “through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ” (1:1) technically can be translated: “through the righteousness of our

God and Saviour Jesus Christ.” Six things can be said about this. First, the Greek syntax of this statement does not demand that it be translated in the second way. Second, Peter in the very next verse distinguishes between God and Christ in his formal salutation (thus all formal salutations themselves are consistent in the New Testament). Third, in the salutation of his First Epistle, Peter speaks unambiguously of “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:3), and we can be sure that an inspired author would not contradict himself (thus, if Peter does use *theos* of Christ, we know that he cannot mean it in the absolute sense). Fourth, the rest of the inspired epistolary salutations all clearly point to God as Father alone. Fifth, even some Trinitarian scholars do not believe that 2 Peter 1:1 can be used to show that Jesus is “very God.” Sixth, and finally, even if Peter is using the term *theos* of Christ rather than the Father in 2 Peter 1:1, this would not prove that Peter believed Christ to be “very God,” as we will see in Study 4.

One God the Father and one Lord Jesus Christ

In this section we will study some additional powerful scriptural evidence that demonstrates that only the Father is God. This is a cornerstone principle for understanding biblical doctrines, and like all pivotal teachings, it is stressed numerous times in the Word. There are two types of biblical testimony that stress this teaching:

1. Passages that equate the person of God with the Father
2. Passages that also specifically exclude Christ from the Godhead

Examples of the first type have been examined above and one in particular is found in the doxology of Paul’s salutation to the Corinthian ecclesia, in the second epistle:

Blessed *be* **God, even the Father** of our Lord Jesus Christ, the **Father** of mercies, and the **God** of all comfort. 2 Corinthians 1:3

There can be no questioning the meaning of this passage: God is the Father (note also the parallel between “Father of mercies” and “God of all comfort”). One of many illustrative examples of the second type comes in Acts 2:22:

Ye men of Israel, hear these words; **Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God** among you by miracles and wonders and signs, **which God did by him** in the midst of you, as ye yourselves know.

Sometimes one passage will do both these things at the same time. 2 Corinthians 1:3 above is one example of this.

Read the opening of Jesus’ prayer for his disciples in John 17:1-3. Examine the language of the passage carefully, and show exactly who the Only True God is, and how the Only True God is clearly distinguished from Jesus Christ.

Now turn to 1 Corinthians 8:4-6. Analyse Paul's argument in this passage, and, paying close attention to the language and categories he describes, show precisely how the Apostle makes exactly the same three points we have stressed in the first three Studies: namely, that there is One God, that He is the Only God and that this Only One True God is the Father, which in turn demonstrates that Jesus Christ is a separate being and person.

What does Paul mean when he says that there are many that are called "gods" and "lords"? How does this fit into his overall argument?

List some other verses that distinguish between God and Christ. Only use verses that use "the LORD" or "God," since Trinitarians accept that the Father and the Son are separate individuals. An example of this type is Christ's words to his disciples in John 14:1: "Ye believe in God, believe also in me." (Hint: there are several interesting examples in the Book of Revelation!).

While the Bible clearly teaches that God and His Son are distinct beings, it also stresses their intimate unity. Not (as we saw in our study of John 10:30) a unity of substance and essence—this is a Greek philosophical idea later read back into the Bible by Trinitarians of the fourth century AD and beyond. This unity is one of will and purpose. Find some passages that speak of the unity of the Father (God) and His Son.

God as a loving and caring Father

From the days of ancient Israel, God has been Father. God has also been at pains to tell His people of this special relationship. We already saw in Deuteronomy 32:6 above that Moses was inspired by God to remind backsliding Israel of this. Later, during the ministry of Jeremiah, the LORD pleaded with his people, who had once again become unfaithful to their high calling:

Then I said, “How I would set you among My sons and give you a pleasant land, the most beautiful inheritance of the nations!” And I said, “You shall call Me, My Father, and not turn away from following Me.” Jeremiah 3:19 NASB

One can sense God’s yearning for His people to respect and obey Him as a Father, so that He could truly treat His people as his sons and daughters. Notice also the association between sonship and inheritance, something picked up again in Revelation 21:7. Read Jeremiah 3 in its entirety and you will see God pleading with Israel, whom He calls His backsliding children. Yahweh is not some distant tyrant; He wants to be a Father to His people and for His people to be his children. In another place, the LORD is referred to even more generally as “a father of the

fatherless” (Psalm 68:5). At the same time, God as Father disciplines the children that He loves: both the Israelites (Jeremiah 2:30) and those in Christ (Hebrews 12:5-8). We can understand this language: imagine how you would feel if you had children who were ungrateful for what you had done for them, and then turned their backs on you. These are compelling and intimate descriptions of a loving and caring God—a God concerned for the welfare of His children. This is the God of the Bible: Our Father.

Find other verses that describe God as a loving and caring Father in the following relationships:

1a. God’s relationship to Israel

1b. Where in the Bible do we see Israelites turning from God and calling idols “my father”? (Hint: it’s in Jeremiah). How did this make God feel and what did he do about it?

2. God’s relationship with His Son

3. God’s relationship with the saints (consider also what the New Testament says about the adoption of the saints in Christ as sons and daughters, and how our status as sons of God is related to Christ’s status as Son of God).

“Our Father” in the language of prayer

As we have seen above, God’s Fatherhood is stressed much more in the New Testament. Related to this we see an emphasis on the use of “Father” in the language of prayer. Examples of this usage can be found in both prayers of Christ and the prayer language of the saints. The most well-known example, of course, was given by Christ as a model for disciples everywhere:

Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as *it is* in heaven . . . Matthew 6:9-10

The theme of praying to our compassionate and caring Heavenly Father is developed throughout Matthew chapter 6. Read this chapter and explain what it teaches us about our Father, His care for us and prayer.

Find examples of Jesus using the term “Father” in his prayers to God.

So intimate was Christ's relationship with his Father, that he used the Aramaic word *abba* when praying to Him (Mark 14:36). This is a term of extremely close familiarity, and was in fact the expression used by Aramaic-speaking children of their own human fathers. One of the first words uttered by a baby, it compares with the contemporary Greek term "pappa" and our own English "dadda" or "daddy." The Aramaic *abba* was in currency among Jews in the time of Christ, but its use was normally restricted to family life and its application to God was extremely rare. Thus Christ's usage of "Abba" for his Father (assuming he used it on occasions when others were witness) would have seemed overly familiar and perhaps disrespectful. Yet, we must remember that God was Jesus' literal Father, and thus we are given insight into the profoundly intimate relationship Christ had with the One who was his real Father.

Find the two examples in the New Testament where "Abba" is also used by those in Christ:

In prayer language "Abba" is roughly equivalent to the intimate expressions "my Father" and "our Father." Discuss the examples of the use of "Abba" in the New Testament and the privileged relationship the saints have with their Heavenly Father. Explain why it is possible for us to use such expressions as "Abba" and "our Father"?

How do you think the saints' use of "Abba" relates to the desire of God to be called "my Father" as expressed in the Old Testament? (*Cf.* Jeremiah 3:19).

The Promise: “They shall be called the children of God”

The Old Testament reveals that God called Himself, and wanted to be, the Father of the Israelites. Also, in the Messianic promise to David, God spoke prophetically of His relationship with the Messiah, who was to be both son of David and Son of God:

Also the LORD telleth thee that he will make thee an house. And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be his Father, and he shall be my son. 2 Samuel 7:11-14

This promise hearkens back to the promises of the seed in Eden (Genesis 3:15) and to Abraham (Genesis 12:7, 13:15-16), and points forward to the words of the angel Gabriel to Mary (Luke 1:30-35). But it also intersects with other themes in the Bible, namely God’s Divine Name and the promise that we can be God’s children.

When God revealed His Name Yahweh to Moses through His angel at the burning bush in Exodus 3:14, He expressed its meaning as well:

And God said unto Moses, “I WILL BE WHO I WILL BE:” and he said, “Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I WILL BE hath sent me unto you.”

The Hebrew expression rendered in English as “I will be who I will be,” is *’ehyeh asher ’ehyeh*. The short form of the Name “I will be” in the same verse is *’ehyeh*. This verb form derives from the Hebrew verb *hayah* (“to be”). It is from a form of this verb in the third person singular that we get the Name Yahweh (“He will be”). The Name, both in its first and third person forms, is profoundly apt for the God of Promise and Prophecy.

Although scholars have long debated over the meaning of the words in Exodus 3:14, we know that *’ehyeh* should be translated “I will be” because the same verb appears in 3:12, where it is given in the future (“certainly **I will be** with thee”). The rendering “I am that I am” is likely influenced by the uninspired Greek Septuagint translation “I am the one who is” (*ego eimi ho ōn*). Nevertheless, many translations, such as the NIV, give the correct meaning in the margin.

The name *’Ehyeh* also appears throughout the Hebrew Old Testament embedded in a series of crucial prophetic promises of Yahweh. For example, when the Covenants of Promise are repeated to Isaac in Genesis 26:2-5, God assured Isaac: “Sojourn in this land, and **I will be** [*’ehyeh*] with thee”—language that foreshadows that of Exodus 3:12 and 14. Similarly, *’ehyeh* appears in Joshua 1:5: “**I will be** with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.” The words of 2 Samuel

7:14 also echo the Name: “**I will be** [*’ehyeh*] his Father, and he shall be my son.”

But God had also promised the Israelites that if they obeyed Him, He would be their God and they would be His people:

Cursed *be* the man that obeyeth not the words of this covenant, which I commanded your fathers in the day *that* I brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, from the iron furnace, saying, “Obey my voice, and do them, according to all which I command you: so shall ye be my people, and **I will be** [*’ehyeh*] your God.
Jeremiah 11:3-4

This language derives from several passages in the Pentateuch, including Exodus 6:7 and Leviticus 26:12. We have also seen that God wanted to be Father to the Israelites. This theme, with that of the Davidic Covenant and Divine Name, all come together in the New Testament.

The Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 6:16-18, draws on language from Leviticus 26:12, 2 Samuel 7:14, Isaiah 43:6, Jeremiah 31:31-4 (the language of the New Covenant) and Jeremiah 32:8, when he writes:

God hath said, “I will dwell in them, and walk in *them*; and **I will be** their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean *thing*; and I will receive you, and [**I**] **will be** a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters,” saith the Lord Almighty.

Relying on passages that use the Hebrew *’ehyeh*, this text also twice reproduces the Name “I will be” in the Greek (*esomai*). The promise is made again in the description of the New Creation in Revelation 21, which draws heavily on Old Testament language. First, the prophecy says in 21:3:

“Behold, the tabernacle of God *is* with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, *and* be their God.”

Here we see the promise that the saints would be God’s people and that God would be with them. The latter aspect (literally: “God himself, **he will be** with them”) is an echo of the Divine Name embedded in several Old Testament promises, including Yahweh’s affirmation to Moses (“**I will be** [*’ehyeh*] with thee”; Exodus 3:12) and the assurance given to Joshua (“**I will be** [*’ehyeh*] with thee; Joshua 1:5). The language of God being with us also connects with Jesus’ name Immanuel, which means “God with us” or “God is with us” (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:23).

Second, the themes continue and are extended in 21:7, which also contains an echo of the covenant language of inheritance:

He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and **I will be** [*esomai*] his God, and he shall be my son.

Thus God's desire to be Father to all His people will finally be fulfilled fully in the future. This is the promise to all those who obey Him as sons. A more wonderful and comforting promise cannot be imagined. We don't look back with regret; we look forward in hope.

There are many more references to this general theme in the Bible. Find further examples in the Old and New Testaments of God promising to be His people's God. Note how many of these passages use the phrase "I will be;" a good number of the Old Testament examples use *'ehyeh*.

There are also a number of passages that speak about the prospect of the saints being "sons" or "children of God" both now and in a fuller sense in the Kingdom. List some examples of these.

In these all these passages, God has made His promise. What does the Bible say His people need to do to receive this wonderful promise? And what kind of lives do these verses say we must live if we are to be "God's people"?

Wrested Scriptures

Let's consider the implications what we have just learned has for the doctrine of the Trinity. Often when discussing the Bible's teaching on God with Trinitarians, we turn to the verses that speak about the LORD being the Only God. These verses on their own, however, are not enough to disprove the Trinity to a committed Trinitarian, since they believe the True God is the only God. If we want to construct a fool-proof scriptural argument against the doctrine of the Trinity, we really must build our case using all three categories of passages that we have studied thus far: those teaching God's Oneness, Uniqueness and Fatherhood.

First, we show that the LORD is One, then we demonstrate that He is also the Only True God and finally we bring home the powerful scriptural evidence that only the Father is Yahweh. To this we add those verses that show that Christ is the Son of Yahweh, and not merely the Son of the Father. There is absolutely no biblical answer Trinitarians can give to this conclusive testimony. Interestingly, even some Trinitarians admit that when God appears unqualified in the Bible, it is indeed the Father. By their own admission, then, virtually all references to God in the Scriptures refer to the Father. Moreover, once a person realises that the Bible teaches that only the Father is God, it is incontrovertible that God is one person. There goes the Trinity.

The language of Fatherhood in the Old Testament is also profound evidence against the doctrine of the preexistence of Christ. For although not all Trinitarians accept the doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son (*i.e.* some Trinitarians believe the second person of the Trinity only became Son at his human birth), and we have already seen that God's literal Fatherhood did not begin until Christ's birth in Bethlehem, the fact that God is only identified as the Father (just one of the three persons of the Trinity) in the Old Testament shows that the Son did not yet exist.

John 14:9

When Jesus' disciple Philip asked the Lord to show them the Father, Jesus replied: "he that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9). Trinitarians argue that this reply shows that Jesus and the Father were coequal, coeternal and both "very God." Does these words really teach this? What did Christ mean by his reply?

John 5:23

Christ's words "He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him"

(John 5:23) are used by Trinitarians as proof that the Father and Son are co-equal and co-eternal. Look at the context of this statement and study the use of similar language elsewhere to demonstrate that Christ could not have meant this.

Optional: John 6:33,38,51,58,62

Christ makes a series of statements in John 6 about his being the “bread of God” that came down from heaven. Trinitarians argue that these verses show that Christ literally came down from heaven as a person. Study the language, its context and its Old Testament roots to explain the spiritual teaching Christ was conveying to his followers.

THE POWER AND DOMINION OF GOD

God of gods, and Lord of lords: the Supremacy of God

The One True God, the Father, is a mighty and powerful God. He is, without question, supreme in power and dominion. He is Almighty and His omnipotence is unchallenged. The Bible abounds with language that ascribes greatness and power to Yahweh. One such description was given to the Israelites during their wilderness wanderings:

For the LORD your God is the God of gods and the Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God who does not show partiality nor take a bribe. He executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and shows His loves for the alien by giving him food and clothing. Deuteronomy 10:17 NASB

The Psalmists also celebrate God's supremacy and universal sovereignty. Psalm 135:5 reads:

For I know that the LORD is great, and that our Lord is above all gods [*elohim*].

Similarly, the eighty-third Psalm declares (placing "alone" with the final part of the verse, as it is in the Hebrew):

That *men* may know that thou, whose Name is Yahweh, *art* alone the Most High [*Elyon*] over all the earth. Psalm 83:18

These passages, and the many others like them, state unequivocally that the LORD alone has dominion over all things. His power and authority originate in Himself and derive from no other. All of this is perfectly consistent with all that we have learned thus far.

Find some other passages that speak about the *Supremacy* of the Most High God:

Find some passages that attribute *power* and *might* to the Most High God:

Find some passages that teach that the Most High God is Lord over all the earth:

Look up the Hebrew words for “Lord” and note their meanings and usage in the Old Testament:

What do these words tell us about God and His roles?

The LORD is not only Most High, He is also King over all. Consider the following words, again from Psalms:

For the LORD Most High *is* terrible; *he is* a great King over all the earth.
Psalm 47:2

And God's Kingship is not just for a period or an age—it is for all time:

The LORD *is* King for ever and ever: the heathen are perished out of his land.
Psalm 10:16

Find some other passages that speak about God's Kingship and Dominion. What do they tell us about God and His relationship with the earth and mankind?

Daniel 4:17 says that “the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men.” What does this verse and others like it tell us about God's relationship to the Kingdoms of this world?

Look up the Hebrew and Greek words for “kingdom,” “dominion” and “rule.” What do their meanings tell us about the nature of the coming Kingdom?

“I said, ye are gods”

In the Bible the term “God” is used mostly of the LORD, the Most High God. Nevertheless, the Hebrew (*'el* and *'elohim*) and Greek (*theos*) words for God are sometimes used of those other than the One True God. Such usage can be broken down into three categories:

1. Men and angels who represent God.
2. Mighty kings and warriors (only in Hebrew).
3. False gods.

To seek to understand why this should be so, we first need to look at the meaning of the Hebrew words *'el* and *'elohim*. Look up these two words and discuss their meanings and usage below. (Note that even though *'elohim* is grammatically plural, when used of individual humans and angels and the True God, it is used in a singular sense, with singular verbs and pronouns).

Now we will turn to the three categories listed above, beginning with the third. Since the words for “God” used in the Bible are not proper names, but rather generic terms for deity that apply to both the true God and the false ones, it is not surprising that the same words should be used of both. Note, however, that when these terms are used of false gods, they are usually used in a plural sense. Thus we read in Jeremiah 10:11:

The **gods** that have not made the heavens and the earth, *even they* shall perish from the earth, and from under these heavens.

These gods, we know, existed only in the imagination of idolaters. The Apostle Paul said that there are indeed many “so-called” gods, but only One True God (1 Corinthians 8:4-6).

In our second category, we see that in a very small number of cases the word *'el* is used of mighty men, as in Exodus 15:5 (“the mighty men of Moab”), where it is used of mighty warriors, and Ezekiel 31:11 (“the mighty one of the heathen”), where it is used of the king of Babylon.

But the most important and interesting category is the first. To begin, there are several examples of angels being referred to as both “God” and “Yahweh.” In Psalm 8:5 we encounter the words: “for thou hast made him a little lower than the angels.” The original word in the Hebrew for angels here is *'elohim*. We know that angels are referred to, however, because the passage is cited in the New Testament with the Greek word *angelos* (Hebrews 2:7). When Abraham was visited by three heavenly messengers as recorded in Genesis 18, he was left with one angel, who speaks as Yahweh. When Moses witnessed the burning bush, it was an angel who spoke as Yahweh and

who even declared the Name *'ehyeh asher 'ehyeh* (Exodus 3:2,4,7,14-15; *cf.* Acts 7:30-34).

Find other examples in the Bible where angels are called “God” or “Yahweh” (or speak as “God” or “Yahweh”):

Men acting as God’s representatives are also called “God” in the Bible. Thus the LORD told Moses: “See, I have made thee a god to Pharaoh: and Aaron thy brother shall be they prophet” (Exodus 7:1).

Can you find other examples where the term “God” is applied to men acting on God’s behalf?

Let’s now consider why such human representatives of God can take on the title “God.” The Bible, in Jesus’ words, gives us our most important insight into this. When the Jews (wrongly) accused Jesus of making himself God, Jesus did not reply in agreement. Instead, he said:

“Is it not written in your law, ‘I said, “Ye are gods?”’ If he called them gods, unto

whom the word of God came, and scripture cannot be broken; 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 10:34-36

Here we see that Christ did not agree with the accusation of the Jews, but rather clarified his relationship with God as Son. But he also cites from Psalm 82:6, which uses *'elohim* of the Israelite judges. Those whose authority was derived from God, and who received God's Word and Law, could be called "gods." Crucially, these judges were called "gods" not because they were by nature God, but because of their office: they represented God on earth.

A very important representative of God on earth was the one reigning as king of His Kingdom (*i.e.* ancient Israel and Judah). In Psalm 45 we learn that the Davidic king could be called "God" (*'elohim*; 45:6). Not only that, but he was called "Lord" (*'Adon*) and could be worshipped (45:11). These titles and this honour came to him because of the One he represented: the Supreme King of all the earth. God delegated power to the king, who acted as His vicegerent. The Davidic king himself was not the Supreme God, of course, for he had a God (45:7).

The Word of God came to Christ in the fullest sense, so he of all men deserves to be called "God" in the ways just outlined. He is, after all, the "Word of God" (Revelation 19:13). As Son of David and Son of God, he is also the greatest heir to David's throne (Luke 1:32). Thus the language of Psalm 45 applies to him in the greatest possible way. But Christ is also a unique example. It is not only because of his role as the speaker of God's Word, or because he will be King of Israel and the world, that Christ can be called "God." Unlike other men, Christ also shares with the angels the role of speaking and acting for God in a more direct fashion.

Since God is a consuming fire (Deuteronomy 4:24), and because mortal man cannot look on God and live, God has spoken directly first through angels and then in an even more intimate sense through His Own Son. This principle is in part outlined in Deuteronomy 18:15-19, where the Israelites pleaded with Moses that they not be exposed to the powerful manifestation of God's presence on Mount Sinai. They also did not want to hear the voice of God directly, for fear of dying. God replied that "they have well spoken what they have spoken" and promised that He would send them a Prophet like Moses to act as mediator. Ultimately, this prophet is Christ, who receives God's Words directly from Him and then gives them to His people.

But God also appeared through angels in manifestations of His Glory. During these manifestations, the angels took on God's Name and manifested His character. Such an occasion is a "theophany" (Greek for "God appearing"). Christ's appearance is a manifestation of this sort, except that as God's Son he could manifest God much more fully, perfectly and uniquely.

Describe the characteristics of some examples when God appeared through angels in the Bible.

Describe some examples where theophanous (“God appearing”) language is used of Christ. This is a challenging question that you may want to come back to later. Several examples can be found in the Prophets, such as Isaiah 6 (*cf.* John 12:41) and Zechariah 14:3-4. Note how in these circumstances how Christ takes on some of the characteristics of God.

Names and titles of God and Christ

In the Bible some names and titles are used of the Father and the Son in common, including Yahweh and God (although Jesus is only rarely referred to in these ways). Other titles are used of the Father exclusively, just as some are used only of the Son. Complete the following chart and add any other titles you can find.

Names and titles	Exclusively of God	Exclusively of Jesus	Used of Both
Father			
Son		Hebrews 1:5	
Firstborn			
Yahweh			
King			Psalm 89:18; Matthew 25:31-34
God			
God of Gods	Deuteronomy 10:17		
Lord of Lords			
Anointed			
Shepherd			
Alpha and Omega			
Almighty (NT)			
Saviour			
One God			
Most High God			

What does do the above patterns tell us about the things God and His Son have in common and the ways in which they are distinct?

There are at least two amply-supported scriptural reasons why Christ receives some of the

Names and Titles of his God and Father. One is related to who he is and the other to what he has done. Give scriptural proof for your answers.

1. Christ receives Names and Titles of his God and Father because of *who* he is:

2. Christ receives Names and Titles of his God and Father because of *what* he has done:

Both “Lord” (*'Adon*) and “God” (*'El* and *'Elohim*) are also Messianic titles. Where are they used in the Old Testament in this sense?

In the Book of Revelation, Christ is given a title held not only by God, but also by the Kings of Babylon and Persia, the first two empires in Daniel’s image. What is this title? Why might Christ receive a title used by kings of nations that conquered Israel?

The character of God

If we really want to know and love our God and Father, we must understand His characteristics. The Old and New Testaments provide numerous descriptions of God's personal character. One of the most powerful comes in Exodus 34:6-7:

“The LORD, The LORD God [Yahweh, Yahweh El], merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear *the guilty*; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth *generation*.”

List some of God's characteristics (*e.g.* “merciful,” “gracious”) with other supporting verses:

Some of God's attributes, including omnipotence, omnipresence and omniscience, He holds exclusively. Others are manifested in Christ and can be manifested in the saints, although their ultimate source is always God. Using your Bible, list some of the characteristics of Christ:

Using your Bible, list some of the characteristics saints may manifest:

Note how many of these characteristics can be held in common with God and His Son and discuss how we can become better able to show these good attributes in our lives in Christ.

The Spirit of God

A wide range of verses in the Bible tell us that the Spirit is God's Mind and Power. It is linked with power in a number of ways. First, God's activity in this world is associated with the Spirit from the moment of Creation (Genesis 1:1-3):

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form and void; and darkness *was* upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.

The Spirit is associated with power through Hebraic parallelism as well. The words of the angel Gabriel to Mary in Luke 1:35 offer one example of this:

The **Holy Spirit** shall **come upon** thee,
and the **power of the Highest** shall **overshadow** thee.

There is a small number of other verses in the Bible that show through parallelism that the Spirit is associated with power. Find them and write them out below in parallel fashion. An Online Bible will help for this question.

The Bible also describes the Spirit as the Mind of God. We know this because Isaiah 40:13, which reads, “Who hath directed the **Spirit** of the LORD?” is cited in Romans 11:34 as “For who hath known the **mind** of the Lord?”

Where else in the New Testament is Isaiah 40:13 cited?

What is the Greek word in both cases that translates the Hebrew word for Spirit? What does it mean?

Look up the Hebrew and Greek words for “spirit.” List them and the different ways they are translated in the Bible.

How do these meanings help us understand what the Spirit of God is?

The Spirit and the Breath of the Almighty

The above analysis of the usage of the Hebrew and Greek words for “spirit” show the close relationship of the idea of spirit and breath (whether in God or man). This is also true of English, for our word spirit comes from the Latin verb *spirō*, which means “to breathe” and also forms part of the word “inspiration.” This relationship is brought out in the virtually synonymous expressions “Spirit of God” and “breath of the Almighty” in the parallel structure of Job 33:4:

The **Spirit of God** hath made me,
and the **breath of the Almighty** hath given me life.

Find other passages that associate “spirit” with “breath.”

The Spirit and the Word

The Spirit of God is also associated with the Word of God in the Bible. When the Apostle Paul wrote that “all Scripture is given by inspiration of God” (2 Timothy 3:16), he used the word *theopneustos*, which uses the same root from which *pneuma* is derived. This word means “God-breathed.” This shows also how the relationship between spirit and breath extends to God’s Word, which are “breathed out.” In another place, Paul wrote:

And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of **the Spirit, which is the Word of God.**
Ephesians 6:17

The relative pronoun “which” in the Greek is in the neuter gender and agrees with Spirit (the neuter *pneuma*) as its antecedent. Thus Paul is here saying that the Spirit is the Word, not the sword (which is feminine: *machaira*). God inspires through His Spirit.

Find other passages in both the Old and New Testaments that link the Spirit with the Word and inspiration.

Outpourings of the Spirit

The Spirit has not only inspired God's prophets to record His Words. It also gave some men in the Old Testament special skills and empowered men and women with special gifts.

Give examples of individual outpourings of the Spirit in the Old Testament.

Discuss the spirit gifts of the New Testament and how they relate to those in the Old.

Explain how these help demonstrate that the Holy Spirit is a power of God, not a separate person in the Godhead.

Optional project

Since the Hebrew and Greek words for “spirit” are translated in different ways in our English Bibles, it is helpful to be able to determine at a glance whether a particular English word is backed by the word for spirit in the original languages of the Scriptures (also, a handful of times other words are translated as “spirit”). One way to do this is to colour or underline in a particular colour all the words in your Bible that translate the Hebrew and Greek words for “spirit.” To do this, you can either use Englishman’s Concordance, or you can look up the words in the back of Young’s to find out how they are translated, and then find these examples in their entries. This exercise will take a little patience, but the results are worth it!

The Promise: “I will write upon him the name of my God”

In the first three Studies, we saw that in the Kingdom age the world would know that the LORD was One (true teaching), that He would be the Only God (universal rule) and that the saints would be His sons and daughters. Thus we have brought a principle from each Study into the Millennium. In this Study, we want to focus on another aspect: the bestowal of God’s Name on the saints.

In an important passage in the Apocalypse, Jesus makes the following wonderful promise to the believers in Philadelphia (and thereby all the saints):

Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, *which is* new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name.

Revelation 3:12

The Lord Jesus Christ in this declaration gives us three clues as to what this Name might be. First, and more generally, the Name is the Name of his God. Second, it is the name of New Jerusalem. Third, it is Christ’s own new name (*i.e.* not the name he already had, but the Name given to him because of who he is and what he had done).

What Name does will be given to Jerusalem in the future? Look at verses where God says His

Name shall be there (*i.e.* in Jerusalem) and at the two verses that actually give the Name. (Hint: here you will want to use either an Online Bible or concordance to find verses that use both “name” and “Jerusalem”).

Find some verses that speak about Christ receiving a new, exalted Name:

Where else in Revelation does it say that the saints would receive a new Name from God?

Where in Revelation does it speak about those who turn from God receiving the mark and the name of the Beast?

Where in Revelation does it speak about the saints being protected because they are sealed by God on their foreheads?

Where in the Prophecy of Ezekiel does it speak about the faithful remnant receiving a mark from God that saves them from God's vengeance?

What spiritual lessons can we learn from this pattern?

Using Revelation 3:12 and other relevant verses for support, for what reasons do you think we will (by the Grace of God) be given the Name of God as a reward?

Wrested Scriptures

In this Study we have seen that there is clear precedence in the Bible for the term "God" to be applied to those representing the LORD. Thus when we encounter passages that apply the term to Christ, we can understand the dynamics behind this usage (remembering, of course, that when

“God” is applied to Christ it takes on a special and unique significance). Nevertheless, such usage is quite uncommon in the Bible—much, much more uncommon than one would suspect if the Bible did in fact teach a truly co-equal Trinity. Two of the few examples are given below.

Trinitarians have infested discussion about the terms *'elohim* and *theos* with talk of “essence” and “substance.” Thus on the handful of occasions when *theos* is used of Christ in the New Testament, they take it to mean that Christ is in very essence and substance the true God. But the Bible knows no such ideas. Trinitarians rest their case on a superficial and unsophisticated argument that if Christ is called God, he must be “very God.” We’ve already seen that this argument doesn’t hold up, otherwise more humans than just Christ would be God. Even in the common idiom of the first century this argument cannot be sustained, as we saw earlier with the example of Domitian. Instead, there is an explanation that covers all the cases: those other than the One True God who are called *'elohim* or *theos* are so called because of office or might. In taking the term “God” to refer to essence, Trinitarians claim that it is used in an absolute sense when used of Christ (thus, some like to down-play the references to judges being “gods”). Yet our studies have shown that the term “God” is used in the absolute sense only for the Most High, but in a relative and derived sense for those representing and manifesting Him—including Christ.

If Christ were by nature God, the Bible would not speak about Christ being *given* a name he already had by virtue of his substance. Yet, the Bible speaks about the Divine Name being bestowed on Christ because of who he is (and will be) and because of what he has done (Philippians 2:6; Revelation 3:12). This is incompatible with the idea that he is God from all eternity. If Christ were “very God,” such a transaction would be nothing more than a charade. But the Names and Titles of God are not given to Christ in an honorary way only, as with the Israelite judges of old. First, Christ is uniquely the Son of God. Second, as such, he manifests God in a more complete way than any other.

Not only are there sound, biblical reasons why Christ above all other humans can be called God, but certain affirmations necessary to the Trinity are conspicuously absent from the pages of Scripture. Namely, the language of underived supremacy and absolute power that is so often used of the Father in the Scriptures is never used of Christ. Consider the following:

- Christ is never called the Almighty (*pantokratōr*)
- Christ is never called “God of gods”
- Christ is never called the Most High God
- Christ is never included in the One True God
- Christ is never included in the Only (*monos*) God

The first three examples show that Christ is at least subordinate, and not co-equal. The last two examples are incontrovertible. Christ is not “very God of very God.”

Isaiah 9:6

There are very few Old Testament passages used by Trinitarians to attempt to support their doctrine. One of the more popular is Isaiah 9:6, in which four (or five) titles are given to the

Messiah: “Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (alternatively, the first title may be: “Wonderful,” “Counselor”). To explain the intent of this prophecy, look at the surrounding verses (especially 7) and look up the words used to see how they are used of elsewhere. You will also benefit from comparing between different translations. Consider also if the prophecy had a first fulfilment. What else is the Messiah called in verse 6? Finally, with which other two major promises about the Son of God does Isaiah 9:6-7 go (right down to the use of the future tense)? One is in the Old Testament and the other in the New.

Hebrews 1:8

The term *theos* is rarely used of Jesus Christ in the New Testament. There are, in fact, only two unambiguous and uncontested examples. The first is John 20:28. The other is Hebrews 1:8. In this latter verse, the writer to the Hebrews writes: “But unto the Son he saith, ‘Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever.’” First, study this verse in its context. Next, determine the Old Testament source for this language and study the context of this passage. What is, and what is not, the writer to the Hebrews saying? Lastly, reflect on the spiritual lessons of Hebrews 1.

Wrested Scriptures on the Spirit

When discussing the Holy Spirit with interested friends and Trinitarians, we often speak about the Spirit being personified and then embark on an explanation of personification in the Bible. This is completely unnecessary. When the literary figure of personification is needed, there is a clear implication that the thing personified is impersonal, which in this case makes the Spirit appear as some sort of remote, abstract power separate from God. This gives Trinitarians room to criticize our view of the Spirit as an “impersonal influence” or “energy” (although much of this criticism is based on what they know of the JW’s superficial explanation of the Spirit). Rather, personal language is sometimes used of the Spirit because it is none other than the *personal* Mind and Power of God, and is just as much a part of God’s Person as our own minds and power are a part of our’s.

At that same time, God has sometimes given of His Spirit to men and women. Thus the Spirit is something that can be bestowed on people—as it was in the past and will be in great measure in the Kingdom (Joel 2:28-29; Acts 2:2-4). Such outpourings are manifestations of God’s Power and like all manifestations from God, including the granting of His Name to others, they are derivative. God remains the ultimate source of the power, just as in the case of His dominion. For the Holy Spirit to be poured out, or for it to be a gift, is fully compatible with it being God’s personal Power. This language, however, does not jibe with the notion that the Spirit is the third person of a Trinity. Here’s the key: the Spirit is personal, but not a separate person.

It is also important to remember that God is a spirit being. Thus we read in John 4:24: “God is a Spirit,” or, as the Greek can also be translated: “God is Spirit.” Paul can even write in 2 Corinthians 3:17 that “the Lord is the Spirit.” Yet the relationship is always clear, for even in this same verse, Paul speaks about “the Spirit **of** the Lord.” The Lord God is certainly Spirit, but the Spirit itself is not another Lord. Another way to put this distinction is to say that God is fully Spirit, but the Spirit is not God on its own (*i.e.* in the Trinitarian sense of a separate person).

For these reasons, we are not surprised to see Peter, in the incident with Ananias and Sapphira, moving back and forth from speaking about lying to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3), lying to God (5:4) and, then, bringing them together, tempting the Spirit of the Lord (5:9). Also, when Peter is speaking to the voice in the vision of the unclean animals (Acts 10:10-20), he refers to its source as “Lord” (verse 14) and later as “God” (verse 28), even though in verse 19 we are told that the Spirit was speaking to him. Moreover, in the next verse the Spirit speaks using the first person pronoun “I” (verse 20). None of this is particularly surprising once we understand the principles outlined above: God speaks through His Spirit.

Finally, some honest Trinitarians will acknowledge that they sometimes see the Holy Spirit as the power of God, rather than a separate individual. Most are also willing to concede that the being they believe in the third person of the Trinity plays a much less central and less independent role than those of God or Christ. As with Trinitarians who usually think of God as the Father, this is a case where the clarity of the Bible is getting the better of the artificial Trinitarian dogma. When discussing the Spirit with Trinitarians, build on this!

Acts 13:2

Trinitarians argue that the language of Acts 13:2, which uses personal pronouns, shows that the Holy Spirit is a separate person from the Father. Here is the verse:

As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, “Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.”

This is followed by the statement: “So they, being sent forth by the Holy Spirit . . . ” (13:4). Study how utterances of the Spirit are presented elsewhere to show what these verses are really teaching. Who is is the One really speaking here?

JESUS CHRIST: SON OF GOD AND SON OF MAN

Hereby know we the spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God. 1 John 4:2

The birth of Jesus

The birth of Jesus Christ, recorded by the Gospel writers (Matthew 1:18-2:23, Luke 1:26-56) presents us with a perfectly rational and satisfactory explanation of his beginning. There is no hint of any “pre-existence” as some would suggest. The Scriptures consistently testify to his literal birth at a fixed point in time. The inspired message of the prophets looked forward to their fulfilment in Jesus (Luke 24:44-45).

Which five specific prophecies are fulfilled in, and immediately subsequent to, the birth of Jesus?

The significance of God’s promises, which weave through the Scriptures, is almost entirely neglected by Christendom, and yet they provide the bedrock to a true understanding of the Gospel message centred in Jesus Christ. Try to find at least twelve references detailing or commenting upon the promises that God made to certain individuals in the Old Testament concerning the future Redeemer.

What is a promise? And what do the above verses tell us about the true Jesus, as opposed to the

Jesus of the Trinity?

The word “seed” used in the AV/RV translation of these promises has more recently been translated in different ways (*e.g.* “offspring” and “descendants”). Look up both the Hebrew and Greek words translated “seed” and note their usage.

See how “seed” reflects the Hebrew idea very well.

Hebrew:

Greek:

The fact that Jesus is termed as “begotten” by the Father declares a physical bringing in to existence at a fixed point in time. Clearly, these Scriptures become meaningless, if Jesus had been “co-eternal” with God. “Begotten” is used in the Bible to speak of a literal birth (John 1:14) and also resurrection (Acts 13:33). Look up the Greek word translated “begotten” and define its meaning.

Greek word:

Meaning:

Find occurrences in the New Testament where “begotten” refers to Jesus’ literal birth:

Psalm 89 is clearly Messianic. How is the word “firstborn” used in verse 27?

Jesus: the same nature as ourselves

We have already seen that Jesus was born into the Adamic race through his mother Mary, and thereby fully partook of our human nature. Try to find at least ten references where Jesus is referred to as a “man.”

Why is Christ still referred to as a man after his ascension?

Jesus calls himself the “Son of Man” in Matthew 16:13. The same title is used in Hebrews 2:6 where the writer is providing us with an inspired commentary on an Old Testament Scripture. Where is the writer quoting from and what is the Hebrew word translated “man”?

Find other significant examples of this title and discuss the context in which you find it in terms of the work and ministry of Jesus.

In contrast to the above study, the Almighty Creator declares on a number of occasions that he is not a man. Find some verses where God declares explicitly that He is not a man, or he draws a vast contrast between his ways and our ways (hint!).

The true victory of Jesus over sin and death can only be seen when we understand that he fought on the same “battlefield” as us. Having our nature, he had the same tendency to sin—yet he never did. An appreciation of this elevates Jesus far above anything the Trinity could possibly allow.

Examine and discuss the various words and phrases used in Hebrews 2:14-18 to define the nature of Jesus.

How can a correct understanding of the nature of Jesus encourage us in our discipleship? Particularly consider verses 17 and 18 here.

Find some passages that demonstrate that Jesus encountered the same tensions and temptations to which we are subject, and that he also required redemption.

The true marvel of Jesus' character is that he never gave in to temptation. Find at least five references which illustrate that he never sinned.

The Epistle of James informs us that "every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is finished bringeth forth death" (1:14-15). Jesus didn't allow any wrong thought to "conceive" within him, it was always expelled immediately.

In what ways can the example of Jesus help us to overcome temptation in our lives. What

practical measures can we take to help ourselves?

Jesus as Mediator

The Synoptic Gospels Matthew, Mark and Luke record that at the death of Jesus, the “veil of the temple was rent in twain” (Matthew 27:51). A “new and living way” had been opened up by Jesus, he has now become “an high priest over the house of God” (Hebrews 10:20). In his sacrifice, he became the mediator of a better covenant (Hebrews 8:6). We now have access directly to God through prayer (Romans 5:1-2, Ephesians 2:18, 3:12, Hebrews 4:16).

How important is prayer, and how can we become more prayerful in our lives?

Any specific scriptural examples of prayer that you may find helpful?

Jesus: subordinate to God

The relationship between Jesus and his Father is totally dislocated when approached from a Trinitarian standpoint. The fact that God is described as “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:3) after his ascension negates the view that his subordination only lasted during his mortal life (see also Revelation 1:6 RV). We find statements from Jesus himself, together with many other references clearly setting out their true relationship.

Find some passages that demonstrate that Jesus was and is dependent on, or subject to, God.

Because the nature of Jesus was that of Adam, as he was descended through Mary, he had to die according to the curse that came on Adam's descendants (1 Corinthians 15:22, Romans 5:14-19). The difference between ourselves and Jesus is that we have sinned personally and therefore deserve death (Romans 6:23). Jesus never sinned, and therefore was raised from the dead and subsequently exalted to God's right hand. We have to conclude that this whole process would be a charade if Jesus was and had been part of a triune Godhead.

Find as many references as you can (Old and New Testament) that plainly declare that Jesus had to die and then be raised by God.

Look up the word resurrection and define it. Discuss the implications for resurrection if Jesus had not truly died. How does this affect our hope? Consider especially 1 Corinthians 15:12-22.

Jesus Christ is not "very God"

One excellent and revealing way to see how the Bible distinguishes between God (that is, the Father) and His Son Jesus Christ is to examine their attributes and characteristics. In the columns below, find verses that show each of the listed attributes. For many of the examples, you should be able to find multiple references. The first example is done for you.

The LORD God

Jesus Christ

Cannot be tempted: *James 1:13*

Was tempted: *Hebrews 2:18*

Cannot be seen by men:

Was seen by men:

Cannot die:

Died:

All-knowing:

Not all-knowing:

All-powerful:

Not all-powerful:

Will not be, is not a man:

Was and is a man:

Inherently good:

Ascribed true goodness to God:

Inherently perfect:

Had to be made perfect:

Does not change:

Was changed:

Will not physically look on evil:

Physically looked on evil:

Subject to none, supreme:

Subject to God:

Has no God:

Has a God:

The Messiahship of Jesus

The word Messiah simply means “anointed one,” the first occurrence of which (in root form) can be found in Genesis 31:13 where Jacob “anoints” the pillar at Bethel. The New Testament equivalent is translated by the word “Christ” (cf. John 4:25). It is an important feature when considering the nature of Jesus, for faithful Jews were waiting for the Messiah to come, and saw Jesus as the fulfilment, as was said: “We have found the Messiah” (John 1:41). Jews today are still looking for the coming of their Messiah, but fail to realize that he was born among them (his brethren) 2000 years ago!

Find the first reference to Messiah (anointed one) referring specifically to a future King.

Who said it and why?

In Daniel 9:25-26, the Hebrew word “Messiah” has been transliterated. Consider the “70 weeks” prophecy, including the implications of the “cutting off” of Messiah. How did faithful men and women of the New Testament view this prophecy? The same angel (Gabriel) had the privilege of delivering the news of its fulfillment to Mary (Luke 1:26-38).

Do you notice any connections with the previous question?

The Promise: reigning with Christ a thousand years

The literal reign of Jesus over the whole earth is a prospect that should both encourage, and excite us in our discipleship. The saints have an active part in this future age, for they will live and reign with Christ a thousand years (Revelation 20:4). At the end of this period of “restitution of all things” the restored earth will then be handed to the Father that he may be “all in all.”

Then *cometh* the end, when he [Jesus Christ] shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet . . . then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all. 1 Corinthians 15:24-25,28

In what sense will his kingdom (when speaking of Jesus) stand for ever (*e.g.* 2 Samuel 7:16), even though he personally will reign only for a thousand years?

See how many passages you can find relating to the reign of Jesus over the earth during the

Kingdom.

Find passages that refer to the saints' roles in the Kingdom. Identify and list these roles.

Given what we (by the grace of God) will be doing in the future, what should we be doing *now* by way of preparation for our roles in the Kingdom?

Wrested Scriptures

Our two wrested Scripture examples for this Study are used by many as evidence that Christ literally "preexisted" (itself arguably a contradiction in terms) as a person before his literal birth

in Bethlehem. In this case, it is not only Trinitarians who teach a literal preexistence of Christ (although some Trinitarians believe he was only properly “Son” after Bethlehem), for others, such as the JW’s, who hold to an “Arian” view of Christ, also contend for this position. The Arian view (named after the fourth-century theologian Arius) holds that Christ was a created being who nevertheless preexisted his literal birth (and indeed the Genesis creation).

Given the complete lack of evidence for this position, those who argue for the preexistence of Christ assert that he appeared occasionally as an angel in Old Testament times. Nowhere in the Bible is there anything that supports this notion. If one Angel was Christ, the Bible would say so—but it manifestly does not. Another approach taken by those who hold this position is to lift examples of symbolic language of Christ’s place in God’s plan, and read into them the unbiblical doctrine of literal, personal “preexistence.” We’ll examine two passages used for this below.

John 17:5

As always in our scriptural studies, we must first build up our doctrinal vocabulary using unambiguous Scriptures, and then move on to those that may seem more challenging. In this case, having established irrefutable evidence concerning the literal birth of Jesus by Mary at a point in time, what did Jesus mean when he prayed: “And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was”? (John 17:5)

There are several points to consider. Whatever the glory was, it was derived (17:24), just as his power over all flesh (17:2). What does “the world” here signify? Also, if we can determine when and in what way Jesus would be glorified, it will shed light on how this was seen before by God. Moreover, is similar language of “preexistence” ever used of the saints? If so, is it relevant to our understanding of John 17:5? Some helpful references are: Jeremiah 1:5; Matthew 13:35, 25:34; Acts 2:23; Romans 4:17, 9:23; Ephesians 1:4; 2 Timothy 1:9; Revelation 13:8, 17:8. Finally, reflect on what knowledge of own calling and role in God’s plan should mean to us.

Colossians 1:15-18

This passage of Scripture is also used in defence of the “preexistence” of Jesus. An honest consideration of the context will soon reveal the true issue under discussion.

Discuss and examine the key words used (*e.g.* creation, firstborn and beginning) to help you arrive at a scripturally-consistent understanding of these verses. Remember also to analyze the logic of Paul's argument and to find examples of similar language being used elsewhere.

MAN: A LIVING SOUL

The nature of man

The purpose of the second half of this Workbook is to establish the scriptural teaching on the nature of man: namely, that he is mortal, living “soul.” The biblical exercises in Part 2 will demonstrate the plain and overwhelming evidence that “All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again” (Ecclesiastes 3:20). As the studies proceed, the true and scripturally-consistent doctrine of bodily resurrection will be revealed as the only means whereby men and women might inherit everlasting life.

We will commence once again by going right back to the beginning; in this case, we will analyze the first specific statement the Bible presents on the physical nature of man. This is found in Genesis 2:7:

And the LORD God formed man *of* the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.

Examine the following key words used in this verse. Note the Hebrew roots and meanings.

formed

man

dust

ground

breathed

breath

living

soul

The word “soul” has taken on a mystical meaning in Christendom, with its plain meaning and significance being obscured. As with all Bible topics, a grasp of its usage within the pages of Scripture is the only right way to a proper understanding of its meaning and import.

How else is the Hebrew word for “soul” translated in the Old Testament?

Jesus himself uses the term “soul.” What is the Greek word used for “soul” in the New Testament?

How else is the Greek word used for “soul” translated in the New Testament?

The Scriptures describe nearly fifty different activities that “souls” are capable of or can experience (*i.e.* eating, working, loving, hating, *etc.*). See if you can find at least twenty-five.

Explain how these examples demonstrate that whatever the “soul” is, it must be fundamentally physical in nature.

As further evidence of the essentially physical nature of the “soul,” we see that in the Bible it is associated with blood. Where is this and what is the significance of blood in this context?

The soul as “life”

Our foundation passage in Genesis 2:7 shows that, with the breath of life, humans are living “souls,” that is to say, “living beings.” Animal life is described in the same way in the creation account (Genesis 1:20,21,24,30; 2:19). Consider these examples:

And he that killeth a **beast** [*nephesh*] shall make it good; **beast** [*nephesh*] for **beast** [*nephesh*].
Leviticus 24:18

And every **living soul** [NIV: “living being”] died in the sea.
Revelation 16:3

Find other passages that use *nephesh* or *psychē* for the whole living being of either humans or animals:

It naturally follows from what we have seen above that a creature (whether human or animal) that is no longer breathing would be a “dead soul.” In fact, this is exactly the language the Bible uses. A case in point is Leviticus 19:28.

Using your concordance, find other examples of “dead souls” in the Bible (using *nephesh*):

Now list all the references you can find that demonstrate that the “soul” is capable of destruction and death:

In Part 1 of the Workbook we saw that an understanding of literary forms and idioms used in the Word of God can bring further light on biblical truth. One of the most helpful idioms is that of Hebraic poetic parallelism. Sometimes parallel structures are set up for contrastive purposes, but usually parallelism lays out synonymous concepts. Parallelism also helps us out with our present topic by providing an additional line of evidence that shows how closely the words *nephesh* and *psychē* are linked with the concept of life. Thus in Psalm 7:5 we read:

Let the **enemy** persecute **my soul**, and take *it*;
let **him** tread down **my life** upon the earth.

Here we see that the expressions “my soul” and “my life” are equivalent.

Find other examples where parallelism or other sorts of contextual evidence reveal the synonymous relationship between “soul” and “life:”

When studying the subject of the nature of man, many of the more difficult passages can be understood plainly when the original words *nephesh* or *psychē* are translated with a word such as “life” rather than “soul.” The translators, through their inconsistencies, have often introduced confusion. We will look at this problem in more detail in the Wrested Scriptures section below, but consider the following, where Jesus says to his disciples:

For whosoever will save his **life** [*psychē*] shall lose it, and whosoever will lose his **life** [*psychē*] for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own **soul** [*psychē*]. Or what shall a man give in exchange for his **life** [*psychē*].
Matthew 16:25-26

Using this and other similar references, discuss the import of Jesus' words upon our lives today.

The soul as “person”

We have seen how the word soul can simply mean “life” or “living.” The identification of the soul with a person's whole being is also revealed through examples where the words *nephesh* and *psychē* operate effectively as pronouns. For example, upon the looming destruction of Sodom, Lot says: “I cannot escape to the mountain lest some evil take me, and I die . . . Oh let me escape thither [to Zoar], and **my soul** shall live” (Genesis 19:19-20). Here it is clear that Lot is simply saying that **he** (his whole being) will live. In addition, however, we also see that there was a possibility that Lot's *nephesh* could die.

When David declares in Psalm 3:2: “Many there be which say of **my soul**, ‘There is no help for him in God,’” he is clearly not speaking about an immaterial entity within him, but is simply saying: “There are many saying of **me**, there is no help for him in God.” Sometimes English translations actually use the word person to render *nephesh* or *psychē*, as is the case with Leviticus 27:2.

There are many other cases of *nephesh* and *psychē* simply referring to the person. See how many of these you can find.

Using examples, explain why a good number of these passages also show that the “soul,” or person, is mortal.

The soul as the seat of the emotion

The Greek and Hebrew words for “soul” are also used of human feelings, emotions and desires. This usage is especially common in the poetic passages of the Bible. Thus we see David appeal: “O LORD, heal me, for my bones are vexed; **my soul** is also sore vexed” (Psalm 6:3). Sometimes the original word is translated with such terms as “heart” and “lust” (*cf.* Psalms 10:3, 78:18).

Find other passages that use *nephesh* or *psychē* for human feelings, emotions and desires:

What additional insights into the “soul” do these verses offer us?

The spirit of man

When considering the creation of man, there can be some confusion of meaning between “spirit” and “soul.” Having considered the soul we will now look at the spirit. Clearly, there must be a reason for the inspired writers to use two distinct words, as in the following passage:

The word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of **soul** and **spirit**. Hebrew 4:12

Once again, definitions must be found from the Word itself. (This does not negate the fact that meanings can merge and overlap at times). Let’s review what we learned in Study 4 about the Hebrew and Greek words for “spirit.” (You should be able to transfer your answers to the next four questions from your work in Study 4).

What is the Hebrew word for “spirit”?

How else is this word translated?

What is the Greek word for “spirit”?

How else is this word translated?

From Genesis 2:7 we have already seen that God “breathed into [Adam’s] nostrils the breath [spirit] of life: and man became a living soul.” The spirit, then, is the animating power or life-force given by God. The same spirit gives life to man and beast alike. It follows therefore, that should God withdraw his breath or spirit, man would become a “dead soul.”

Find some references that show that it is the “breath” or “spirit” of God that gives us life and by which we are sustained.

Find five references that show that if God should withdraw His breath or spirit from a living being, that person or animal would perish.

The expression “giving up the ghost [spirit]” is an idiomatic saying consistent with the teaching that the “spirit shall return to God who gave it.” At the point of death, Jesus said: “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit” (Luke 23:46). In other words, he “gave up the spirit.”

Of what other scriptural characters is similar language recorded?

The above teaches us how God has given, and continues to give us life, but what does this tell us of His own character? Consider Lamentations 3:20.

The Promise: “Now in this time”

Although we struggle with mortal and sinful flesh, we are given numerous assurances in the Bible that there are blessings in this life as well for those who trust in Him. This promise is made by Jesus in Mark 10:29-30:

Verily I say unto you, there is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel’s, but he shall receive an hundredfold **now in this time**, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecution; **and in the world to come** eternal life.

We must thank our Father daily that we can receive blessings “now in this time” *and* “in the age to come.”

Study the above-quoted words of Christ carefully. What is the nature of the blessings promised?

Beginning with Old Testament examples, find and discuss other passages that promise blessings for God's people during their mortal pilgrimage.

Optional Project

In Study 4 we suggested as an optional project that you could colour in all the occurrences of the Hebrew and Greek words for “spirit” in your Bible with a particular colour. Once done, this allows you to side-step potential translator bias by revealing at a glance what the original word is. For similar reasons, it is both a great learning experience and a valuable reference tool to do the same with the words *nephesh* in the Old Testament and *psychē* in the New Testament. When you have coloured in both these words with the same colour, you will never need to turn to a concordance to know whether or not a particular word in the English translation renders *nephesh* or *psychē*. See the comments under “Optional project” in Study 4 for advice on how to do this.

Wrested Scriptures

Biblical passages that teach doctrine are not only meant to present truth in a positive sense for the edification and instruction of believers, but are also intended to counter the false teachings of the pagan nations around God's people. It was necessary to emphasize God's Oneness to Israel (Deuteronomy 6:4; Zechariah 14:9; Malachi 2:10) after they emerged from their captivities in Egypt and Babylon—two cultures caught up in the worship of divine triads. It was also important that God's Uniqueness be stressed in Isaiah's day against the backdrop of Persian cosmic dualism (Isaiah 45:7). Similarly, the clear statements presented in the Word on man's mortality served to clarify God's truth at a time when the false teaching of the immortality of the soul was common among the Gentiles.

A whole range of erroneous theories concerning the ultimate fate of human beings was taught in

the ancient world. Egyptian, Babylonian and Greek cultures all sought to appease this tragedy of human experience—death—through their “philosophies and vain deceit.” Because orthodox Christianity has through the falling away inherited these pagan teachings, the corrective feature of God’s Word is still highly relevant. Many of the pagan ideas on the nature of man still pervade peoples’ thinking today, the most popular being the “Christianized” doctrine of the immortality of the soul. In an attempt to portray this pagan doctrine as biblical, the orthodox twist several passages from the Bible to argue that men and women possess immortal, immaterial souls. In this second part of the Workbook we continue the pattern of Part 1 by examining a few of the more common examples of wrested Scriptures that relate to our theme.

Using the two Greek words for “soul” and “body,” some people talk of a “psychosomatic” dichotomy in human beings, and hence attempt to show the differences between the experiences of “soul” and “body.” But the Bible knows nothing of this soul-body *division*. Our own experience of life contradicts such a notion, for when we are ill in body, our minds are often affected as well (and *vice versa*). Instead, while alive man is an animated soul: a mind-body *unity*. The Bible knows nothing of “souls” existing separately from the body. On the other hand, while the Word never speaks of *disembodied* souls, it often refers to both humans and animals as “living souls” or “beings.” Some credence is given to the orthodox position through the traditional usage of the word “soul.” We will begin with a consideration of this term.

Translating *nephesh* and *psychē*

Many of the troubles the orthodox have with the teaching of man’s mortality, and some of the apparent obstacles we ourselves may encounter in interpretation, arise from difficulties with translating the Hebrew word *nephesh* and the Greek word *psychē* (pronounced soo-**kay**). Here the chief problem is our English word “soul.” This word has, through usage and tradition, become a heavily loaded term and a classical example of ecclesiastical jargon. So engrained is the ecclesiastical meaning, that when most people in society use or encounter the word “soul,” they think of an immortal and immaterial entity that somehow survives the death of the body. This predetermined definition of soul goes a long way to explaining why so many people believe the Bible teaches the immortality of the soul: when they see the word “soul” they assume the orthodox concept is intended. Let’s examine this.

As we all know, while the term “immortal soul” is found in the pages of orthodox theology textbooks, it never appears in the Bible—a valuable point to make with someone who adheres to this teaching. While it would be wrong to assume that every person who believes in the immortal soul holds that *nephesh* and *psychē* always mean “immortal soul,” many do argue that a large number of examples of passages with these words are meant to teach this very thing. A simple exercise will demonstrate how unnatural this meaning is. Look at some verses that use either *nephesh* or *psychē* and read these passages substituting “immortal soul” for the English translation given. A particularly revealing example is Matthew 16:25-26:

For whosoever will save his **immortal soul** shall lose it; and whosoever will lose his **immortal soul** for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own **immortal soul**? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his **immortal soul**?

Although this passage is self-contradictory when foreign, unbiblical concepts are read into it, it makes perfect sense when we render *psychē* as “life” as we saw earlier in this Study.

Consider also the following passages read according to the orthodox concept:

And they smote all the **immortal souls** that were therein with the edge of the sword, utterly **destroying** them. Joshua 11:11

Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save an **immortal soul** from **death**. James 5:20

Obviously, these passages sound ludicrous read in this way; and so it is when any foreign idea foisted on the pure truth of the Scriptures. On the other hand, these passages make perfect sense when we remember that *nephesh* and *psychē* often act simply as pronouns. The account from Joshua speaks of the destruction of the people of Hazor (for further insight, read the entire verse and note the comment in the margin of the KJV). The passage in James is simply describing the rescue of the sinner from eternal death. These are simple exercises, but they help show what goes on in the mind of someone who comes to the Bible with unscriptural presuppositions: the truth is turned into falsehood.

Clearly, then, the orthodox definition won't do. Once again it is necessary to strip away and rid ourselves of the layers of meaning that the orthodox centuries have added to a pure, biblical concept. It is interesting to see, therefore, that some translators are moving away from using the term “soul.” The Jewish Publication Society's Tanakh, for example, has eliminated the word altogether in its translation. The United Bible Societies' *Concise Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament* (which is used by many translators) does not even include the word “soul” in its list of definitions for *psychē*. Instead, it gives this word's shades of meaning as: self, inner life, one's inmost being; (physical) life; that which has life, living creature, person, human being. Note that the terms “self,” “person” and “human being” support what we have seen above, namely that *nephesh* and *psychē* often operate simply as personal pronouns.

Thus the Tanakh translates the well-known verse Ezekiel 18:4 (KJV: “The soul that sinneth, it shall die”) as: “The person who sins, only he shall die.” The use of “soul” and the neuter pronoun “it” in the KJV rendition are misleading, since the context and the passage itself are clearly meant to teach that a *person* is responsible for his or her own sins. Of course, once we realize that *nephesh* is used in the original, either translation of this verse offers one of the best proofs that man is mortal. Another example of the avoidance of the word soul in translation can be found in the NIV's translation of Genesis 2:7, where the KJV's “living soul” is rendered as “living being.” Nevertheless, the NIV still uses “soul” in many other places.

Where does our English word “soul” come from then? Interestingly, linguists haven't been able to determine the ultimate etymology of this expression. Our modern spelling “soul” derives from an ancient Germanic root through the Old English *sāwol*, and is related to the Gothic *saiwala*, the Old Frisian *sēle* and the Old Scandinavian *sēola*. The best evidence we have for its original

meaning comes from the fact that the Germanic root is related to the Greek term *aiolos*, which means “quick-moving,” “rapid” or “easily moved.” This meaning makes sense because the primitive concept of the soul was that it was a fleeting or flitting entity. Another hint comes from the ancient Greek god of the winds, *Aiolos*, whose name literally means “changeable.”

Whatever the origin of our English word, it really acts more like a shell into which traditional theological ideas are poured. Here the Greek concept of *psychē* looms large. A standard idea among the Greeks was that every person possessed an immortal, immaterial entity that survived the physical death of the body. Because the early church picked up many Greek philosophical concepts during the falling away of the first three or four centuries AD, those speaking Germanic languages like English would have begun to define the word soul according to the orthodox Christian teaching. It’s our job to completely side-step this legacy of corruption and use only the pure and true concepts of the inspired Word.

Luke 16:19-31

The account of the Rich Man and Lazarus is still used by many to support the dogma of the immortal soul. Read the passage through and formulate a suitable response to this attempt to twist the meaning of the Bible. Consider the following in your answer:

Is this passage written in the language of a completely factual narrative, or as a parable? Look for, and list, specific clues that help determine which of the two it is.

If it is a parable, exactly how should it be used for positive teaching?

Can the scenario and language be taken literally? If not, why not?

Something like the scenario Jesus describes in this account was believed popularly by the

Pharisees and many Hellenized Jews. Does Jesus' use of this endorse its teaching? If not why use it?

What is the force of this discourse, and to whom is it primarily directed?

Luke 23:39-43

The reply of Jesus to the thief on the cross, who asked "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom," is often taken to substantiate the view that both men would, after death, depart immediately into paradise. How do you understand Jesus' words: "Today thou shalt be with me in paradise"?

Did the thief have an understanding of the true Gospel? By examining every detail of his words to Jesus, consider how much of the truth of the Bible he understood.

Are there any other parts of Scripture that may help us understand the form of language Jesus used in his reply?

What does the word “paradise” mean in the original? Is there an Old Testament equivalent? Does it mean heaven?

Where did Jesus go on that day? Give supporting references.

MORTALITY OF MAN AND DEATH STATE

Man mortal

In the beginning God placed a sentence on mankind as a consequence of sin, and again and again throughout the rest of Scripture we see the confirmation of this punishment: “thou **shalt** surely die” (Genesis 2:17). The rest of Scripture provides ample testimony of man’s mortality. Man, however, with his earthly wisdom, has denied this evidence and has attempted to perpetuate one of the original lies of the serpent: “ye shall **not** surely die” (Genesis 3:4). Despite the many attempts to deny the awful but obvious truth, until Christ’s return men and women will continue to die in accordance with the edict of Genesis 3:19:

In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken. For dust thou *art*, and unto dust shalt thou return.

Man was formed from the dust of the ground (Genesis 2:7) and at death the process is reversed. We are organic beings; like all organic life, when we die our bodies break down and return to the earth. Nothing in the Genesis description suggests anything about any sort of continued existence after this process. In fact, the Bible knows nothing of human life existing in any form without a physical body.

In English we use the term human to describe men and women. This expression comes from Latin and is related to the Latin word *humus*, which means the “ground,” “earth” or “soil.” We get our English word “humus” (which refers to the organic component of soil) directly from this Latin term. It is helpful and humbling to remember this when we use the word “human.” But a similar dynamic occurs in the inspired Scriptures as well.

What is the generic term for “man” or “human” in the Hebrew Old Testament?

To what other Hebrew words is it related?

Discuss the implications the associations the Hebrew word for “man” or “human” has.

Whenever the creation of man is referred to, there is never a mention of any inherent

immortality. No part is said to live on after death; in fact we find quite the opposite. Find all the references you can that stress the physical makeup of man (*e.g.* that we are dust and of the earth).

The Scriptures leave us in no doubt as to the finality of death (but for the hope of resurrection). Find passages that corroborate with the statement: “For dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return” (include those that speak of the body corrupting and perishing at death).

The recognition among faithful Bible characters that they were but “dust and ashes” clearly had an impact on their thinking and relationship with God. Give some examples from the Scriptures, and discuss in what way this knowledge should effect our lives and relationship with our Creator.

Death: unconscious oblivion

The Scriptures make it plain that all existence, thought and human activity ceases completely at death. The words of Psalm 146:2-4 could not be clearer:

While I live will I praise the LORD; I will sing praises unto my God **while I have any being**. Put not your trust in princes, *nor* in the son of man, in whom *there is* no help. His **breath goeth forth**, he **returneth to his earth**; in that very day **his thoughts perish**.

The Psalmist opens by implying that he can praise only “while he lives.” He then goes on to outline the three essential elements in dying:

1. The breath or spirit returns to God.
2. The body returns to the ground.
3. All consciousness ceases.

Find other passages that teach us that death is unconscious oblivion:

Find passages that link the human experience of death with that of animals:

Death and the grave equated in the Bible

Since everyone goes to the grave at death, it is important for our current study that we understand what the Bible teaches about this subject. First, we need to examine the original words that are translated as “grave.”

List the Hebrew words translated as “grave,” along with their meanings. Also write down how else these Hebrew terms are translated.

List the Greek words translated as “grave,” along with their meanings. Also write down how else these Greek terms are translated.

Speaking prophetically, David wrote in Psalm 16:10: “For thou will not leave my soul in **hell**; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.” In this translation from the KJV, what Hebrew word lies behind the English word “hell”?

Where is this verse cited in the New Testament?

What Greek word is used for the Hebrew word originally translated “hell” in Psalm 16?

In the Bible these Hebrew and Greek terms are synonymous and both refer to the place we go when we die: the grave.

The helpful expositional tool of parallelism shows us that the grave and death are strongly linked in the Bible. Consider Hezekiah’s reflections on both in Isaiah 38:18:

For **the grave** cannot praise thee,
death cannot celebrate thee,
they that go down into the pit cannot hope for thy truth.

In this case we see three synonymous thoughts: the grave, death and those who descend into the pit are three ways of speaking about the death state. With each expression the condition is the same: lack of thought and existence.

Find other passages that link the grave with real, physical death and cessation of existence:

“Immortality” in the Bible

The English word “mortal” is derived from the Latin word for death (*mors*), and means prone to, or pertaining to, death. We use this word with a negative prefix to describe deathlessness, namely “immortality.”

Look up all the examples of the term immortality used in our English translations of the Bible (the KJV has five). What does this sequence of verses tell us about immortality?

What two Greek words are translated as “immortality” in the New Testament?

What are their roots and what do they mean?

The death of the saints

Tremendously encouraging words for believers are found in Psalm 116:15: “Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints.” Because Yahweh will raise His holy ones, their deaths are special and different from those who have no hope. If an immediate reward at death really is offered by God, we should see evidence for this in the accounts of righteous people dying. Yet we find that the language of cessation of existence is used of the saints as well as for unbelievers. Obviously, we look beyond this to the resurrection, but it is helpful to examine the accounts of the death of saints.

The death of Lazarus offers us an excellent starting point. John 11 contains the record of the death of this man, a friend of Jesus. Note how Jesus plainly said, “Lazarus is dead” (11:14), and not that he was by then a “better world.” Consider the implications of Jesus raising Lazarus, and his discourse with Martha. Why was Martha upset? Why was Jesus troubled at the death? Why raise a man to return to mortal existence?

Examine and discuss the records concerning the death of the following characters (look at others as well if you wish). Are there any grounds for considering that anything other than cessation of life occurred? What do the narratives say, and what don’t they say? Note the key points.

Abraham

Isaac

Jacob

Joseph

Moses

David

Solomon

Jesus (be sure to include Matthew 27:58-60, Luke 23:46 and Acts 2:31)

Discuss how we can gain great encouragement from the fact that our Saviour also experienced what is common to all men and women: death.

Brief is our portion now

Considering the brevity of our lives is not very appealing (particularly when we are young), but it does “teach us to number our days, that we may apply *our* hearts unto wisdom” (Psalm 90:12).

Therefore, as Paul exhorts us, when we have opportunity, “let us do good unto all *men*, especially unto them who are of the household of faith” (Galatians 6:10). Faithful men and women of Scripture were under no illusion concerning their life span, and thereby the limited amount of time they had to serve God. The psalmist David said it all when he exclaimed: “Behold, thou hast made my days *as* an handbreadth, and mine age is as nothing before thee” (Psalm 39:5). We have also learned above that it is only while we live that we can praise and serve God.

Find further passages that speak of the passing and transitory nature of our mortal lives:

The Prophet Isaiah compares flesh (mankind) with grass that withers and fades (Isaiah 40:6-8). List other specific metaphors and similes used in the Bible to describe our mortality. What additional insight into the nature of man do these figures offer?

Using the above references, and others you have found, consider the practical implications of realising the shortness of our lives. How do we redeem our time (Ephesians 5:16)—the one thing of which there is a finite amount—and what should our aims and priorities be?

It is often said that “youth is wasted on the young.” What special responsibilities do believers have when they are young and full of energy? Support your comments with verses.

What lessons and spiritual truths can we derive from the contrast between our short “three-score and ten,” and the endlessness of eternal life to come?

Consider more specifically what Hezekiah (Isaiah 38) and others in the Bible, when faced with death, saw as the main purpose of life. How can their examples help us determine the sort of activities we should engage in? (Remember the ultimate example, as always, is Christ).

Dead to sin

Aside from the sobering dimensions of death that we have studied above, the Bible brings out specific spiritual lessons based on the analogy of natural, physical death. In Romans 6:2, the Apostle Paul asks: “How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?” Later, he appeals to the Romans (and hence to us): “reckon [consider] ye also yourselves to be **dead** indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (6:11).

Examine Romans 6 in detail from beginning to end, identifying all the metaphors of dying to sin, crucifying ourselves and dying and living with Christ.

1. Explain how this language helps corroborate what we already know about natural death.

2. Explain how these powerful metaphors must be lived out in our discipleship.

3. Identify and comment on similar language (*e.g.* crucifying the flesh) used elsewhere in the Bible.

Alive to the Spirit

Although the Bible describes us unequivocally as creatures of the dust, we can through God's grace and His Word rise above this to a spiritual life now, even before Christ's return. In Galatians 5, Paul admonishes believers to despise the works of the flesh (since those who do those things will not inherit the Kingdom of God), and to manifest the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control.

Find and discuss passages that speak of the life of the Spirit that we must strive to attain:

How can God enrich our lives now, even before the Kingdom?

The Promise: "There shall be no more death"

Even while alive we are all touched by death and the sorrow it brings. The loss of loved ones, friends and relatives is a part of human existence. Thanks be to God that for the saints in the Kingdom, and for everyone when God becomes all in all, death itself with all its attendant misery and pain will be destroyed. Christ dealt the fatal blow to sin and death on the cross: through death destroying "him that had the power of death" (Hebrews 2:14). The Messiah's conquering of sin and death was foretold on the day that these twin enemies of humanity came into the world (Genesis 3:15), and the final result will be accomplished when the new heaven and new earth are created (Revelation 20 and 21). Death and the Grave, which reigned united in their destructive

powers throughout the Bible, come to an end together as well when they are thrown into the Lake of Fire (Revelation 20:14). And then come these reassuring words of comfort:

And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. Revelation 21:4

It is one of God's greatest blessings to His saints that such a brief pilgrimage can, through His Grace and Favour, end in such a happy beginning.

Starting with Hebrews 2:14, explain how the sacrifice of Christ brought about the destruction of sin and death:

Starting with Revelation 21:4, reflect on the biblical promises of a world to come without death and suffering:

Wrested Scriptures

The doctrine of the immortality of the soul cannot in any way be reconciled with the truths we have just examined. The Bible teaches that the dead cease to exist unless (as with the responsible) raised again to life. Because the immortal soul insists on continued existence, those who hold to this view are forced to find places for the disembodied souls of the dead. Thus, the saints are said to go straight to heaven, and the wicked to conscious torment in hell—even though the Word categorically states that there is neither praise nor any sensation between death and resurrection. Once again we see the confusion created when foreign ideas are introduced to the pure, simple biblical message.

But those who assert this pagan doctrine are faced with a second serious problem. God declares through his Word that eternal death and destruction is the punishment for sin (Matthew 25:46; Romans 6:23). How does one square eternal *death* as a punishment with the idea that everyone continues to exist forever as immortal souls? As we will see in Study 8, the Bible depicts life and death as opposites. Life is being; death is non-being.

Because this fact of life and death contradicts the notion of continued existence through immortal, conscious souls, orthodox Christians attempt to get around this difficulty by redefining judicial death (death as a punishment) as “alienation” from God, rather than complete destruction. Quite apart from the fact that this definition of death is nowhere to be found in God’s Word, it flies in the face of one of the most fundamental first principles in the Bible. The best way to deal with this view in discussions is to refer to both the scriptural definitions of death, and the language of complete destruction used of the wicked (more on this in Study 8).

Four views on the nature of man

There are four main views on the nature of man held by those who profess belief in the Bible. You are certain to encounter at least two of these when discussing the Truth with others. As with views on the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, we see that the Truth lies between two extremes:

Subtracting from the Truth	The Truth	Adding to the Truth
<i>Annihilationism</i>	<i>Conditional Immortality</i>	<i>Natural Immortality</i>
No future life	Soul Death Soul Sleep	Immortal Soul

Annihilationism holds that there is no future life for either the wicked or righteous, and you will recognize this view as the position of the first-century Sadducees. It is doubtful that you will run across very many people who claim to believe in the Bible and who also espouse this view, although some modern Jews do. There is a small element of truth in Annihilationism, in that the wicked will be annihilated. But because this view portrays all death this way, and does not account for the gift of eternal life given to the saints, it is an unbalanced and unbiblical extreme.

The biblical view is, of course, that of **Soul Death** (sometimes called thnetopsychism)—that is, that the person’s whole being perishes, with the prospect of resurrection to eternal life for the saints. It teaches that immortality is not automatic, but conditional upon obedience and God’s Grace. The earliest Christians and some “Protesters” such as the Polish Brethren, accepted this position.

A second variant of conditional immortality that leans towards the idea of the immortal soul is **Soul Sleep** (also called psychopannychism). This view holds that there is some sort of continued existence of a “soul” at death, but that it lies unconscious and dormant until the resurrection. Seventh-Day Adventists take this position, which assumes that the language of the sleep of death in the Bible is literal, rather than metaphorical. Sometimes Soul Death is mistakenly referred to as Soul Sleep.

Finally, the full orthodox position of the immortality of the soul is **Natural Immortality**—so

called because it posits that everyone is naturally immortal. This has long been the official orthodox position taught by Catholics and most Protestants, although you will find that some of the latter, most notably a small minority of Evangelicals, opt for conditional immortality. There is, as with many extreme positions, a hint of truth in it, as immortality is indeed something that will one day be possessed by all the saint. Since this position attributes immortality to the wicked as well as the righteous, sees the soul as distinct from the body, and asserts that immortality is possessed now, it is, like Annihilationism, an unbalanced, unbiblical extreme.

2 Kings 2:11

The account of Elijah being taken up into heaven in a chariot of fire has long been used by the orthodox as proof not only of the immortal soul, but also that believers go to heaven at death. There are serious difficulties with this interpretation, however, not the least of which involve flat-out contradictions with the plain words of the Bible. As always, we must strive for an interpretation that does not involve contradictions and that does justice to the rest of Scripture. We need to begin by considering a number of details related to the account.

1. Does the account say that this event was the “death” of Elijah?
2. Did Elijah ascend into the throne room of God, or merely into the sky (*i.e.* the atmosphere)? (Note here the passages that say no man has or can ascend to heaven).
3. Did those who knew about this event at the time automatically assume Elijah went to heaven (see the surrounding verses)?
4. Is this the last we hear of Elijah in the biblical account?
5. Does the Bible say that Elijah eventually died just like everyone else?

With this background in place, develop an argument to explain what you think the account in 2 Kings 2 actually describes.

Philippians 1:23

Despite the fact that the Scriptures reveal in unmistakable terms that there is no intermediate state of conscious existence between death and resurrection, many grasp at potentially difficult biblical texts in an attempt to find this idea in God's Word. One such example is Philippians 1:23:

For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ—
which is far better.

The contention is that Paul's words here teach an immediate reward in heaven at his death. There are a number of strong scriptural reasons why Paul could not have meant this. First, we have already encountered a wealth of passages that teach that there is no existence between the death of the body and its resurrection. Second, the Bible knows nothing of the impossibility of life (let alone the separate existence of an immaterial "soul") existing apart from the body. Even Christ did not go to heaven at death (John 20:17) and had a physical body when raised (Luke 24:39). Third, the Bible hope is clearly the resurrection—and it was Paul himself who wrote the "resurrection chapter," 1 Corinthians 15.

Examine the words used by Paul in Philippians 1:23 and how they are used elsewhere, and then go on to consider the immediate context of this verse and the book as a whole (note especially 3:10-12) to build up a picture of what Paul was saying in 1:23.

THE END OF THE WICKED

The wages of sin

The punishment for sin is death. The LORD God established this at the beginning of human history when he told Adam:

Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat. But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it; for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely **die**.
Genesis 2:16-17

The Apostle Paul elaborates on this truth in Romans 5:12:

Wherefore, as by one man **sin** entered into the world, and **death** by sin; and so **death** passed upon **all men**, for that **all have sinned**.

Thus, as James wrote, “sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death” (James 1:15). Although we inherit the consequences of Adam’s sin—mortality—we are individually guilty only for our own sins. This is implied by Paul’s comments in Romans 5:12, and also made plain from the biblical principle that we die only for our own sins (*cf.* Ezekiel 18:4,20).

Beginning with Paul’s argument in Romans 5, show how other passages also link sin and death:

What are the several things that we learn from the association of sin and death in the Bible?

List some passages that show that the natural inclinations of men and women are evil:

Knowing the source of sin, how did Christ combat sin in his own life and how can we do the same in ours?

Starting again with Romans 5, show from this and other passages how Jesus ultimately overcame sin on the cross:

Life and death contrasted in the Bible

The Bible teaches that the opposite of life is death. Life involves such things as breathing, seeing, touching, speaking, thinking, eating, loving, hating, praising, worshipping and feeling pain and sorrow. Death involves none of these things. Life is existence; death is non-existence. The two are completely antithetical and this is exactly how the Bible presents them. In our last Study we looked at Isaiah 38:18. The following verse completes the picture when Hezekiah affirms: “The living, the living, he shall praise thee, as I *do* this day.” Life is praising; death is not. Life is celebration; death is not. Life is hope; death is not. Many other passages contrast life and death. Consider the following:

The LORD **preserveth** all **them that love him**; but all **the wicked** will he **destroy**.

Psalm 145:20

Here we see through parallelism those who love God contrasted with the wicked, and preserving contrasted with destroying—two sets of opposites. This theme of preservation and destruction is picked up by Christ in his account of Judgment Day:

And **these** [the wicked] shall go away into **everlasting punishment**; but the **righteous** into **life eternal**.
Matthew 25:46

Because we have already established that life and death are antithetical, and that death is cessation of existence, we are better able to understand the contrastive parallel that Christ sets up in this verse. Further clarification comes from what is one of the most-cited (and least understood) verses in the Bible:

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not **perish**, but have **everlasting life**.
John 3:16

Once again life and destruction are set up against each other. And there can be no doubt about the meaning of this verse: perish means perish; everlasting life means everlasting life. Finally, we turn to our theme verse for Part 2:

For the wages of sin *is* **death**; but the gift of God *is* **eternal life** through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Romans 6:23

Consider how the words of Romans 6:23 fit in with other scriptural passages that touch on death as a punishment. Do you think the death Paul refers to here is the normal death we all are prone to suffer because of our inherited mortal nature? Or is Paul speaking of the eternal, absolute (second) death suffered by the unregenerate wicked? Give reasons for your answer with scriptural support.

Find other passages that contrast life and death. Discuss any additional points these verses bring out.

Death as destruction

In our last Study, we learned that death was the cessation of all existence. The punishment for sin, then, is oblivion—the denial of life in any form. Since we already know what the Bible means by death, we know what the Bible teaches when it speaks of the death of the wicked. Death is death. There aren't two different conditions of death; the only distinction is that for the wicked death is forever. Thus at one level we need go no further. However, there are a number of important biblical themes deriving from that of the destruction of the wicked, so a study of this topic will enhance our understanding of the Scriptures in other areas as well. In this section we will examine the theme of death as destruction.

In the days of Noah the wickedness of man reached such a height that the LORD said: “I will **destroy** man whom I have created **from the face of the earth**; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air” (Genesis 6:7). Writing of the Flood, Peter says that God “**spared not** the old world” (2 Peter 2:5). Noah, however, “found grace in the eyes of the LORD” (Genesis 6:8) and, along with his family, was saved (2 Peter 2:5). God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19:29), but Lot and his daughters were delivered (2 Peter 2:7). Once again, we see a concept (destruction) defined in part by its biblical opposite (salvation). Were the wicked antediluvians or those in Sodom and Gomorrah still around (suffering or otherwise) after God's destruction? No, they utterly perished. This is the consistent biblical teaching on the destruction of the wicked.

Look up the Hebrew and Greek words translated as “destroy” and “destruction,” and identify the words (with their meanings) most important to our theme linking death and destruction:

Note the Hebrew words *'abad* and *'abaddôn*. Where does the latter word appear in the Bible as a name? What does this example tell us about death and destruction?

In Study 7 we saw how death and the grave are linked in the Bible. “Destruction” is also linked with both death and the grave. Can you find these examples? What added insight into destruction as a biblical theme do these associations give us?

We saw above in the Flood and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah the contrast between the destinies of the righteous and the wicked. In Psalm 37:9 we read: “For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth.”

Psalm 37 contains a number of these contrasts. Identify them below:

List the examples of the different language used of both. What does this language tell us about the respective fates of the righteous and wicked?

Find other examples where the destruction of the wicked is contrasted with the salvation of the righteous:

In the Bible other language equivalent or similar to that of destruction is also used of the wicked. For example, Psalm 1:6 uses the term “perish” to describe the fate of the wicked: “For the LORD knoweth the way of the righteous; but the way of the **ungodly** shall **perish**.” Psalm 104:35 is especially explicit: “Let the sinners be **consumed** out of the earth, and let the wicked **be no more**.” Another example that uses a different metaphor is found in Proverbs:

Do not fret because of evil men or be envious of the wicked, for **the evil man** has **no future hope**, and **the lamp of the wicked** will be **snuffed out**.

Proverbs 24:19-20 NIV

Find additional passages that, while not using the term destruction, teach the total annihilation of the wicked:

Unquenchable fire

Having examined the plain message of Scripture on the complete destruction of the wicked, we can now turn to examine how the powerful language of burning is used of the end of the ungodly in the Bible. Fire is a particularly apt illustration of complete consumption, and as such is used often in the Bible to describe the judgment and punishment of the wicked. For example, Psalm 21:9 reads:

Thou shalt make them as a **fiery oven** in the time of thine anger. The LORD shall

swallow them up in his wrath, and the **fire** shall **devour** them.

Similar language is found in Malachi 4:1 and 3:

For, behold, the day cometh, that shall **burn** as an **oven**; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be **stubble**. And the day that cometh shall **burn them up**, saith the LORD of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch . . . And ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be **ashes** under your feet in the day that I shall do *this*, saith the LORD of hosts.

One of the most graphic examples of such language is recorded in Isaiah 66:24:

And they shall go forth, and look upon the **carcases** of the men that have transgressed against me: for their worm shall not die, **neither shall their fire be quenched**; and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh.

While it is important to recognize that these pictures are not meant to be literally in every detail, the language itself presents doctrinal truths that are perfectly consistent with what we have learned thus far about the fate of the wicked.

Find other examples in the Old Testament of the consuming fire of God's wrath being used to describe the punishment of the wicked:

Find additional examples of this language of fiery destruction in the New Testament:

What is “unquenchable” fire?

What can we learn from these examples?

The Valley of the Son of Hinnom

Without an appreciation of the entire Bible’s teaching on the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, we will not be able to understand fully the scriptural language on the fiery end of the wicked. In this section we will survey what the Bible has to say about this Valley, which is a literal location with both literal and figurative import.

Begin by looking at all the references to the Valley of the Son of Hinnom in the Old Testament. Where does the Bible say it is (you may want to check its location on a Bible atlas)?

By what other name is it called in the Old Testament? Check and list all the references to this alternative name as well.

What ungodly practices went on there in Old Testament times?

What does Jeremiah say will happen in this place in the future?

What is this valley called in the time of Christ?

What was it used for in the time of Christ?

Explain why Christ use this place as a symbol and how this helps us understand the end of the wicked:

The biblical roots of “hell”

While the Bible knows nothing of souls going down to “hell” to be tormented with fire forever, it does speak about wicked men going down alive into Sheol, being consumed with fire, being tormented with fire and brimstone and, lastly, of God destroying the wicked with unquenchable fire. We have already seen some of this language being used of the end of the wicked in our studies above. In this section, we will examine several more illuminating examples—some of which have been misinterpreted by the orthodox, but all of which help fill out the biblical teachings on the complete destruction of the wicked.

Our first example is one of the sheet anchors of those who believe in eternal hellfire torments. It describes the punishment meted out to anyone who worships the Beast and his image:

He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever, and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name. Revelation 14:10-11

One of our first steps in trying to determine the meaning of such a verse is to look for biblical antecedents to the language used therein. In our introduction material on biblical interpretation, we noted that this passage cites from Isaiah 34:10.

Study Isaiah 34:10 with its context and explain how this passage helps us determine the meaning of Revelation 14:10-11. Consider in particular how much of Isaiah 34 is meant to be taken literally.

Note also that Isaiah 34 speaks of the land becoming burning pitch. What fiery image near the conclusion of the Book of Revelation does this picture suggest?

Jeremiah 17:27 uses striking language to describe God's judgment against Jerusalem. In particular, it speaks of a fire being kindled in the gates and palaces of this city that "shall not be quenched." Once again, we see the image of "unquenchable" fire.

Using cross references and a concordance, discover where in Jeremiah this fiery destruction was predicted:

Now turn to the Book of Nehemiah and find the passages that inform us that the fire in the gates of Jerusalem was no longer burning.

Find other examples of language in the Old and New Testaments that help us understand Revelation 14:10-11:

Complete destruction for the wicked

Thus the fate of the wicked is made plain in the Bible with language that is both clear and graphic. The accounts of the complete destruction of the wicked in the past, help us understand the nature of similar judgments to come. These examples, as with all Scripture, were written for our learning (Romans 15:4)—and a sober lesson all of this certainly is for us. While we know that Yahweh is a God of love Who wants everyone to be saved, the Bible makes it clear that those who turn their back on Him in disobedience will not be saved, but will perish. The invitation is our's to accept. If we don't, it's *our* fault, not God's.

Using scriptural support, explain why this is just:

How should our knowledge of the ultimate fate of the wicked, combined with our love of those around us, motivate and affect our preaching?

The Promise: “God is not willing that any should perish”

Avoiding eternal death certainly acts as yet another biblical motivator for us to serve and please our Heavenly Father as much as is humanly possible. We must pray that we will be among those on whom the second death will have no power (Revelation 20:6). Yet, “perfect love casteth out fear” (1 John 4:18), so it is far better to be directed primarily by the positive motivation to “seek for glory and honour and immortality—eternal life” (Romans 2:7). Here the words of Yahweh to the Israelites are instructive:

I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, *that* I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore, **choose life**, that both thou and thy seed may live.
Deuteronomy 30:19

This really shouldn't be a difficult choice for anyone (including us) to make, should it? Yet, although God offers so much, it was necessary for Him to appeal to the Israelites to choose life over death.

Discuss reasons why this appeal was necessary and why so many today continue to make the wrong choice:

We can take heart that our Heavenly Father both wants us to be in the Kingdom *and* will help us get there. He will work for us, not against us. These things are made clear in the two following passages:

The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.
2 Peter 3:9

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned; but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.
John 3:16-18

Thus it is clear that the main goal is a positive one: salvation rather than condemnation. God loves the world and is motivated by love, not anger.

Find other examples in the Bible where we are told that God is pleased to offer us the Kingdom:

Provide and discuss other biblical examples of God's patience with sinners:

What do these examples tell us about God's character and love for mankind?

Optional Project

Like the words *ruach*, *pneuma*, *nephesh* and *psychē*, the words *she'ōl* and *hadēs* are translated in different ways—some of which can be potentially misleading and problematic. Thus, you may find it helpful to colour in these two words with the same colour in your Bible. Unlike the examples from Studies 4 and 6, however, the number of occurrences of these two words is not that, and thus the exercise will take much less time. See the comments under “Optional project” in Study 4 for advice on how to do this.

Wrested Scriptures

The traditional orthodox view of eternal hellfire torments for the wicked is an appalling teaching that is absolutely incompatible with the Bible's presentation of God as a God who is both just and loving. Our studies have shown us that the wicked will not suffer eternal burning any more than the city of Jerusalem. Instead, the wicked will be done away with and forgotten so that God can truly be all in all. As frightening and savage as the traditional view is, many still cling to it.

The four views of hell

Nevertheless, there are a full four different views of “hell.” Again, only one is biblical. You are

likely to come across all three of the other views. The four are as follows:

1. Literal
2. Metaphorical
3. Purgatorial
4. Conditional

The **Literal** view is the tradition position that hell involves literal fire, literal torment and literal eternal consciousness. This has long been the official doctrine of the Catholic and Protestant Churches. The second position in our list, the **Metaphorical** view, holds that the wicked will be eternally conscious, but not literally tormented with literal fire. The wicked, then, will suffer mental anguish and remorse alone for eternity. In a way, this is almost more terrifying than the Literal position. The third doctrine is the **Purgatorial** view, which states that there will be literal torment, but only for as long as each of the wicked deserve—after which they will be saved. Finally, the Biblical teaching is the **Conditional** view, which is a corollary of the Conditional view of the “soul”—namely that the only ones to receive eternal life are the righteous, while the wicked perish after they are burned up by fire (which may or may not be literal).

More problems with a loaded term

As with the word “soul,” the English term “hell” has acquired a meaning in popular culture that echoes that of the traditional, orthodox dogma. The expression has an innocent enough etymology, since it comes from a Germanic base simply meaning to “cover” or “conceal.” Yet, because of its associations, it is potentially misleading term that should not be used in modern translations. Consider, for example, Psalm 16:10 in the KJV:

For thou will not leave **my soul** in **hell**; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.

Even though the second part of the verse illustrates that death is physical, it isn’t difficult to see how this sort of language can conjure up notions of a disembodied spirit descending into the inferno. Yet, what the passage is actually teaching is made plain when the loaded terms are jettisoned, as is the case in the NIV rendition of the same verse:

Because you will not abandon **me** in **the grave**, nor will you let your Holy One see decay.

This is further brought home when we examine the parallel structure of the verse: “me”=“your Holy One” and “the grave”=“decay.” It really is that simple.

Mark 9:43-48

A passage often turned to by those who believe in an eternal hellfire is Mark 9:43-48, where Christ tells believers to cut off members of one’s body that cause one to sin. Fortunately, few people would ever want to take this directive literally. Clearly, we can see in Christ’s words a deeper spiritual meaning. But the orthodox do attempt to argue that the references to “hell,” and the fire that shall never be quenched, should be taken literally. After our studies above into the

biblical imagery of fire and destruction for the wicked, this passage should pose few serious problems for you. Nevertheless, it is important to have in place a coherent explanation of passages like this are teaching.

This passage relies on Old Testament language. Identify the source being cited and demonstrate how the language is used in the Old Testament source.

What Greek word in this passage appears as “hell” in the KJV?

What is Christ’s true meaning of both the metaphor of “cutting off” and the language of eternal fire?

Why do you think Christ chose to use such graphic and disturbing imagery?

Matthew 10:28

Despite the overwhelming evidence in the Bible that the soul and body are linked, as well as the fact that the “soul” has physical features, some try to argue for a rigid division between soul and body. To do this, they point to passages that they argue distinguish sharply between the two. One such example is Matthew 10:28:

And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul. But rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

The first question we need to ask those who employ this verse as evidence of the immortality and immateriality of the soul is how far they want to take their argument. Mere humans cannot kill the “soul,” but God can. Thus, whatever this passage is teaching, it’s not the immortality of the soul. Second, we need to remember that it is possible to translate the biblical words *nephesh* and *psyhē* without ever using the potentially misleading and loaded term “soul.” Think of another word that could be used here instead of “soul.” Also, note what Greek word is here rendered as “hell,” and how this helps illuminate Christ’s intended meaning.

Now add to this an analysis of this verse and its language, checking for biblical antecedents, and present an argument for the true meaning of the passage:

RESURRECTION AND JUDGMENT

“The resurrection at the last day”

Studies 6,7 and 8 have demonstrated that the Bible clearly teaches the mortality of man, and that death is the complete cessation of life. If the “soul” did go to heaven at death there would be no need for the resurrection. Yet the doctrine of the resurrection permeates the whole of Scripture. Jesus himself spoke of being “recompensed at the resurrection of the just” (Luke 14:14). The hope of all those who follow Jesus can be summed up in the words of faithful Martha when she said concerning Lazarus: “I know that he shall **rise again** in the **resurrection** at the last day” (John 11:24). This study will help us to develop our understanding first on the Bible’s teaching about resurrection, and then on the scriptural doctrine of Judgment.

Like all other major biblical doctrines, the resurrection has its roots early in Old Testament times. The Lord Jesus affirmed that Moses believed the Patriarchs would be raised (Luke 20:37-38). The inspired writer to the Hebrews tells us that Abraham was a firm believer in the resurrection, having faith that God would raise his son Isaac if he was sacrificed (Hebrews 11:19). The book of Job, one of the most ancient writings in the Bible, contains one of the most powerful and detailed statements on the resurrection:

For I know *that* my redeemer liveth, and *that* **he shall stand** at the latter *day* upon the earth. And *though* after my skin *worms* destroy this *body*, yet **in my flesh** shall I see God, Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; *though* my reins be consumed within me. Job 19:25-27

This passage is explicit and unambiguous: after his body had perished, Job believed he was be raised to life to stand again at the latter day.

Having established the biblical roots of the teaching of the resurrection, let’s turn to examine its features.

Death as a sleep

Our earlier studies have shown us that man turns again to dust at death. Although there is no continuance of any part of the person, to the faithful this state is regarded as a “sleep.”

Many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake.

Daniel 12:2

A common Old Testament idiom describing death consistent with this idea is the formula: “and X slept with his fathers.” The death of the responsible is from God’s perspective regarded as a sleep, for, as in literal sleep, there will be a very real *awakening* and physical *rising* from the grave in the day of resurrection.

Find some passages that use the language of sleep to describe the death state:

Given the future reality of the resurrection, it is not surprising that the Scriptures speak of a “waking” out of sleep when referring to a literal rising from the dead. Jesus, on the momentous occasion of the resurrection of Lazarus, referred to him as both dead *and* sleeping (John 11:11,14).

See if you can find any other references that demonstrate this point:

Discuss why and how this terminology is picked up and used of the living waking out of sleep. How can we help ourselves and each other keep spiritually awake?

In Daniel 10:7-19 we are told that Daniel was raised up from sleep by an angel. Examine this passage closely, and discuss the words and features that indicate this account is intended to represent physical, bodily resurrection.

Resurrection: a “standing again”

The English word “resurrection” only occurs in the New Testament. It comes from the Latin roots *re-* (“again”) and *surgō* (“to stand”). The Old Testament equivalents are translated from the Hebrew *qum* (*cf.* Deuteronomy 18:15,18 with Acts 3:22,26). This Hebrew word is used by Jesus on the occasion of raising Jairus’ daughter: “And he took the damsel by the hand, and said unto her, ‘Talitha **cumi**,’ which is being interpreted, ‘Damsel, I say unto thee, **arise**’” (Mark 5:41).

Look up the original New Testament word for resurrection and define its meaning:

Although the word resurrection may only occur in the New Testament, it doesn’t take a serious Bible reader long to realize that this doctrine is taught from the beginning to the end of Scripture.

Explain how the promise of the seed itself (Genesis 3:15) is inextricably linked with the doctrine of resurrection:

Discuss how God’s promises to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and David are dependent on this teaching:

Against the backdrop of the Sadducees’ denial of resurrection (but using their belief in the Law), Jesus said:

Now that the dead are raised, even Moses shewed at the bush, when he calleth the Lord the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. For he is not a God of the dead but of the living: for all live unto him.

Luke 20:37-38

Discuss the implications of this statement. How are these patriarchs regarded as “living”? What did Christ mean when he said: “for all live unto him”? (Compare other translations).

Resurrection: in the flesh

The Gospel writers devote 150 verses to the resurrection of Jesus and his subsequent appearances. Read the accounts of his resurrection and his appearances afterwards, listing the things that demonstrate that he was raised with a physical body (*e.g.* the same one he possessed before). If Jesus, the Son of God, was literally and physically raised from the dead, there is no reason at all to think that God would reward the followers of Jesus differently. In fact, as we shall see, there is ample testimony to demonstrate that our hope is one and the same with what Jesus himself held.

Paul demonstrates in 1 Corinthians 15:17 how the resurrection of Jesus is central to the Gospel: “If Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins.” Find the seven occasions in the book of Acts where, under inspiration, we are told that “this Jesus hath God raised up.”

From the instances you have found above, find and discuss the Old Testament passages that are used in the arguments of Peter and Paul to affirm the bodily resurrection of Jesus. Would you have used these references? Include also Luke 20:37-38 as a pattern.

In his discourse on resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15, Paul uses the term “firstfruits” to describe Jesus’ resurrection in relation to that of subsequent believers. Consider the origins of this term in the Bible and its aptness when dealing with the order of resurrection. Provide references.

The death and resurrection of Jesus are described by Paul in the following way in Romans 14:9: “For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living.”

What might these stages represent? Consider any possible parallels with the creation of “the first Adam.”

In Acts 28:20 Paul addressed the “chief of the Jews” in Rome, and said that he was bound with a chain for “the hope of Israel.” Trace the phrase and concept “hope of Israel” in the Bible and see how it is very closely linked with “the hope of resurrection.” Include Zechariah 9:11-12.

Unique among the Gospel writers is Matthew’s record of many saints being raised coincident with the death of Jesus (Matthew 27:52). Also, in Hebrews 11:35 we read: “Women received their dead raised [*anastasis*] to life again.” List the eight specific people (other than Jesus) who are recorded as having been raised from the dead in the Bible. Note the reference that says: “he revived, and stood up on his feet.” This phrase is roughly equivalent to the New Testament word for resurrection, *anastasis*, which we saw means “a standing again.” The word translated “stood” is in the Hebrew *qum*—the regular Old Testament word used for “raising up.” It should of course be remembered that these characters were only raised to a continued mortal existence, after which they died again awaiting a final resurrection.

In all the above cases, it can be seen that resurrection involves a literal revival and “standing again.” When Jesus returns, the “dead in Christ shall rise first” (1 Thessalonians 4:16). The Bible makes it plain that any reward will be received in a bodily form. As Job declared: “In my flesh shall I see God” (Job 19:26). Paul, when writing to the Romans said: “he that raised Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies” (8:11).

Find and discuss other passages that demonstrate that the reward will be in a *bodily* form.

We saw earlier that Paul, when writing to the Philippians, said that Christ “shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body” (Philippians 3:21).

To establish this biblical truth, find and consider other passages that speak of the body being changed (include Psalm 17:15):

The resurrection and other biblical themes

Consider how the doctrine of resurrection is associated with many other themes that have a bearing on our life in Christ. List the associated themes and ideas presented in each of the references given below:

Acts 17:31

Romans 1:4

Romans 4:25

Romans 6:4-5

Romans 7:4

Romans 10:9

1 Corinthians 15:17

2 Corinthians 1:9

2 Corinthians 5:15

Philippians 3:10

Colossians 2:12-15

1 Thessalonians 1:10

2 Timothy 2:8

1 Peter 1:3

1 Peter 1:21

Resurrection: types and shadows

The Bible is rich in types and shadows. One such example is given in Hebrews 11:17-19 concerning Abraham's belief in resurrection, where we read that he accounted "that God was able to raise *him* [Isaac] up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure" ("figure" here is the Greek word *typos*, meaning "a type").

List any other examples you can think of, both Old and New Testament, which demonstrate resurrection in a type or figure:

The Judgment

The final prerogative concerning those who shall be raised is of God. Some will never be raised (Psalm 49:20; Isaiah 26:14, 43:17; Jeremiah 51:39; Amos 8:11-14), but the Bible tells us that those who are regarded as responsible or who understand (*cf.* Psalm 49:20) will be raised to judgment. As the Lord Jesus Christ said:

No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him; and **I will raise him up** at the last day. It is written in the prophets, “And they shall be all taught of God.” Every man therefore that **hath heard**, and **hath learned** of the Father, cometh unto me. John 6:44-45

Many Scriptures make it plain that “sin is the transgression of the law” (1 John 3:4), and also that “sin is not imputed when there is no law” (Romans 5:13). So it is those people who know God’s law to a greater or lesser extent who will be required to appear at the judgment seat of Christ (see Romans 2:12, 3:2; John 12:48, 15:22; James 4:17).

I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom. 2 Timothy 4:1

The Judgment to come is a fundamental doctrine of Scripture—a first principle (Hebrews 6:2). The righteousness and justice of God can be seen in His requirement that “we shall all [*i.e.* all the responsible] stand before the judgment seat of Christ” (Romans 14:10)

Find and discuss passages that show that both the responsible good and bad will be raised to be judged by Jesus.

What effect should the knowledge of the judgment have upon us? (Consider how 2 Timothy 4:1 continues!).

Felix was clearly troubled by the thought of coming judgement (Acts 24:25). Should we be? What reassurance do true believers have? Find any pertinent references.

David declares: “Verily, there is a reward for the righteous; verily he is a God that judgeth in the earth” (Psalm 58:11). God has given Jesus all authority to execute judgment (John 5:27).

Find and discuss passages that demonstrate that rewards are only given, whether good or bad, subsequent to the return of Jesus, at the Judgment:

Although care must be taken when discerning first principle teachings in the parables of Jesus, it is apparent that on many occasions they serve to underline the true and unambiguous teaching of other Scriptures.

Find and discuss the parables that deal with the Judgment that Christ will carry out at his return, and consider the exhortation that we must occupy ourselves in our master's work until he comes. What does this mean in practice?

Romans 6 contains a discourse of Paul in which he uses resurrection language. It is employed to describe the beginning of a new life in Christ through baptism. Clearly the parallels that Paul draws would be meaningless if there was no resurrection.

Consider, list and discuss the comparisons that are drawn in this chapter, along with their exhortational import:

How can we help ourselves and each other to be servants of God and not servants to sin?

The Promise: “We shall be like him”

Only one man has thus far received the reward of immortality: the Lord Jesus Christ. Our Saviour’s immortality is a guarantee of the immortality the saints will receive in the age to come. Writing to the believers in Philippi, the Apostle Paul said:

For our conversation [citizenship] is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. Who shall change our **vile body**, that it may be **fashioned** like unto his **glorious body**, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself. Philippians 3:20-21.

Look up the original words and meanings for the expressions highlighted in bold:

What do these expressions tell us about the difference between the present and future bodies of the saints?

Discuss the implications of the fact that the same root used for “fashioned” in verse 21 is used in the word for “conformable” in verse 10.

In 2 Corinthians 5:2, Paul, describing the reward of immortality that Jesus will bring from heaven (Revelation 22:12), speaks about the desire of believers to “be clothed upon with our

house which is from heaven.” Study the language used in verses 1-4 and consider also the message in the rest of the chapter. What do Paul’s words here tell us about our hope?

The Apostle John offers great encouragement to believers when he writes of the promise that the saints will one day be made like Christ:

Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God; therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that, when he [*i.e.* Christ] shall appear, **we shall be like him**; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure. 1 John 3:1-3

What is the connection between our need to purify ourselves and the ultimate gift of immortality?

Can you find other passages that connect immortality with the requirement to lead holy lives after the model of Christ? Consider the implications of these verses for our walk.

Identify and consider any further passages that speak about the nature of immortality to come:

Wrested Scriptures

As we learn through experience, when we deal with difficult passages, we must always obtain a firm grasp of the plain unambiguous Scriptures first. With this grounding, we can go on to examine the more difficult passages. The Truth will always prevail!

The verses below are sometimes used to suggest that the doctrine of judgment is superfluous, and that the righteous dead are raised automatically immortal. As we have seen from the foregoing Study, this cannot be accepted. Consider, discuss and enlarge on the following two passages.

Revelation 20:5-6

Resurrection can refer to both the action of being raised and also the age in which those who have been raised are a part. Consider the following references: Matthew 22:28-30; Mark 12:23; Luke 20:27-36 (note that in verse 35 “that world” [*aiōn*] of resurrected people, describes an age or dispensation in contrast to “this world” [*aiōn*] of verse 34).

An appreciation of this usage helps considerably when examining the language found in Revelation 20:5-6. The “first resurrection” may refer to a dispensation and not the process. The word “part” in verse 6 is the Greek word *meros* and means “portion” (*cf.* 22:19). The faithful who receive or inherit a part in this age of “the raised ones” will obviously not be subject to the “second death.”

Study the language and context of Revelation 20:5-6, and try to establish its positive meaning:

1 Corinthians 15:52

The resurrection is presented sometimes as the whole process, viewed from the perspective of the true believer's hope (*e.g.* "the resurrection of the just" in Luke 14:14, or "the resurrection of life" in John 5:29), even though it is plain from other biblical passages that resurrection and subsequent Judgment are involved.

The chapter under consideration demonstrates the contrasts between the present corruptible state and future incorruptible state. It is dealing with absolutes and is not primarily concerned with the step-by-step method of change from one state to the next. Bearing this in mind, such verses as 42 and 52, which read "the dead shall be raised incorruptible," can be seen to be speaking of the ultimate state (*i.e.* that the faithful will be raised to ultimate incorruption). Note that verse 53 goes on to say "for this mortal must put on immortality" ("put on" has the idea "to invest" or "to sink into"). The mortal state being referred to here may well be speaking of the post-resurrectional, but pre-judgment state of the individual, who may then after judgment receive immortality.

Tabulate all the contrasting examples given in this chapter, and discuss further thoughts on this subject as to both how 1 Corinthians should and should not be used:

THE REWARD OF THE RIGHTEOUS

Looking to the past to see the future

The writer to the Hebrews declares that God “is a rewarder of them who diligently seek him” (Hebrews 11:6). Jesus himself has promised his servants: “behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be” (Revelation 22:12). As we would expect, this same message runs through the Old Testament as well. The prophet Isaiah said: “Behold, the Lord GOD will come with strong *hand*, and his arm shall rule for him; behold, his reward *is* with him, and his work before him” (Isaiah 40:10). The central focus of the reward of the righteous is the promised Kingdom of God. The Bible speaks of a future glorious age in which God’s laws will be the order of the day, and in which Jesus will rule with “power and great glory” (Matthew 24:30).

Staying within the pages of Isaiah, we read of God’s original plan for the earth: “For thus saith the LORD that created the heavens; God himself that formed the earth and made it; he hath established it, he created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited” (Isaiah 45:18). This leaves us in no doubt that the place of reward for the faithful is to be the earth—a rejuvenated earth. It is no surprise therefore that we read that while “the righteous shall never be removed . . . the wicked shall **not** inhabit the earth” (Proverbs 10:30).

To obtain an idea of what the future reward will be like, we turn back first to both the beginning of human history, second to the Abrahamic Promises and third to the Kingdom of God in Israel. The description we have of the Garden of Eden before Adam and Eve’s fall from grace (Genesis 2), offers a compelling glimpse of the peace, fertility and man’s harmony with his Creator that will characterize the coming Kingdom Age and beyond. We have already seen how Christ, while on the cross, used the term “paradise” to describe the Kingdom (Luke 23:43). Abraham was promised the world (Genesis 13:14-17), and this will be fulfilled ultimately in the future. Finally, the Kingdom of God has already existed in a limited way during the days of ancient Israel (1 Chronicles 29:23).

Discuss in more detail what we can learn about the coming Kingdom of God from:

The Garden of Eden

The Promises to Abraham

The Kingdom of Israel (and later Judah)

The Kingdom: on earth

It goes without saying that the Kingdom of God in the past was on earth. The Bible is clear that this will be the case with the Kingdom of God in the future as well. The Lord's prayer contains some of the most well-known words spoken by Jesus. The second verse of this prayer is arguably the most famous:

Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done **in earth**, as *it is* in heaven.

Matthew 6:10

These words are recited by millions every week, but are almost always neither understood nor believed! Is there any way in which Christ's words here cannot refer to a literal kingdom on earth?

Find other passages that demonstrate that the Kingdom will be establish **on earth** (save passages that teach more explicitly that Christ will return to earth for below):

Throughout his ministry, Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom of God. In some examples, the expression "Kingdom of **heaven**" is employed. Using examples from the Bible, explain how we know that these two expressions refer to the same thing. Explain also the significance of the

preposition “of” in “Kingdom **of** heaven.” Finally, does the expression “Kingdom of heaven” occur throughout the New Testament? If not, why not?

We have just read in the Apocalypse the encouraging words of Christ: “Behold, I come quickly; and my reward *is* with me, to give every man according as his work shall be” (Revelation 22:12). Notice that the reward is dependent on Jesus coming again to the earth.

Find as many references as you can that show that Jesus will literally return to the earth:

In John 3:13 we read that “no man hath ascended up to heaven.” This simultaneously affirms the scriptural teaching that the Kingdom will be on earth and contradicts unbiblical ideas that the saints go to heaven. Men and women do not leave the earth for heaven; instead, when the Kingdom is established and God’s absolute rule is extended to the Kingdoms of men, heaven comes to earth. Put another way, we don’t go to heaven; heaven comes to us.

Find other verses that show that man’s place is on earth, not heaven:

The Gospel and the hope of Israel

The promises given to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are at the very centre of the Gospel message (Galatians 3:8). It is of course right to see the ultimate fulfilment of these promises being realised in Jesus, “the son of David, the son of Abraham” (Matthew 1:1), but we should not overlook the

significance of the promises to Abraham himself. Concerning the land through which he had just walked, it is stated by God to Abraham: “I will give it unto thee” (Genesis 13:17).

Find the places where the same personal promise is made to Isaac and Jacob. How do we become “heirs according to the promise”?

Consider the following two inspired commentaries on the Promises:

[God] gave him none inheritance in it, no not *so much as* to set his foot on; yet he promised that he would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him.
Acts 7:5

(Notice that this passage says the promise would be given “**to him**”).

These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off.
Hebrew 11:13

How do these commentaries elaborate on the Promises given in Genesis?

Before he ascended into heaven, the Apostles asked Jesus: “Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6). The Apostles understood that when Jesus had been preaching the Kingdom of God, he was referring to something with distinctly Israelite associations. The use of the word “again” clearly demonstrates that Israel had been regarded as God’s kingdom before.

It is a tremendous theme that spans the Old Testament. Israel had a law provided by God, a land given by God, and a throne, on which the chosen one of God would rule. As we read in 1 Chronicles 28:5: “he hath chosen Solomon my son to sit upon the throne of **the kingdom of the LORD** over Israel.” The peace and prosperity existing in the time of Solomon is particularly appropriate in its representation of God’s future kingdom. This throne of David and of Solomon was of course in Jerusalem, the city that the LORD will “choose again” (Zechariah 2:12).

Find references that demonstrate that Jerusalem is to be the future capital of the world.

Find all the examples that show that Jesus is to sit upon the throne of his father David in Jerusalem when he rules over the nations in his Kingdom.

Find some prophetic passages of Scripture that speak of the Jews returning to Israel in the latter days:

Using scriptural evidence, explain why the return of the Jews in the twentieth century gives us hope that the Kingdom will soon come.

Ezekiel chapters 40-48 supply us with a detailed picture of the Temple that is to be built in Israel in the Age to come. From these chapters we also learn that animal sacrifice is to be reintroduced as a means of instruction to the mortal population during the millennium concerning the principles of redemption in Christ.

Find other passages that speak of literal worship and sacrifice in the Kingdom:

The Kingdom and its people

During the millennial reign of Christ (Revelation 20:4-6), there will be two groups of people on the earth: the immortalised saints and the continuing mortal population.

The servants of Christ are described as a “kingdom of priests” in Revelation 1:6. Find and discuss the passages that refer to the saints reigning with Christ (in both the Old and New Testaments), and how they are to help in ruling the people of the earth during this thousand-year period. Note: some argue that the word “on” in Revelation 5:10 should be translated as “over,” to suggest the Christ and the saints will rule from heaven. Aside from the fact that other passages contradict this interpretation, the same Greek phrase *epi tēs gēs* (“on the earth”) appears elsewhere in Revelation (including 5:13) and with all of these other examples the phrase must mean “on the earth,” which shows that the KJV rendering is correct.

Clearly there will be a lot of ground to cover in bringing about “the restitution of all things” (Acts 3:21). List all the references you can that demonstrate that the nations of the world will be subject to the reign of Jesus and be instructed by him.

What is to happen to those nations that choose to ignore his rule? Find references to support your account.

The message of the prophets

The Hebrew prophets are full of messages of hope about the Kingdom Age. The prophet Habakkuk wrote: “For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea” (Habakkuk 2:14; *cf.* Numbers 14:21; Isaiah 11:9; Psalm 72:19). This is the time that the prophet looks to when the “vision shall come” or, in the words of Hebrews, when “he that shall come will come” (Hebrews 10:37). Daniel speaks of a mountain that “filled the whole earth” (Daniel 2:35; *cf.* 7:27; Revelation 11:15), representing the subjugation of the kingdoms of men under the rule of God and of His Christ.

We are supplied with a variety of Scriptures that speak of coming fruitfulness of the earth, as it

brought under the righteous and benevolent rule of Christ. One of the most well-known of these is Isaiah 35:1: “The desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose,” a passage that almost certainly has both literal and symbolic meanings.

Find other prophetic passages that give us insights into this glorious coming age:

Other New Testament teaching

The reward of the righteous is often expressed as “eternal” or “everlasting” life. This is a major theme particularly in the Gospel record of John. The same language was found in connection with the promises given by God to the “fathers” styled “the everlasting covenant” (Genesis 17:7,8,13,19). This reward is to be received in “the land of Canaan” (Psalm 105:9-11).

Look up the Greek adjective translated “eternal” and “everlasting” and define its meaning:

What else in the New Testament is described as “everlasting”?

Jesus came preaching the “kingdom of God” (Mark 1:4). This continued after his resurrection as well (Acts 1:3). The Apostles took up this central message by teaching “the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ” (Acts 8:12, 14:22, 19:8, 20:25, 28:23, 28:31). From these examples, as well as other occasions in Paul’s epistles, it is made clear that our living now will affect whether we will receive the reward of a place in that Kingdom. Find and discuss those virtues which must be manifested among us now in order to have a hope of life in this promised Kingdom.

Consider and discuss the rewards that are described in the letters to the seven ecclesias in Revelation. What are these rewards, and do they speak of something in heaven or on the earth?

The parallels between the garden of Eden, and the restored earth in Revelation 22 are remarkable. Is this just coincidence, or are we being told that Eden is to be restored on earth? List these parallels.

The Promise: “the meek shall inherit the earth”

Thus it is that God has promised His saints that they will, along with the faithful of old, inherit an earth restored to its original intended glory. This implies that some work will have to be done to reverse the destruction brought upon the earth by the careless actions of mankind. This restored earth is our hope, and we must pray daily that the Kingdom will soon come. Let’s spend a few moments considering the promise of the world. By doing this, we will better appreciate God’s Grace and more earnestly desire the Kingdom.

It is instructive that on three occasions Jesus uses the word “inherit” when speaking of the reward of the faithful:

And everyone that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or

mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall **inherit** everlasting life.

Matthew 19:29

Blessed *are* the meek: for they shall **inherit** the earth.

Matthew 5:5

Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, **inherit** the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

Matthew 25:34

If we put these passages together, we can see that the faithful will inherit 1) everlasting life 2) on earth 3) in God's Kingdom.

Discuss the implications of the first quotation concerning our lives today, and the sacrifices we should be willing to make.

In the second passage, Jesus is quoting from the Book of Psalms. Find the other six occasions in the same Psalm that declare the same truth:

What are the implications for us now of the meekness required by God in Matthew 5:5?

Examine and discuss further aspects of the parable quoted from in the third passage:

Consider in all these examples the responsibilities of the disciples as they wait for their Lord:

Discuss how the hope of the Kingdom can motivate us now, and help us to overcome the trials and temptations of this life. Consider the examples given in the scriptures where clearly the faithful were encouraged by what they saw as the reward ahead of them (*cf.* Hebrews 12:1-2).

Wrested Scriptures

The Millennium, or Kingdom of God, is one of the plainest and most prominent teachings in the pages of Scripture. The term “Millennium” comes from Revelation 20:4-6, where we see an explicit reference to the thousand-year reign of Christ on earth (*cf.* Revelation 5:10). The expression literally means a “thousand years,” and comes from the Latin *mille* (thousand) and *annus* (year).

Nevertheless, while the biblical teaching and term itself speak of a literal thousand years on earth, many mainstream Christians have deviated to different degrees from this original teaching. In our discussions with those who reject the scriptural teaching, it is helpful to know what the other positions are. There are actually four main views of the Millennium; obviously, only one of these can be true.

The four views of the Millennium

First, when some in the early Church began to believe that the return of Christ had been delayed (from their perspective only, of course), the theory of the **spiritual millennium** was proposed. This idea is based on mystical, allegorical interpretation, and holds that the Kingdom of God is realised “within” a person when Christ reigns “spiritually” in a person’s heart. Second, when the Church became the Roman Empire under Constantine in the fourth century AD, apostate Christendom had no trouble seeing the Kingdom of God fulfilled in the institutional state Church. This view is associated with what is called **amillennialism**—that is, that there was no need to look for a literal millennial Kingdom to come (hence the term, which means “no millennium”).

Third, in a variation of amillennialism,” some seventeenth- and eighteenth-century theologians began to propose the scheme of **post-millennialism**, which suggests that the Church itself will set up the Millennium and that Christ will only return at or near the end of this period. The term derives its meaning from the fact that it holds that Christ returns *after* (post) the Millennium. Hence, post-millennialists are often involved in politics in an attempt to bring about what they believe to be a Christian society.

The biblical teaching, and that held by the earliest Christians, is **premillennialism**: Christ returns *before* the Millennium to set it up. This is the literal sense of Revelation 20:4-6, and the unmistakable meaning of 2 Timothy 4:1, along with the rest of the multitude of biblical texts that teach the Kingdom. The establishment of the Kingdom is on God’s hands; thus, we make no attempt to bring it about by our own efforts. This is consistent with the biblical teaching that our Kingdom “is not of this world” (John 18:36).

Luke 17:21

The chief “proof text” of those who believe in a spiritual millennium is Luke 17:21, where Christ says (in the KJV): “the kingdom of God is within you.” Looking at the context and the use of this language here and elsewhere in the Bible, demonstrate that this view is inconsistent with the sound and consistent teaching of the Word of God.

What do you think Christ meant when he made this statement? When you provide your account, consider the following: to whom was Christ speaking? is “within you” the best translation? is the pronoun “you” in “within you” singular or plural?

John 14:1-3

A standard corollary to the amillennial position, which does not envision a literal Millennium with Christ reigning on earth, is the idea that the saints are rewarded in heaven. Indeed, for those who accept this position, the Kingdom is in heaven.

Christ's words in John 14:1-3 are still used by many to demonstrate that the reward of the faithful involves going to heaven. Do his words in this passage actually teach this? Explain.

Look at the passage carefully. Look up the word "mansion" in verse 2 and compare verse 23.

What is it that is being prepared and by whom?

What does the phrase "I will come again" mean and what is its relevance in this context?

When and where are the faithful "received" by Jesus?

Consider the above points together with your own and arrive at a meaningful interpretation of this passage which is consistent with the rest of scriptural teaching concerning the reward of the righteous.