

# The Triune (Three-in-One) God



## SABBATH—DECEMBER 31

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON:** Deuteronomy 6:4; Philippians 2:6; Matthew 28:19; Genesis 1:26, 27; John 14–16.

**MEMORY VERSE:** “Dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith. Let the Holy Spirit guide and help you when you pray. The mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ will bring you eternal life. As you wait for his mercy, remain in God’s love” (Jude 20, 21, NIV).

**KEY (IMPORTANT) THOUGHT:** The Bible teaches that there is a Three-in-One God. And it teaches that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are One God.

**THE WORD *TRINITY* (THREE-IN-ONE GOD) IS NOT IN THE BIBLE.** But the teaching is. The doctrine (teaching) of the Trinity (Three-in-One God) is that God is One and made up of Three “Persons.” This point is very important because it tells us who God is, what He is like, how He works, and how He is connected with the world. Most important, the Godhood<sup>1</sup> of Christ is a very important part of the plan of salvation.

The Bible gives proof for God’s Oneness in three different ways: (1) It shows the unity (oneness) of God, that God is One. (2) It shows that there are Three Persons who are God. (3) And the Bible also gives hints about God’s three-in-oneness.

The differences between God the Father, Christ, and the Holy Spirit are also a part of who God is. But it is very difficult for our sinful human minds to understand what that means. Ellen G. White calls the Godhead<sup>2</sup> the “eternal Rulers of heaven—God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit.”—Adapted from *Evangelism*,<sup>3</sup> page 616. They are equal but not the same.

Some early Adventists struggled with this doctrine. But our church today has taken a firm stand on this teaching. As Fundamental (Basic) Belief number 2 says, “There is one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a unity (joined together as one) of Three co-eternal Persons.”

1. Godhood—being God; the state of being divine.

2. Godhead—the Three-in-One God; God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

3. Evangelism—the act of spreading the good news about Jesus to the world.

**SUNDAY—JANUARY 1****OUR GOD IS ONE GOD  
(Exodus 3:13–15)**

The belief system of the Hebrews in Bible times was monotheistic. *Mono* comes from the Greek word for “one” and *theistic* comes from the Greek word for “God.” This means that there is only one true God. This position (teaching) never changes throughout the Old Testament. There is only one God: the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And He is not many gods, as the nations and tribes surrounding Israel believed. In this sense, the religion of the Bible is special.

**How does God speak about Himself in Exodus 3:13–15? How do these verses suggest that God is One?**

The idea of the oneness (the quality of being one) of God is also found in Deuteronomy 6:4. The Jews call this verse the *Shema*. It was given this name because the first word, *hear*, is *shema* in the Hebrew. The wording of the Shema contains one of the great truths about God. The people of Israel were commanded to believe and to teach this truth to their children.

**“ ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one’ ” (Deuteronomy 6:4, ESV). Compare<sup>4</sup> that verse with Genesis 2:24, “That’s [that is] why a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife.**

4. compare—to show how two or more things are the same.

**The two of them will become one” (NirV). What might it mean that the same Hebrew word for “one” appears in both verses?**

The same word, *echad*, meaning “one,” is used to show God in the Shema of Deuteronomy 6:4. This word *echad*, meaning “one,” does not suggest an actual number but a complete unity (harmony) of oneness instead. *Echad* also hints at a unity or a oneness of different parts. Husbands and wives are to be “one” (*echad*) according to Genesis 2:24, just as in Deuteronomy God is “One.”

**How does the New Testament in such places as James 2:19 and 1 Corinthians 8:4 talk about the oneness of God?**

**How should the understanding of God as One help us to avoid falling into the trap of idol worship? Why should the Lord alone be the One whom we worship? How can you get rid of any “idols” in your own life?**



Husbands and wives are to be “one” just as God is “One.”

**MONDAY—JANUARY 2****THE GODHOOD OF CHRIST  
(Philippians 2:6)**

The Godhood of the Father is hardly ever in question. But those who question the Trinity often challenge the Godhood of Christ. However, if Christ were not eternal and fully God, then the plan of salvation would be dangerously compromised (damaged). (Read Thursday's study.)

**How does Paul, who was once a strict Pharisee,<sup>5</sup> talk about the Godhood of Christ in Philippians 2:6?**

As a strict Pharisee, Paul had been firmly schooled in the Old Testament teaching of the oneness of God. So, this verse is shocking coming from Paul. The reason it is so shocking is that it shows Paul's deep loyalty to the idea of Christ's Godhood.

The book of Hebrews was written to Jews who were strong monotheists,<sup>6</sup> as Paul was too. The book has many strong verses that point to the Godhood of the Son of God. In Hebrews 1:8, 9, Christ's nature<sup>7</sup> as God is powerfully and clearly described.

Jesus' own knowledge of who He was is very important in revealing His Godhood. He did not march through the streets of Jerusalem announcing

and preaching His Godhood. But, the four Gospels<sup>8</sup> include many threads of proof that show how He understood Himself. Jesus often made claims that He had the qualities (special characteristics [ways of being]) and power that belonged only to God. He spoke of the angels of God as His own angels (Matthew 13:41). He claimed to forgive sins (Mark 2:5–10). And He claimed the power to judge the world (Matthew 25:31–46). Who else but God could rightfully do that?

**Review how Jesus accepted the worship of different people in the Gospel records of Matthew 14:33; 28:9; Luke 24:50–52; and John 9:35–38. Compare Jesus' actions with Paul's in Acts 14:8–18. What does Jesus' acceptance of all this worship show about His Godhood?**



**Jesus spoke of the angels of God as His own angels.**

5. Pharisee—a religious leader of Jesus' day who believed that a person must keep God's law to be saved.

6. monotheists—those who believe there is only one God.

7. nature—any of the qualities (ways of being) or aspects of God that make Him who He is, such as His love, mercy, goodness, forgiveness, holiness, power, and so on.

8. Gospels—the first four books of the New Testament: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

At Jesus' trial, one charge against Him was that He claimed to be the Son of God (John 19:7; Matthew 26:63–65). If Jesus did not think of Himself as God, this would have been a wonderful opportunity for Him to correct a false idea about who He was. But He did not. There was nothing to correct. Jesus supported His own Godhood under oath during His trial before Caiaphas.<sup>9</sup> So, here we have powerful proof from the Bible of the Godhood of Christ.

**Take some time to think about the life of Jesus. Think deeply about the fact that Jesus was God Himself, the Creator of the universe. What does His Godhood tell us about God's love for the world? Why should this amazing truth give you comfort and hope?**



Jesus supported His own Godhood under oath during His trial before Caiaphas.

## TUESDAY—JANUARY 3

### THE HOLY SPIRIT (Genesis 1:2)

**What does Genesis 1:2 tell**

**us about the work of the Holy Spirit, who appears so early in the Bible?**

**How does Matthew 28:19 show the Three Members of the Godhead?**

Jesus names Three Persons of the Godhead when He teaches how new believers are to be baptized. This baptismal “plan” is still used in most Christian baptisms today. The person who has chosen to follow Jesus is baptized into God’s “Name” (singular [one], not plural [many], in the Greek). But Three Persons are included in that Name. These Three Persons are God and act as One.

At the baptism of Jesus, all Three Persons of the Trinity join together. Read Mark’s powerful description of that baptism (Mark 1:9–11). Mark describes the heavens as “parting” (verse 10, NKJV), which would be better translated as “torn open” (NIV). With this description, Mark brings our attention to all Three Members of the Godhead in a wonderful revealing (showing) of God.

As with Jesus, the work of the Holy Spirit is joined with the actions of God. Review the following examples of the Holy Spirit’s actions:

1. When announcing the birth of Christ, the angel tells Mary that her Child will be called “holy.” The reason He will be called “holy” is because the Holy Spirit will come upon her (Luke 1:35).
2. Jesus says that the Spirit of the Lord is upon Him. This claim gives

9. Caiaphas—the high priest in charge of Jesus’ trial.

Him the authority (power) to preach (Luke 4:18).

3. Jesus also drives out demons by the Spirit of God (Matthew 12:28).
4. The Spirit is to carry on Christ's work after Christ's return to heaven. The Spirit is another Counselor of the same kind as Christ (John 14:16).
5. Jesus breathes out the Holy Spirit upon His followers (John 20:22).
6. New Christians will have both the Holy Spirit's leading (John 14:17) and also the Spirit of Christ (Galatians 2:20; Colossians 1:27).

Christ and the Holy Spirit are closely joined with each Other's ministry (work). Moreover, there are verses in the Bible that name the Holy Spirit as God. For example, read Acts 5:1–11. How do these verses also help us to understand the Godhood of the Holy Spirit?



The person who has chosen to follow Jesus is baptized into God's "Name."

### WEDNESDAY—JANUARY 4

#### BEING UNITED AND EQUAL (Genesis 1:26, 27)

The Bible is very clear that God is One (*echad*). But the Bible also talks about the Three Persons of the Godhead. This truth, as with many others, is more fully shown in the New Testament.

#### How is the Three-in-One God shown in Genesis 1:26, 27?

The idea of the Three-in-One God also is shown in Genesis 11:7, 8, at the building of the Tower of Babel. God Himself speaks again. The "Lord" is mentioned, but He speaks as one of a group ("us").

#### In what ways does Isaiah 6:8 show the idea of the Three-in-One God too?

In the New Testament, how does Peter's sermon at Pentecost<sup>10</sup> honor Jesus as part of the Three-in-One God? (Read Acts 2:33.) Peter, a faithful Jewish believer in the One God, preaches the full Godhood of Christ, who is now in heaven. In his letter to the Jewish believers, who are scattered all over the Near East, Peter again shows proof that God is Three-in-One. (Read 1 Peter 1:1–3.)

How does Paul show the idea of the Three-in-One God as he describes the plan of salvation in 2 Corinthians 1:20–22? (Read also 2 Corinthians 13:14.)

With our limited minds, this teaching is not easy to fully under-

10. Pentecost—the time when Jesus' followers received the special outpouring of the Holy Spirit after Jesus went back to heaven (Acts 2:1–4).

stand. But we are dealing here with God—the Creator of the universe. How foolish it would be to think that we could fully understand Him. As humans, we do not “fully” understand much of anything. Think about even the “simplest” thing you can think of. How many parts of it go beyond your understanding? How much more would this be true with something as great as God Himself?

### THURSDAY—JANUARY 5

#### THE TRINITY AND SALVATION (John 14–16)

The Gospel of John gives special attention to the oneness of God. John seems to know that God is One and yet Three-Persons-in-One.

**Read Christ’s prayer in John 14–16 and count the times that the Three Persons of God are mentioned. How do these verses help us to understand that this important truth is real?**

These verses in the Gospel of John are the best examples of the coequal (made of equal parts), Three-Person God. Here the idea of the Three Persons of the Godhead, working together as One, is repeated often. The doctrine of the Trinity is not based on a wild guess or the imagination. It is a solid conclusion based on many verses in the Bible.

Of special importance is the Godhood of Christ. If Christ were not

fully God, then that would mean the Lord simply put the punishment for our sins on another person instead of taking them upon Himself. The whole point of the gospel is that it was God Himself on the cross, accepting the sins of the world. If this were not true, then Jesus’ work of dying on the cross as our Sacrifice would be meaningless. And it would destroy the beauty of God’s wonderful plan of salvation for sinners.

Think about it: if Jesus were just a created person, and not fully God, how could He accept the full measure of God’s punishment for our sins? What created person, no matter how great he or she is, could save humans from the curse that comes from breaking God’s holy law?

If Jesus were not God, then God’s law would not be as holy as God Himself. And then the breaking of the law would be something that a created person could pay for. The law would be only as holy as that created person was and not as holy as the Creator. Sin itself would not be so bad if the death of a created person would be enough to pay for it. But the fact that it took God Himself, in the person of Christ, to solve the problem gives powerful proof of just how serious sin is.

Also, our knowledge of God’s promise of our salvation through what Christ has done for us, and not through our own works, comes from the fact that God Himself paid the price for our sins. What could we do to add to that? If Christ were created, maybe we could add something. But

with God, the Creator, sacrificing Himself for our sins, it is an insult to God if we believe that anything we do could “add” to that sacrifice. So, if Christ were not God, then the price He paid for our sins would not have been enough to save us.

**Think for a moment: the Creator of the universe died in your place so that you could have the promise of eternal life in Him. How does this amazing truth give you hope? Next to this hope, what else is really as important?**

### FRIDAY—JANUARY 6

**ADDITIONAL STUDY:** In the doctrine (teaching) of the Trinity, we do not find three separate godly roles (duties) carried out by One Person. There are not three gods in a group. The One God (“He”) is also, and equally, “They,” and “They” are always together, and always working together. The Holy Spirit does the will (desire; intention) of both Father and Son, which is also His will. God shows this truth about Himself all through the Bible.

Some people struggle with the Godhood of Christ. They struggle to understand how Jesus, as a Man, surrendered Himself while here on earth to the will of the Father. Many believe His coming in the flesh and His surrender to God are proof that He was not really God and that He seems to be less important than the Father. But these things about Jesus do not show the true arrangement of the Godhead. Jesus’ surrender as a

Man to God’s will shows how the plan of salvation was to work. Jesus was to become a Man, who would be “obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:8, ESV). Also, “Jesus was God’s Son. But by suffering he learned what it means to obey. In that way he was made perfect. Eternal salvation comes from him. He saves all those who obey him” (Hebrews 5:8, 9, NIV). These verses show the surrender and humble work that Jesus did as a Man. This surrender and work were very important to God’s plan of salvation. These verses do not prove that Jesus is lower than God the Father or that He is not fully eternal and God.

“‘His name shall be called Immanuel, . . . God with us.’ ‘The light of the knowledge of the glory of God’ is seen ‘in the face of Jesus Christ.’ From the days of eternity the Lord Jesus Christ was One with the Father. He was ‘the image of God,’ the image of His greatness and power as God, ‘the outshining of His glory.’ It was to show this glory that Jesus came to our world.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 19.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

❶ Some early Seventh-day Adventists struggled with the doctrine of the Trinity. Today, the church has taken a strong stand on the doctrine. How does this change over time show us that truth is progressive and, that as we accept the light God gives us, we grow and change? In your own expe-

rience, how have you grown in your understanding of truth? What beliefs did you once hold that today you no longer accept?

② John 8:58 reads, “ ‘What I’m [I am] about to tell you is true,’ Jesus answered, ‘Before Abraham was born, I am’ ” (NirV). How does this verse powerfully show the full Godhood of Christ?

**SUMMARY:** If we want to deepen our love for the great eternal God we serve, first we must try to understand what He tells us about Himself. The Trinity is a mystery, but in the Bible “mysteries” are deep truths that an eternal God opens to our limited understanding. So, we can safely speak of God only from our knees. “ ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one!’ ” (Deuteronomy 6:4, NKJV).