

So Who Is God?

DAVID

Have you ever mistaken someone's identity? It's so embarrassing when you miss all the clues staring you in the face and then open your mouth and say things you regret!

My brother-in-law Oscar had just finished his PhD, so we had a big party to celebrate his achievement. Oscar and Marty, my sister-in-law, have friends from seemingly every country in the world. The party was like a United Nations convention, and I found myself mingling with Africans, Asians, Latinos, and Europeans.

I was making small talk with a young couple, and when I introduced myself to them, they told me they were the Michelins. I asked the dark-haired young man with a strange accent where he worked.

He answered with a shy grin, "Michelin Tire Company."

"Michelin?" I said. "That is funny! I'll bet you get all kinds of comments at work about having the same last name as the founders!"

My wife recognized the obvious and quickly squeezed my hand. Did I get the hint? No, I went on talking about how funny it would be to "pretend to be one of *the* Michelins at work."

The more I talked, the worse it got. Mr. Michelin was getting uncomfortable with the conversation and eventually exited gracefully. After the couple walked away, my wife looked at me in horror. "David! That *was* a Michelin—*the* Michelin family—who own the tire company!"

Oops! Mistaken identity.

WHO IS GOD?

Relationships don't work well if the people involved don't really know each other. If we are to grow strong in the Lord, we must start with an understanding of who God really is.

Why start with identities? Because many of our problems in understanding the Christian life can be traced back to a basic misunderstanding of who God is. It doesn't have to be that way. God has revealed everything we need to know about Him—His personality, His character, His desires, His longings, and His timeless precepts—between the two covers of the book we call the Bible.

Often described as God's Word, the Bible contains 66 different books written by 40 authors and covers thousands of years of history. Yet every single word is ultimately God's. Nothing can be added to make it better, and certainly nothing can be taken away because it is untrue or useless. All of it—in part, and as a whole—is God's perfect and powerful revelation of Himself.

Most of the Bible contains narrative—true stories about God and His interaction with His men, women, and children down through the ages. But it's not all stories. There's poetry, history, drama, down-to-earth counsel for living, and letters from church leaders to friends and to churches across wide swaths of the world.

WHO DOES THE BIBLE SAY GOD IS?

With all this in mind, doesn't it make sense that if we are to grow in our relationship with God, we start by getting to know who He is? Who *He* says He is?

Who is God? What is He like?

Read the biblical passages printed out below and simply mark every reference to God. Marking helps you quickly identify key people and key words. We suggest you color the word *God* in yellow or draw a triangle over every mention of Him. Don't miss the pronouns that refer to God. After you have marked the text, go back and make a list of what you learn about Him. Simply ask with each

marking, What does this say about God? Then let the text itself provide you with the answer.

The best way to let the text speak for itself is to use words right out of the passage. Doing this simple exercise throughout the Bible can be life changing. In fact, we have found that after teaching people all around the world how to study the Bible, this basic question—What do I learn about God?—is useful anytime you are reading the Bible. You will be amazed at what you learn about your heavenly Father if you ask this question each time you study His Word. We encourage you to do this exercise with your Bible using colored pencils. It will make *God* stand out on the pages of your Bible, making it easier to get to know Him through reading His Word.

In this first passage God is speaking to Cyrus, King of Persia, who at the time of Isaiah’s prophecy hadn’t even been born! Cyrus would (eventually) conquer Babylon and let the Jewish people who were being held in captivity return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple.

Isaiah 45:5-7

5 “I am the LORD, and there is no other;

Besides Me there is no God.

I will gird you, though you have not known Me;

6 That men may know from the rising to the setting of
the sun

That there is no one besides Me.

I am the LORD, and there is no other,

7 The One forming light and creating darkness,

Causing well-being and creating calamity;

I am the LORD who does all these.”

Psalm 103:19

The LORD has established His throne in the heavens,
And His sovereignty rules over all.

Jeremiah 32:17-19,27

- 17 “Ah Lord GOD! Behold, You have made the heavens
and the earth by Your great power and by Your out-
stretched arm! Nothing is too difficult for You,
18 who shows lovingkindness to thousands, but repays
the iniquity of fathers into the bosom of their children
after them, O great and mighty God. The LORD of
hosts is His name;
19 great in counsel and mighty in deed, whose eyes are
open to all the ways of the sons of men, giving to
everyone according to his ways and according to the
fruit of his deeds...”
27 “Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh; is any-
thing too difficult for Me?”

Deuteronomy 32:3-4

- 3 “For I proclaim the name of the LORD;
Ascribe greatness to our God!
4 “The Rock! His work is perfect,
For all His ways are just;

A God of faithfulness and without injustice,
Righteous and upright is He.”

Deuteronomy 32:39

“See now that I, I am He,
And there is no god besides Me;
It is I who put to death and give life.
I have wounded and it is I who heal,
And there is no one who can deliver from My hand.”

Revelation 4:11 (I love the scene that this verse comes from. Read the chapter to get a feel for the awe and reverence given to God.)

“Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive
glory and honor and power; for You created all things,
and because of Your will they existed, and were
created.”

1 Corinthians 8:4-6

4 Therefore concerning the eating of things sacrificed to
idols, we know that there is no such thing as an idol in
the world, and that there is no God but one.

5 For even if there are so-called gods whether in heaven
or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many
lords,

6 yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom

are all things and we exist for Him; and one Lord,
Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist
through Him.

Romans 11:33-36 (This benediction-like paragraph serves as a hinge that connects the first 11 chapters of Romans, which are filled with solid, everlasting statements or doctrines about righteousness, with the last 5 chapters, which apply all those eternal truths to life today.)

33 Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and
knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!

34 For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who
became His counselor?

35 Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid
back to Him again?

36 For from Him and through Him and to Him are all
things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.

In the space below or in your journal, record what you see the text saying about God.

What I learned about God:

If the whole Bible can be described as God’s revealing of Himself to mankind, we have barely scratched the surface, haven’t we? But we have to start somewhere. *And wherever we start, that’s where God’s blessing will begin in our lives.*

Take a minute to look at your notes. Let who God is sink into your mind. God wants us to know who He really is. As Christians we don’t have to take classes in comparative religions and evaluate all the gods of this world, comparing and contrasting them to one another. We don’t have to experiment with each one to see if what it offers is true or not. Using the Bible, we have direct access to the *one true and living* God!

Why waste time—and precious days and years of our lives—looking in any other direction?

NO COMPARISON TO THE TRUE GOD

God tells the prophet Isaiah, “‘To whom then will you liken Me that I would be his equal?’ says the Holy One” (Isaiah 40:25). The answer is clear—there is no other God but God!

Now why is that important? Why is it crucial to believe there is only *one* God in the universe and that this God has described

Himself in the pages of the Bible? The answer is as simple as it is profound.

We are fed lies upon lies that all religions are equally valid or that all roads lead to God. In other words, a person can take the path of meditation via the practices of Hinduism or keep the strict laws of the Koran or follow whatever it is he or she has decided to worship. It's all “spirituality,” and it all leads to the same place.

Is that true?

No.

How could it be, when these varied religions contradict one another at almost every turn! The Bible tells us there is *only one true* God and that He has revealed Himself and the path to a relationship with Himself through the Bible. The only way to know God and to reach God is to discover what He says about Himself in the Bible.

A NEW NAME—A NEW IDENTITY

My wife's older brother is the kindest and gentlest person I have ever met. If you ever have the opportunity to meet him, you'll sense his tender heart and outgoing kindness within mere seconds. Joe has Down Syndrome and the intelligence level of a three-year-old. He is about five feet tall and has blond hair and sweet blue eyes.

The day of our wedding Joe kept saying one phrase over and over again. It was obviously very important to him, but at the time we had no idea what he was talking about. In fact, it took us weeks, maybe even months, before my wife and I finally understood what Joe had meant.

“Margaret's name,” he told us, “is David.”

If he said it once, he said it a score of times. What was he thinking? What had he wanted to express? We (finally) figured it out, and after we did, *we* felt like the ones who had been “slow.” Joe's mother had told him that his sister, Margaret Mcgown, was no longer going to be a Mcgown but was going to be an Arthur—Margaret Arthur.

Joe and I are good buddies. He always calls me either David Arthur Arthur Arthur (three times, for emphasis, I guess), or he

simply calls me Arthur. But Joe’s wedding day proclamation was profound. Margaret was no longer a MCGOWN—she was now an Arthur. “Margaret’s name is David.” Margaret had been given a new name, a new identity.

The same could be said of you. If you are a believer in God, you are no longer your old self. You now belong to God! The Bible tells us very clearly in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 that “you are not your own... For you have been bought with a price.” We will learn in the next few chapters just how you were bought, but for now let’s think about the fact that your identity has changed. Your identity, if you are a believer, is now connected to God’s identity—the very same God we’ve been reading about.

Just as my wife’s identity is now deeply connected to mine, you are now a possession of the almighty Creator—the one, true, unfathomable, all-powerful God!

TAKE AWAY

Who is God? Review what you learned about Him today by listing the facts you uncovered out of the biblical text. With each characteristic you list about God, think about how His attributes affect you in your daily life. Finally, take some time and thank Him for who He is. Be specific. Be honest.

As you close out your time of study today, why not commit to memory one of the verses we have studied together? I think I will memorize Revelation 4:11. How about you?

How Can There Be Three in One?

DAVID

Instead of us introducing you to each of the three persons of God—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—it would be better to let the Father Himself introduce the other members of the Trinity to you.

We have learned over the years working with hundreds of thousands of students that marking the key words of the biblical text, writing out answers to questions, and even reading the text out loud significantly increase learning.

WHO IS THE ONLY SON OF GOD?

Let's start today by taking a look at Luke 3:21-22. Mark in a unique way the references to *Jesus*, the *Holy Spirit*, and *God the Father*. Be sure not to miss the pronouns for each person of the Trinity. I like to use a red cross for Jesus, a blue cloud for the Holy Spirit, and a yellow triangle for God the Father. Or you could simply color all references to God in yellow.

21 Now when all the people were baptized, Jesus was also baptized, and while He was praying, heaven was opened,

22 and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in bodily form like a dove, and a voice came out of heaven, “You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased.”

How is the relationship described in this text between—

Jesus and the Holy Spirit? What happens between the two of them?

Jesus and God the Father?

Later on in Luke 9, we read about Jesus appearing in a supernatural and glorious state with two others, Moses and Elijah, on a mountaintop. Quickly Peter comes up with an idea:

33 And as these were leaving Him, Peter said to Jesus, “Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three tabernacles: one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah”—not realizing what he was saying.

34 While he was saying this, a cloud formed and began to overshadow them; and they were afraid as they entered the cloud.

35 Then a voice came out of the cloud, saying, “This is My Son, My Chosen One; listen to Him!”

Knowing what you learned earlier in Luke, what similarities do you see in this passage? How is Jesus described? To whom do you think the voice belongs?

COULD JESUS REALLY BE WHO HE CLAIMED TO BE?

Peter reflects on this event in his letter later on in 2 Peter 1:16-17:

16 For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty.

17 For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, “This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased.”

Here is the point: Jesus is the Son of God; God Himself says so.

Not only is Jesus the Son of God, but He is also one with God. By that I mean Jesus *is* God. In John 10, Jesus describes Himself as a good shepherd who cares for His flock, meaning believers in God. A shepherd was responsible for his sheep’s safety. He had to keep them safe from predatory animals or even from other shepherds who might steal them. Jesus says that His Father, God, has given Him sheep, and no one is able to snatch them out of His (Jesus’) hand.

How could Jesus say such a thing? Did He realize the import of His words—that He was in essence claiming equality with God Himself?

In John 5:18-23, Jesus engages in a hot debate with the Pharisees, the self-appointed religious overseers of the Jews during Jesus’ life-time. Jesus had just healed a lame man, thrilling and amazing all who had witnessed this mighty miracle. The Pharisees, however, were furious. Why? Because the miracle occurred on the Sabbath, the holy day, and the Pharisees’ interpretation of the law kept them from doing almost anything on the Sabbath—even a good thing like healing a lame man.

I always feel sad reading about the Pharisees. Here were intelligent, highly educated men who had supposedly dedicated their whole lives to learning about God, serving Him, and guarding His reputation. And yet here was God Himself, in the person of Jesus, right in front of them! He was so close they could have reached out to touch Him. They could look directly into His eyes. Yet they couldn't seem to recognize (or allow themselves to recognize) His true identity. They couldn't let go of the long-held belief that the rules of the Torah—the Old Testament laws—were the only way God's kingdom was going to come and rescue the people of Israel.

Read the text below to see what happens. Note how the Bible describes the relationship between Jesus and God the Father. It will help to mark every mention of *Jesus* and mark every mention of *God the Father*.

18 For this reason therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God.

19 Therefore Jesus answered and was saying to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner.

20 “For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself is doing; and the Father will show Him greater works than these, so that you will marvel.

21 “For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes.

22 “For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son,

23 so that all will honor the Son even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.”

Now take a look at what you marked. What do you learn about God? And what do you learn about Jesus? Write down your observations.

In verse 23, Jesus clearly—beyond all argument—claims equality with God the Father. But did you notice the flow of responsibility in verse 19? Jesus does what He sees the Father doing. He does nothing of Himself. Jesus then is not “another God,” but is one with His Father.

JESUS IS EQUAL TO GOD THE ALMIGHTY

This claim of equality with the God of Israel wasn’t received well by the Pharisees. Not at all! Read John 10:30-33 and mark the references to both *Jesus* and *God the Father*.

30 “I and the Father are one.”

31 The Jews picked up stones again to stone Him.

32 Jesus answered them, “I showed you many good works

from the Father; for which of them are you stoning Me?”

33 The Jews answered Him, “For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy; and because You, being a man, make Yourself out to be God.”

What does Jesus mean in verse 30 by saying that He and His Father are one?

It’s so important that you see the point Jesus is making here: Not only is He the Son of God, but He *is* God. They are equal.

So many people are confused with this point. Many believe that Jesus was simply a good moral teacher and that His message was in line with God’s. But that would be cutting Jesus short of what He claimed to be, wouldn’t it?

WAS HE CRAZY?

I find it interesting to listen to skeptics talk about how Jesus was a great teacher but not divine. My question to them is, If Jesus claimed to be the Son of God and equal to God, and He wasn’t, wouldn’t He be a fool—a crazy man—and not a great teacher? You can’t say that Jesus was just a great moral person and not God. Either His claim to be God was true or He was insane!

If God the Father is God and Jesus the Son is also God, who is the Holy Spirit?

When my girls were young, I would make up bedtime stories to tell them. I would often end the time with an exciting event just about to happen and then stop and ask, “And do you know what happens next?” After a long pause I would say, “I’ll tell you tomorrow

night.” The girls would shriek, “Not again, Daddy! Tell us now! We want to know what happens!”

Well, guess what happens next?

We will talk about who the Holy Spirit is tomorrow.

I suggest that in the meantime you commit to memory the opening of the Gospel of John (John 1:1-3,14), where John refers to Jesus as “the Word.”

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

2 He was in the beginning with God.

3 All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.

14 And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Notice the questions that are answered about Jesus: Who? What? When? and Where? In fact these are the questions you can use when reading any passage of the Bible. In our ministry we call them the “5 Ws and an H”—Who? What? When? Where? Why? and How? Go back to the text above and mark every mention of *Jesus*. Be sure to mark all the synonyms that refer to Him, such as “the Word.”

Now go back to each marking and ask the 5 Ws and an H questions. Record below what you learn from asking these questions.

TAKE AWAY

What is the single most important question a person can answer?

Jesus asked this question of His disciples in Matthew 16:15, “Who do you say that I am?” There is only one correct answer. Maybe you’ve heard Jesus spoken of as a kind, gentle teacher. Or maybe as a good man but somewhat confused about His relationship to God.

From what you learned today, who does the Bible say Jesus is? Who do *you* say He is? What do you truly believe about Jesus?

You could consider ten thousand different questions before you turn out the lights and go to bed tonight. But not one of them—not even all of them lumped together—would come close to the importance of this single, most important question.

And the answer?

It will truly change your life.