

Worshiping God in

Spirit and Truth

A Magazine for Understanding God's Truth

Defining “God”:

Is Monotheistic Trinitarianism
The Final Answer?

(Do You Really Understand the Difference Between
God's Truth and the Traditions of Men?)

October – December 2014

In This Issue

From the Pastor: A brief introduction to the topics in this issue. There are many things in scripture that people *think* they understand. Many of these things are part of traditions that have been learned from childhood and, consequently, taken for granted – that is, accepted as though the issue has been settled and is, therefore, true. A problem exists if the *tradition itself* is based on faulty understanding. These topics will be treated like Jesus Christ did in the Sermon on the Mount: “It has been said....But I say to you...” (Matthew 5:31, 32; see also Isaiah 42:21). **Page 2**

Who/What Is “God” in Genesis 1?: This is a search through scriptures to find what has actually been revealed about “God” in Genesis 1. It challenges the traditional view of *monotheistic Trinitarianism* – basically because that concept was a theological compromise reached centuries after the appearance of Jesus Christ in the flesh. That compromise included elements of pagan philosophy and religion that defies the original Hebrew religion...which had no such concept of “God.” **Page 7**

Who is Yahweh Elohim?: This divine Being shows up in Genesis 2:4 as being the one who created the heavens and the earth. Because it would appear to be a contradiction of Genesis 1:1 (where the name *Elohim* is employed), many in traditional Christianity assume that it is a “proof” that “God” is *triune* in His “actual being.” Such thinking has given rise to the doctrine of *monotheistic Trinitarianism*. Is that conclusion valid? Is that the final word about “God”? **Page 10**

The Shema: “Hear, O Israel...”: Is Deuteronomy 6:4, 5 really a declaration that there is only one “God” (*monotheism*)? Does it contribute anything at all to the claim that “God’s” *actual being* is *triune*? If neither is true, what is a *reasonable* answer to the existence of such a national declaration? This discussion will probably surprise you – especially since Israel had no concept of a *triune* “God.” **Page 16**

Born Again?: This is a frank discussion about the expression “born again” in John 3:3. When, exactly, does the Christian undergo what Jesus Christ says is a rebirth or a second birth? You need to know exactly what it takes to enter the Kingdom of God. **Page 22**

What is the True Gospel?: Is the main focus of the *gospel* in the New Testament a message about God’s *grace*? Or, is it the “good news” about the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ? This is a detailed study about the true gospel of Jesus Christ. **Page 29**



from the desk of: the Pastor

Every now and then it is expedient to do a check-up on what you believe about God, the justification for believing in His existence, and His objective for using His creative powers. The existence of a plethora of opposing religions and philosophies warrants the question about who is right and who is wrong. Of course, the continuing, expanding conflict will eventually boil down to the point where everyone does what is right *in his own sight* (Judges 21:25). So, I will not argue from the point-of-view of the question about who is right and who is wrong. My argument will be restricted to arguments that are germane to “Christian” theology – that religious quagmire of religious thought emanating from over 32,000 different denominations. My approach will be from two basic perspectives: (1) What does the Bible *say*? and (2) What does the Bible *mean*? Even then, what I say will be discounted by many as a mere personal point-of-view. But...you might be surprised at what we’ll find there. Thank you Forrest Gump for that wonderful quote from your Mother about the box of chocolates!

A Historical Background

The appearance of Jesus Christ on the world scene provoked questions about the *essential nature* of “God.” His claims of being the *Son* of God and being *one* with God led to His being accused of blasphemy. Why? Because it was widely accepted that Israel was *monotheistic* – that is, that they believed in the existence of only one “God.” If you take Deuteronomy 6:4 as the “proof” that fully explains why Israel claimed allegiance to only one “God,” then you might have warrant to perpetuate the definition that “God” is a single, individual Being with the capacity to reveal Himself in different “modes” or “faces.” But...if there is more to Deuteronomy 6:4 than meets the eye, then you would be wise to consider what that is and where it leads in the discussion.

In John 5:37, 39, and 46, Jesus told the Jews present:

You have neither heard [the Father’s] voice *at any time*, nor seen [the Father’s] shape....You search the scriptures [see 2 Timothy 3:16, 17]

because in them you think you have eternal life: *yet, they testify about me*....Had you believed Moses, you would have believed me because he wrote about *me*. (emphases added)

If the Old Testament scriptures testify about Jesus Christ ...and if Moses wrote about Jesus Christ, then we would be wise to try to understand in what manner and to what purpose that was done. In what *character(s)* is Jesus Christ cast in the Old Testament? Also, there is a God-being who was both *seen* and *heard* in many different settings. How could this be the “Father” of whom Jesus spoke in John 5.....if He had never been seen or heard *at any time*?

I invite you to read Exodus 24 as one example among many where the LORD GOD (*Yahweh Elohim*) was both seen and heard. I invite you to read Genesis 32:24-32 where Jacob saw, spoke to, and wrestled with “God”: “...*I have seen God face to face*, and my life is preserved” (emphases added). You can see similar statements in Exodus 33:11; Numbers 14:14; and Deuteronomy 5:4; 34:10. What does this mean? Simply



this: Either Jesus is a liar, or there is a “God” who had never been seen nor heard in any shape, size, or description by mankind until Jesus came to reveal His existence!

“...Moses, and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel...saw the God of Israel...and upon the nobles of Israel He laid not His hand: also they saw God, and did eat and drink.” (Exodus 24:9-11; emphases added)

Now, let’s join the theological fray – the public forum – that has been declared a settled matter for centuries. I cannot go through all of the intricacies of the historical development of this doctrine about *monotheistic Trinitarianism*; that would require *multiple volumes* of books. I can, however, sort out some of the essential, core arguments and compare them to the scriptural record. The historical record can be very revealing when viewed with a critical eye.

The Babylonian Concept of “God”

Alexander Hislop, author of *The Two Babylons* (first published in England in 1916), undertook a very detailed historical expose about how the religion of ancient Babylon has been imposed upon “Christianity” by sleight-of-hand and theological subterfuge (read Revelation 16:19 through 18:24; request our free hard-back book “...And God Remembered Babylon...”). Here is part of the summation of his introduction to the subject:

The ancient Babylonians...recognized in *words* the unity of the Godhead; and, while worshipping [*sic*] innumerable minor deities, as possessed of certain influence on human affairs, they distinctly acknowledged that there is One infinite and Almighty Creator, supreme over all. Most other nations did the same. “In the early ages of mankind,” says Wilkinson in his ‘Ancient Egyptians,’ “the existence of a sole and omnipotent Deity, who created all things, seems to have been the *universal belief*; and tradition taught men the same notions on this subject,

which, in later times, have been adopted *by all civilized nations*.” (p. 14; emphasis added)

Hislop then adds a sort of catalog of nations that had such a belief...even though they also worshiped numerous lesser “gods.”

Then Hislop does an unexpected thing by referring to Isaiah 66:17 with the following translation: “They that sanctify themselves, and purify themselves in the gardens, after the rights of the Only One...” (p. 16; emphases added). He explains that “behind one tree” is how the verse is generally translated, but he says that the best scholars of oriental religions say that the rendering should be “...after the rites of *Achad*,” i.e., “The Only One” (Ibid.). This, whether Hislop intends it or not, demonstrates that you can believe in one “God” and yet miss the point. I derive from this discussion that the Only One is treated by Hislop as a *false* “God” of the Babylonians.

Matthew 7:21-23 demonstrates a similar principle: You can call on the name of the LORD and not be connected to the real LORD and/or His truth. Paul does a similar thing in 2 Corinthians 11:4, 13-15 when he speaks of false apostles who pose as “Christians” and preach *another Jesus*, *another gospel*, and *another spirit* (see also Galatians 1:6-9). The point I am making is that *monothiesm, per se*, is not peculiar to the Hebrew religion admittedly followed by Israel, Judaism, and Christianity. Thus, it is warranted to ask who is right and who is wrong. What about a *trinitarian* concept of “God”?

Hislop continues in the summation of his introduction by showing that the Babylonians expressed the *unity* of their Only One by using the equilateral triangle (a triangle that is equal on all three sides = Δ). Why? Because it symbolized the *triune* nature of that Only One. They stipulated by that symbolism that there were *three persons* in the essential nature of that one “God.” He then demonstrates that such a concept has been spread worldwide as a result of the influence of Babylon.

That would not be difficult to understand if one properly understood what the consequences would have been when the Lord God confounded the languages of man and scattered them across the globe as a result of Nimrod’s work at the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9). Confounding the languages and scattering them was

The Influence of Traditions

helpful in arresting their anti-God activities, but the Lord God did not wipe out their memories of the *religious* practices in which they had been involved. Those memories were also scattered around the globe and manifested in the various language groups into which the people had been scattered. Thus, we have many different religions in the world that exhibit similar practices and notions about “God.”

Hislop also discusses the *iconography* (sacred imagery) used to represent this “God.” That iconography includes the head of an old man, a circle, and the wings and tail of a dove, which Hislop says: “...Showing, though blasphemously, the unity of Father, Seed, or Son, and Holy Ghost...the three persons [came to be], the eternal Father, the Spirit of God incarnate in a human mother, and a Divine Son, the fruit of that incarnation” (Ibid.; pp. 18, 19). Is there anything familiar about that? What does this lend to the present discussion?

Let me offer Hislop’s summation as part of the *traditional religious answer*:

While overlaid with idolatry, the recognition of a *Trinity* was universal in all the ancient nations of the world, *proving* how deeply rooted in the human race was the primeval doctrine on this subject, *which comes out so distinctly in Genesis*. (Ibid.; emphases added)

We must be circumspect in how we react to this claim. While this might “prove” how deeply such a *false* doctrine was rooted in the ancient nations of the world, we must ask if it also “proves” that the use of *Elohim*, *Spirit of God*, and *Yahweh Elohim* in Genesis *proves* the *truth* of that primeval *trinitarian* doctrine.

In its utter uniqueness among world religions, the Hebrew religion did not conceive of “God” as being composed of three such “persons.” It would stand to reason, then, that we must enter the public forum and bring scriptural truth to bear on the arguments that have been offered throughout history...especially if we see a difference between what has been offered as a traditional answer and what the Bible actually reveals. It is not difficult to do so...if you know what you’re looking for. Some will counter with questions about why what we understand is so much greater than what the ancients understood. We’ll let our “tree” show its “fruit.”

What should we understand about the influence of *traditions* in this matter? Let’s begin by considering the context of Matthew 15:1-9 where Jesus Christ makes a judgment about the religious *traditions* of the scribes and Pharisees who are challenging the hand washing practices of His disciples. His judgment is twofold: (1) Their religious traditions (even though they are done in the name of the God of Israel) make *God’s commandments* null and void, and (2) they teach the doctrines of *men* as though they are the *commandments of God*. Our question in this issue is whether or not modern “Christianity” is guilty of the same thing.

If God’s word is *truth* (John 17:17), then it is vitally necessary to allow it to speak that truth plainly without perversion.

Somewhere in the grand scheme of “Christian” theology there is the *illusion of truth* where no *biblical* truth really exists – a situation like that described by Norman H. Snaith when he says that the doctrine of the immortality of the soul might very well be a *Christian doctrine*, but it is by no means a *biblical doctrine* [“The Language of the Old Testament,” *The Interpreter’s Bible* (New York: Abingdon Press, vol. 1, 1952), 230]. Why? Because it is the work of what Paul calls the “sleight of men” (Ephesians 4:14). Those who want to be True Christians (John 4:23, 24) must eventually confront this reality and resolve it in their lives; otherwise, we are no better than the scribes and Pharisees whom Jesus corrected in Matthew 15:1-9!

In C. S. Lewis’s lecture on “Christian Apologetics,” he helps to more clearly define the point I am making:

...A clearly maintained distinction between *what the Faith actually says* and *what you would like it to have said* or *what you understand* or *what you personally find helpful* or *think probable*, forces your audience to realize that you are tied to your data just as the scientist is tied by the results of the experiments; *that you are not just saying what you like*. This immediately helps them to realize that what is being discussed is a

question about *objective fact – not about ideals and points of view*. [C. S. Lewis, *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, Walter Hooper (Ed.), (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1970; 91; emphases added)]

If God’s word is *truth* (John 17:17), then it is vitally necessary to allow it to speak that truth plainly without perversion.

We also should take note of a trend in religion that should concern everyone who wants to be a true Christian. This is most effectively pointed out by Dr. Albert Mohler, President of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary of Louisville, Kentucky:

Americans are growing increasingly comfortable with a cafeteria-line-style spirituality in which they *pick* and *choose* whatever doctrines seem *pleasing* and *comfortable* and *leave those that seem distasteful!*” (emphases added)

Tacitly understood, Dr. Mohler does not recommend that one should be persnickety in that manner. Inferentially understood, he recommends that one should let the Bible speak its truth without let or hindrance.

“Mere Christianity” (the “Christianity” that is generally practiced) is like standing in the hall of a great house with many rooms trying to pick a room. Any room is preferable to the hall. But...there is only one room in which the truth resides (a paraphrase of C. S. Lewis’s concept of “mere Christianity”). Which room will you choose?

The influence of family, religious, and national traditions is powerful. This is especially true when there is iconography that illustrates something for the eye and mind. It is not enough to conclude that something is true or right or good just because the majority says it is. It is not enough to say that something is false or wrong or bad just because a majority says it is. Jesus Christ set the standard for the True Christian in John 4:23, 24 when He said: “Those that worship God *must* worship Him in spirit and in *truth*” (see also John 17:17; em-

phases added).

How is it possible to claim that the “Church” (which is generally conceived of as being the True Christians among all of the 32,000+ “Christian” denominations) expresses their *common faith in different terms* and that their *differences* are merely a *manner of expression* rather than a *difference in belief*? How could theologians have argued for centuries about the nature of “God,” questioned whether or not Jesus Christ was divine and of the same essential nature as the Father, and reached a theological *compromise* and still not be concerned about the *differences* in approach? Does that puzzle you in the least? It should because it presents a *paradox* that few seem willing to address.

Conclusion

If we close this introduction with Matthew 7:21-23, then we should be able to see that there is a *futility* bound up in being *religious* outside of *God’s will*. That means that you can aspire to reap specific spiritual rewards and benefits and worship a concept called “God” and still be denied any reward or benefit at all from it because your faulty aspirations – fervently religious though they might have been – were not in unity with the desired outcome of what the True God has planned.

Let me now introduce the questions we will pursue in this issue. My initial and guiding question in the articles that follow will be this: Can you *prove* from the Bible that the concept discussed is valid?

My guess is that you believe that there is only one God-being and that He plays the role of three different characters: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This is called *monotheistic Trinitarianism*. I also guess that if you believe in this concept, it is most likely that you do so simply because that was the way you were raised to believe – or you were friends with someone who convinced you that this is what the Bible teaches about “God.”

Here are some questions that you need to consider while searching out the answer:

- What does the term “God” (Elohim) in Genesis 1 mean?
- Why is the *plural* form of “God” used there (especially in Genesis 1:26 and 3:22)?

● Why does Genesis 2:4 begin using the term LORD GOD (*Yahweh* Elohim) instead of *Elohim*?

● Why do John 1:1-3, 14 and Philippians 2:5-11 make a distinction between “God” and the “Word God” (Jesus Christ)?

● Why does Jesus Christ say in John 10:30 that He and the Father are *one*...but the word *one* does not mean “one and the same”?

● Why do Matthew 24:36 and 1 Corinthians 15:24-28 present the Father and Son as two separate Beings?

These are six questions that, generally speaking, have been ignored in the more modern religious traditions of men. How would you begin to answer them *from the Bible*? You are in for a surprise in these articles. Many *traditional* beliefs will flounder under the revelation from scripture. Can you handle that?

So, this issue of *Spirit and Truth* should prove to be a great challenge. As C. S. Lewis points out in his notable work *Mere Christianity*: The house of “Christianity” contains many rooms from which to pick. *Mere Christianity* is like standing in the hall trying to pick a room. Any room is preferable to the hall. But...there is only *one room* in which the *truth* resides. If you want to be in *that* room, then you must be willing to accept it for what it is...even if you find it uncomfortable to accept the *truth* it contains. Well said, C. S.

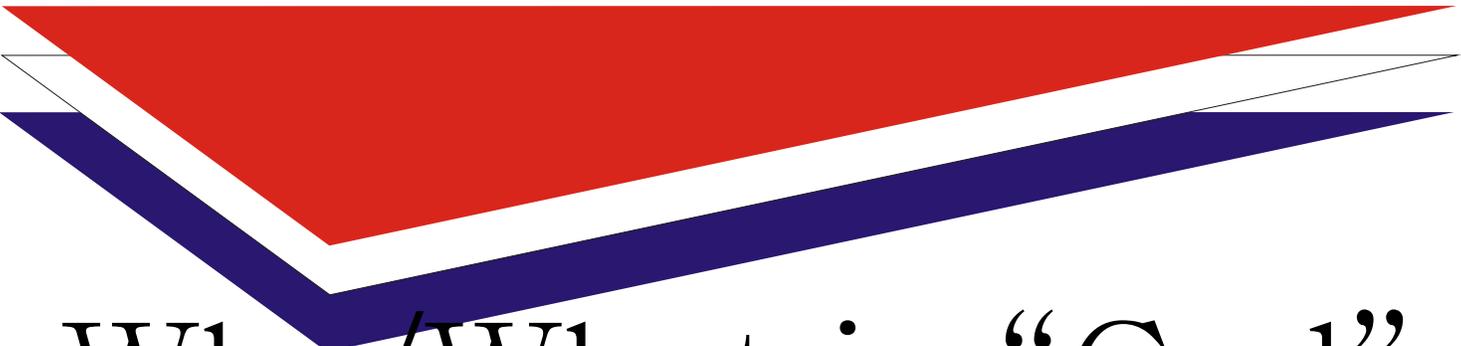
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P.S. One last thing in this introduction: Please take time to go back to the October – December 2013 issue of *Spirit and Truth* and re-read the “Primacy of Self” article under the subheading “The Triune God” (pp. 5-8). This will give you information on this subject that I have already covered – so it is not necessary to repeat it. Thank you.

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Who/What is “God” in Genesis 1?

The use of the term “God” is ubiquitous. As you might suspect, the term does not mean the same thing to everyone. The irony is that most people generally accept the expression of the term based on what their personal definition is...rather than what the person who uses it means. To avoid the ubiquitous nature of the term, I am prone to set my meaning in the context of the expression “the God of the Bible.” Oddly enough, though, with over 32,000 “Christian” denominations and the presence of many sects in Judaism, it would be wrong to assume that all of the adherents to those two historic religions can even agree on what *that* expression means. Thus, we are presented with a *dilemma* about who/what “God” is. We have a *conundrum*.

The appearance of Jesus of Nazareth added to the mystery. Why? Because He claimed to have had a previous existence *alongside* of the one the Jews commonly knew as “God” (John 17:5). He did not claim to be one-and-the-same Being. This mystery was argued for several hundred years before a type of compromise was reached among various “Christian” voices – a compromise that gave birth to what is called *monotheistic Trinitarianism*, which conceives of “God” as being a single supernatural Being who plays three different roles relative to mankind: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Even then, many walked away conceiving of “God” as being three *separate* Beings. So, the question still remains: What does the Bible reveal about the essential nature of “God”?

“God” (Elohim) in Genesis 1

From Genesis 1:1 to 2:3 the term “God” is used: *Elohim*. However, in Genesis 2:4 the term “LORD GOD” begins to be used: *Yahweh Elohim*. Commentators remark about the form of the Hebrew term in both cases: (a) Genesis 1:1 to Genesis 2:3 uses the term *Elohim*, and (b) Genesis 2:4 begins the use of *Yahweh Elohim*. This is where the discussion begins to revolve around the *triune nature* of “God.” My question is whether or not that discussion is a backward-projecting attempt to force

Elohim and *Yahweh Elohim* fit into a *Trinitarian* concept, or if there is something in the Hebrew term that *demand*s that a *triune nature* must be understood. This is also where I begin to look at the whole of scripture to see if there is any specific reason why I should accept the *trinitarian* concept at face value, or...if there is any valid reason why I should reject that concept entirely.

Elohim is generally accepted as a *plural* noun. The *-im* ending is indicative of such. You can find the same ending in *cherubim* – which helps you to understand that *cherub* is a *singular* noun. The same would hold true

for the term *Baalim* (plural of *Baal*). In Dr. C. I. Scofield's *Reference Edition of the King James Bible*, he gives the following definition:

The first of ***three primary names of Deity***, is a uni-plural formed from *El*...This uni-plurality implied in the name is directly asserted in Gen. 1: 26 (plurality), 27 (unity)...Thus the *Trinity* is latent in *Elohim*. (emphases added)

Our first responsibility in coming to a reasonable *biblical* conclusion about Scofield's claim is to understand what a *uni-plurality* is and what the term *latent* means.

A uni-plural noun is otherwise known as a *collective noun*. This type of noun treats a *plurality* as though it is a *singularity*. For example: a *family* is made up of a *plurality* of members, but it can act in *unity* to accomplish a goal. The verbs and pronouns used can vary to distinguish between the members of the group acting together or separately.

According to Scofield's note cited above, a *uni-plurality* is a plural entity that acts in unity. My most exhaustive dictionary is the *Webster's Third New International Dictionary*. It has no such word entry. That is not to say that it is not in more exhaustive dictionaries. Most English grammar texts will teach that such a plurality is called a *collective noun*, which names a plural entity that *collectively* acts in unison. The individual members can act individually, yet still be considered a *collective* noun. You can tell the difference between the two by the verb and pronoun forms that are used in the sentence...sometimes singular and sometimes plural.

For examples: (1) "The class ***has*** completed ***its*** assignment" shows that the individual students had the same assignment and acted in *unity* to complete it. This is treated with a singular verb form and singular pronoun. (2) "The class ***have*** completed ***their assignments***" shows that the *individual* members of the plurality acted *independently*, but in *unity*, in completing their *individual* assignments. This is treated with a plural verb form and a plural pronoun. Either way, the class acted in *unity*. The *plural nature* of the noun *class* does not mean that you can assume that it consists of only one

student acting in many different ways. To assume that the plural term *Elohim* automatically means a *trinity* (a single "God" who manifests Himself in three "person-ages") would be wrong-headed because its plural form can mean that *Elohim* possibly consists of *trillions*+!

What does *latent* mean? *Latent* means that something lies *hidden* or *undeveloped* in a person or thing. I can infer from Scofield's remark that the *triune nature* of "God" is not readily apparent in the term *Elohim*; so, you have to have some special way, or "key" to discover it and make it apparent. The Trinitarians do that by using what Scofield refers to as "*three primary names of Deity*." *Elohim*, according to Scofield, is the first of those "three primary names of Deity."

What is done to complete the revelation of the *latency* of the triune nature of "God" is rather simplistic. The second mention of "Deity" is supposedly seen in v. 2: "...the *Spirit of God* moved upon the face of the waters." Thus, we see the *All-powerful One* revealed as *Spirit*. The third mention is made in 2:4 when the LORD GOD appears in His *redemptive name: Yahweh Elohim*. In "God's" strange and wonderful way, they assume, His *triune nature* is revealed by these three references to "Deity": the All-powerful One, the Redeemer, and the Holy Spirit! *All of these are considered to be expressions of the one "God."*

So, we are left to explore further the question about the nature of "God." Can we determine if this *plurality* indicates *separate* personages in *one* Being? This is where we look at Genesis 1:26 and 3:22.

Genesis 1:26; 3:22

Notice the use of the *plural* pronouns "us" and "our." Many believe that this is like using what is called the "royal *we*". This concept is as follows: The "royal *we*" is the use of a plural pronoun to refer to a single person holding a high office, such as a monarch, bishop, or pope. It is called "the plural of majesty" (*pluralis maiestatis* in Latin). It is used to express that such a majesty is the highest, most powerful, most excellent power that exists in a given realm and...that there are many ways in which this majesty is expressed. If you accept that definition as applying to *Elohim* in Genesis 1:26, then it is not a far leap to insist that it fits perfectly into the doctrine of a *Trinity*. Before we settle on that

issue, we must look for other indicators that either confirm or dispute such a conclusion.

There is also *no* indication in the Genesis 1:26; 3:22 accounts that the *plural* pronouns *us* and *our* indicate that *Elohim* includes the *angelic realm* in the mix. If I appeal to Hebrews 1, for instance, I find that there is a decided difference between the “God” *kind* and the “angel” *kind*. Notice, for instance, v. 4: “[The Son is] made so much better than the angels, as he by inheritance has obtained a more excellent name than they [have].” “God” and “angels” are not the same *kind*; therefore, it would be difficult to understand that “God” was about to try to mix and mingle those two *kinds* in one creature in Genesis 1:26.

In fact, Paul declares in Ephesians 1:4-14 that “God” decided before the creation of the orderly universe (even before “God” had created the angels?) that *man* would become part of the “God” *kind* through Jesus Christ. In Hebrews 2:5-9, he shows through David’s words in Psalm 8:4-6 that man was created “a little lower than the angels.” Yet, even though man was created from dirt clods (angels were created from *spirit*), “God” planned to enable man to become His *kind*, but did not offer the same opportunity to the angels at any time (Hebrew 1:5, 13, 14). Thus, we are back to trying to explain the use of a *plural* noun in Genesis 1...but a more specific *singular* noun in Genesis 2:4.

In Genesis 3:22, *Elohim* is moving to prevent the newly created humans from acquiring access to *eternal life*. That means that “God” was not prepared at that point to move toward the ultimate conclusion of the process whereby mankind could be moved from the *nephesh kind* (Genesis 2:7; Hebrew = “living, breathing being” made of dirt clods) to the *Elohim kind*. The fact that man was originally made from clods of dirt demonstrates that “God” had not intended at the very outset of this “in *our* image” process to create man as an *incorruptible, immortal* creature. It indicates that “God” had a plan by which the creation of man in *Elohim’s* image would involve a *process* by which mankind would eventually fulfill the *potential* that “God” intended he

should reach. *Sin* put the process onto an entirely different path.

Elohim is not an expression of the royal “we” as expressed in the *plural of majesty*. John 1:1, Ephesians 1:4, and Philippians 2:5-11 take us back farther into pre-history than does Genesis 1:1. Therefore, we should pay attention to what they reveal about the “actual being” of *Elohim*.

So, we’re back to the prospect that two or more “Gods” were involved with the creation plan and process. Injecting the *Trinity* concept is a red herring that leads us away from the *truth* revealed in the entire scriptural record. The Hebrew religion did not have any such concept of “God.” The *Trinity* concept was imposed by “Christians” upon the account at a later date as a *compromise* for an argument about the nature of “God” millennia after Moses wrote the Genesis account. Other scriptural factors will reveal this to be true.

Conclusion

What we have seen in the above discussion is that you cannot definitively link *Elohim* to a *triune nature*. The “three-person” definition does not pass the “smell test.” We have also seen that a *plurality* known as *Elohim* was instrumental in creating all that exists. That means that at least two Beings were involved in this creative process. Knowing that, we can logically assume that *Yahweh Elohim* is a reference to one of those Beings who make up *Elohim*. If *Elohim* is only one “God” manifesting Himself in different ways, what would it mean to His *triune nature* if He added redeemed humans to His family? Will they all become *triune* in nature as well? Or, is this *triune* stuff merely the fruits of man’s vain imagination? The following articles will help you to understand the argument better.

“And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14)

Who Is *Yahweh Elohim?*

Why does Genesis 2:4 begin using the term LORD GOD (*Yahweh Elohim*) instead of *Elohim*? We have to take into consideration at least two New Testament scriptures in order to understand the revelation of this biblical truth: John 1:1-3, 14 and Philippians 2:5-11. This should be an eye-opener for those who claim to be *New Testament* “Christians.”

Did you ever wonder why Jesus Christ is often referred to as being *Lord* and *Savior*? That expression of His *Lordship* is found in numerous scriptures. Two examples will suffice: Mark 2:27, 28 and Revelation 1:10. Okay, add Matthew 7:21 and John 13:13. If you want a complete list, consult an exhaustive concordance. The idea is for you to understand that Jesus Christ is *Lord* and *Savior*. How does that relate to *Yahweh Elohim* as the LORD GOD?

A Historical Perspective

In the fourth century A.D., Arius (a deacon and presbyter in Alexandria, Egypt who was tutored by Lucian of Antioch) taught that Christ was a created being who was created out of nothing before all time. His heresy (as it was considered to be by orthodox “Christianity”) was supported among numerous bishops who had studied under Lucian. Eusebius of Nicomedia was one of them. This “Christian” heresy was known as *Arianism*.

Paul of Samosata, Bishop of Antioch, had been Lucian’s teacher. He was of a similar theological stripe and had been excommunicated in A.D. 269. What Paul taught was something of a Gnostic doctrine: Christ was man filled with God’s *Logos*, or *Power*. Lucian taught that the *Logos* was created before the creation of the world and that Christ was neither perfect man nor perfect God. Arius took the concept from there.

In A.D. 325, Emperor Constantine the Great (a Briton who was a devout sun worshiper) called 318 of the bishops of orthodox “Christianity” together at Nice (in Bithynia) to settle the issue about who/what “God” is. This meeting is known as the First Ecumenical Synod. What this august gathering of bishops agreed upon was essentially this: Scriptures teach that the Son is of

the same substance as the Father, and He was neither created nor is He subordinate to the Father. It is easy to understand the conclusion about His *substance*, but difficult to agree with them about Jesus Christ’s *subordination* to the Father.

The New Testament Revelation

In John 1:1-3, 14, we are confronted with the revelation that there were *two* God-beings *in the beginning*. They were not one-and-the-same Being. The one known as the “Word” *accompanied/sat alongside of* the one simply known as “God.” The one known as the “Word” created everything that exists. It was the “Word” that became *flesh* (v. 14). Genesis 1:1, then, reveals to us that the creation was a *cooperative* effort between two “God” Beings.

If you read Colossians 1:1-19, you will discover three remarkable statements in vv. 15-19: (1) All things were created *by* and *for* Jesus Christ (v. 16); (2) all things are held together by the power of Jesus Christ (v. 17); and (3) the *Father* (“God” in John 1:1, 2) allowed the *fullness of the Godhead* to dwell in Jesus Christ (see also 2:9, 10). We can understand this more fully when we read Matthew 28:18 and 1 Corinthians 15:24-28.

If we understand these two scriptures, then we can

understand Philippians 2:5-11 where the process by which Jesus Christ was given the authority to exercise the full power of the Godhead is explained. Then we can answer this question: Why do John 1:1-3, 14 and Philippians 2:5-11 make a distinction between “God” and the “Word God” (Jesus Christ)?

Philippians 2:5-11 lays out information about *pre-creation* history between these two God-beings (see John 17:5). This is where you can see the sharp distinction made between two *separate* Beings who were equal to one another in every way (v. 6). They were not in competition about who is in charge or who is the greater. Neither of them exhibited any type of jealousy or envy toward the other.

In John 10:30, Jesus says that He and the Father are *one*. The Greek term is *eis* (pronounced like the playing card *ace*). It is a numerical term. In John 10:30, it is used to express the unwavering *unity* (*oneness*) that exists between Jesus Christ and the Father. It does not mean that they are one-and-the-same Being as is posited in the *triune* concept of “God.” They are *separate, unique individuals*.

Verses 7 and 8 tell us that the one who became Jesus Christ *voluntarily subordinated* Himself to His fellow “God” in order to become “flesh” and provide a sacrifice for the sins of mankind. Creating a human with an independent mind presupposes the possibility that someone at some time will not conform to the intended outcome (that is, *God’s will*) of being *holy, blameless, and loving*. If any transgression occurs, then *death* will be the judgment against him/her (see Genesis 2:17 and Romans 6:23).

That *death* would involve being allowed to disintegrate back into the dust of the earth from which you were made and being given no remedy for ever being allowed to escape such a disintegration (Genesis 3:19). How would “God” salvage His plan if humankind became infested with the virus of *sin*? It is patently obvious that there must be a contingency plan to recover and remediate any who should make such a fatal mistake. No doubt on my part, this is the type of conversation that must have taken place as these two Beings discussed their plans for expanding their *kind*.

Hebrews 10:5 shows that the plan, therefore, involved creating a *body* in which this sacrifice could be made. Hebrews 2:14-18 demonstrates that it was decid-

ed that the one who became Jesus Christ would have a *human* body like the ones He was to create, and He would live among humans and participate in the human condition. This experience would enable Him to ultimately destroy *death* and the one who might bring the virus of sin among the human population (vv. 14, 15, 17, 18). In doing this, He did not come among humanity as an *angel* (v. 16). Hebrews 1:5-14 shows three important things: (1) that the one who became Jesus Christ was not originally an angel (some claim that He was originally Michael the Archangel), (2) that angels are *inferior* to the God kind, and (3) that *humans* are to be elevated *above* the angel kind (see also 2:5-13).

Philippians 2:9-11 shows that the fellow “God” presented His volunteering partner with a *quid pro quo* (“something given for something received”): He *exalted* the one who became Jesus Christ to a position higher than any other Being in existence except Himself. Paul expresses this quite well in 1 Corinthians 15:24-28 where he says that *all things* were put under the authority of the one who became Jesus Christ...*except the one who put all things under His feet* (vv. 27, 28). This was the point at which all of the power of the Godhead was vested in *Yahweh Elohim* to execute and bring to reality the plan that these two “Gods” had agreed upon.

All of this should help you to understand that *Yahweh Elohim* is, in fact, the one who became Jesus Christ. *Yahweh Elohim* is the one who is described in John 1:1-3 as the “Word” (Greek = *logos* – the one who is the *Spokesman*). You should understand that all of this power and authority did not fall upon Jesus Christ *after His resurrection from the dead* – just before He ascended to the Father’s right hand (Acts 1:9-11). It fell upon Him upon the conclusion of the pre-creation planning session and will continue until all things in heaven and on earth are reconciled to God the Father (Colossians 1:20). Once that planning session concluded, He set about creating all that has been created (Colossians 1:16). He is the *Yahweh Elohim* who created man from the dust of the earth and breathed into him the breath of life (Genesis 2:7).

If you follow the Old Testament from Genesis to Malachi, you will find that most of the references to the LORD GOD are to this *Yahweh Elohim*. He is the *Lord of the Sabbath* (Mark 2:27, 28). He is the one who married Israel (Isaiah 1:1-9; Jeremiah 3; Ezekiel 16; Hosea 2). He is the one who created the Law and gave it to Moses. He told the Jews in John 5:36-39 that the Father sent Him to do a work among mankind and the scrip-

tures (in this case, the Old Testament) *testify* (are a legitimate witness) about **Him!** It should be obvious to the critical reader that *Yahweh Elohim* is a unique individual within *Elohim*. Let's see how that is revealed.

“I and my Father are One.” (John 10:30)

Why does Jesus Christ say in John 10:30 that He and the Father are **one**....but the Greek word that is used as **one** does not mean “one-and-the-same”? This is not as mysterious as some might otherwise like to make it. It is not an admission by Jesus Christ that He was the one and only “God” in existence who had vacated His throne in heaven to assume another “face,” or role, on the earth in the flesh.

Here's about the best explanation that mainstream “Christianity” has offered to explain the *Trinity* concept. It is said that the mention of “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” in Matthew 28:19 “naturally” leads one to believe in the concept. *Really?* Then comes the explanation about the use of *analogies* to make something easier to understand. This approach is based on the idea that if people reject the *Trinitarian* concept of “God,” they do so because they do not really know what it means.

The *analogy* that best fits the situation is assumed to be this: An author has an idea for a book. He writes the book and has it published. People read the book and are influenced through the ages by the ideas presented in it (Idea, Book, Influence – three separate realities that are not really separate). In the term “God,” they say, we have: (1) the *creative power of God*, (2) *materializing* as Jesus Christ, and (3) the *influence of Jesus Christ* throughout the centuries thereafter. They add that we cannot say which came first because the reality of “God” is that “God” is manifested in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. I'm sure that this *analogy* makes the concept crystal clear...(NOT!).

Another reference is to 1 Peter 1:2 – which is compared to 2 Thessalonians 2:13, 14, where Paul makes reference to *God, Jesus Christ*, and the *Holy Spirit*. The commentator says:

This is as yet “the trinity of experience,” out of which sprang the later dogma [theological doctrine]. The early Christians found by experience that they could not express all that they meant by the word “God” till they said “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” (*The Interpreter's Bible*; vol. 12;

pp. 89, 90)

For me personally, I would respond with an apt analogy: That explanation provides as much satisfaction as eating an egg white, grits, or rice without salt (Job 6:6).

The Importance of the Greek Term ***eis***

The Greek term ***eis*** is the easiest to explain. There are two terms in Greek that are ***eis***: one is a *preposition*, and the other is a *number*. In the case of John 10:30, we are dealing with a *number*. The number has several definitions, but the definition with which we are concerned is the one that makes a distinction of ***one*** in contrast to the ***whole*** ***or*** the one that means “one-and-the-same.”

“Endeavoring to keep the ***unity of the Spirit*** in the bond of peace....Till we all come in the ***unity of the faith and knowledge*** of the Son of God....” (Ephesians 4:3). This is the type of ***oneness*** expressed in ***eis***, even though it is a different Greek term from ***eis***.

To illustrate the difference, consider the use of ***eis*** in Matthew 19:5. While it is true that a man and his wife can constitute something that is *one-and-the-same* (like a *collective noun* would do for a *couple*: “John and Mary are a couple”), it is patently obvious that they are *separate* individuals who have become a ***unity*** (see Genesis 2:21-24). The same is true of Paul's statements in 1 Corinthians 6:16, 17 and 12:12. So, there is a context in which “one-and-the-same” is applicable to a relationship, yet...we must make a distinction between the *single* entity and the *whole* entity within that relationship. The members of a *team* are not one-and-the-same *person*, but they act in *unity* to achieve the *team's* purpose.

John 10:30; 17:11, 21-23 must be understood in that regard. If you can grasp Jesus' use of ***eis*** in John 17:11, then it should not be difficult to understand John 10:30. Note 17:11: “...that ***they*** [that is, the individual members of the Church body] may be ***one***, as ***we*** [that is, as the Father and Son] are [one]” (emphasis added). Is there any doubt that the ***oneness*** of which Jesus speaks in John 17:11, 21-23 is a type of ***unity*** among the ***individual members*** of a ***whole body***? Try this: Wherever the term ***one*** is used in these verses, replace it with ***in unity***....then read Ephesians 4:3-7 with ***unity of the Spirit*** in

mind (v. 3). If you can understand that, can you, then, understand that John 10:30 refers to that same kind of *unity of Spirit* (“...as we are”)?

Jesus said in Matthew 11:27 that He was the only one at that time who knew the Father...and He had come to reveal the Father to whomever He chose to reveal Him. That suggests that the people of the Old Testament were generally unaware of the existence of this other member of *Elohim*.

Here’s the next question: Why do Matthew 24:36 and 1 Corinthians 15:24-28 present the Father and Son as two *separate* Beings? Notice in Matthew 24:36 how Jesus Christ admits that God the Father has knowledge that Jesus does not have – knowledge that involves Jesus in the future. You would think that a single God who plays three different roles would not be able to hide such knowledge among those “faces.” Paul adds to the mystery by showing that Jesus Christ acts *independently* of the Father in reconciling all things in heaven and on earth to the Father. Once that is done, Jesus returns to the Father all of the power and authority He had been given (Matthew 28:18; Philippians 2:5-11). How can one “face” return power to another “face” if they are one-and-the-same Being?

Even while Jesus has all power in heaven and earth, He admits in John 14:28: “...I go to the Father because my Father is greater than I.” This gives us two more important pieces of information: (1) If Jesus has to go to the Father, then He is admitting that they are not one-and-the-same Being; (2) If “God” is a single Being playing three different roles, how can one role be greater than another? *Greater* is a comparison made between two things. Perhaps the answer is made more apparent when you read John 17. Is Jesus praying to Himself? It would make little sense to claim that “God” is one single being if Jesus (“God with us”; Matthew 1:23) is praying to a “God” in heaven.

Understanding the Use of the Greek Term *hypostases*

Because the word *trinity* cannot be found anywhere in scripture, what is called “orthodox Christianity” (originally driven by Roman Catholicism) sought a means by which the nature of “God” could be explained. Part

of the problem stemmed from what has generally been considered the *monotheistic* credo of Deuteronomy 6:4 – translated to read: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord.” Historically, that idea was firmly implanted in the faith of Israel, and...that is one reason that Jesus Christ presented such a problem to Judaism. If there is only one God, how could He claim to be the Son of God? Such a claim expands “God” beyond mono [one] theism [godness]. How can you admit Jesus’ claim without contradicting the credo?

In the original Nicene Council, the term *hypostases* was used as a compromise attempt to explain the *essence* or *substance* of the *Triune* God. Where did they get the idea that there existed any such *essence* or *substance* of “God”? The conversation and subsequent compromise were predicated on an effort to unite all of the various descriptions of “God” held by various factions and heresies in “Christianity” into one single confession of faith. That is historical fact.

In the historical milieu at the time of Jesus, there was information given about a “Father” and a “Holy Spirit.” They (that is, orthodox “Christianity”) compared that idea to a philosophical concept of man as consisting of body, soul, and spirit (his mind power). Matthew 10:28 has been used to try to validate that concept of “God” and to claim that such a *trinity* concept exists in various ways in creation. Orthodox “Christianity” believed, therefore, that the evidence was there for a more comprehensive definition of “God”: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Here’s the catch: If there were these three different “faces” (*hypostases*) of “God,” then they must be subsumed under the banner of a single God-being (*monotheism*) as prescribed, supposedly, by Deuteronomy 6:4.

It should be evident that the identity of *Yahweh Elohim* could have been significant in the development of the best definition of “God.” Why so? Think about the enormous number of references in the Old Testament to the LORD GOD. Some translators render it *the Eternal*, or *God the Eternal* (Moffat). *The Anchor Bible* renders it *God Yahweh*, while *The Jerusalem Bible* renders it *Yahweh Elohim* and *Yahweh* (a shortened form).

Dr. C. I. Scofield refers to Him as *Jehovah Elohim* in his *Scofield Reference Bible* (KJV). In his notes for Genesis 2:4, he includes the following information:

- LORD (*Jehovah*) means “the self-existent one who reveals Himself.”

● *Elohim* is a plural noun – *El* and *Elah* being the singular forms.

● *Jehovah* is distinctly the redemptive name of this singular personage in *Elohim*. As such, there are seven names that describe the redemptive nature of this Being: (1) *Jehovah-jireh* – “the Lord will provide”; (2) *Jehovah-rapha* – “the Lord that heals”; (3) *Jehovah-nissi* – “the Lord our banner”; (4) *Jehovah-Shalom* – “the Lord our peace” (or, “send peace”); (5) *Jehovah-ra-ah* – “the Lord our shepherd”; (6) *Jehovah-tsidkenu* – “the Lord our righteousness”; and (7) *Jehovah-shammah* – “the Lord is present.”

All of these names are descriptive of the *offices of service* held by Jesus Christ as He executes the power and authority assigned to Him by the Father.

You can find a New Testament basis for this in Acts 4:12: “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved” (emphases added). Clearly, that is the *redemptive* office held by Jesus Christ. You can add Malachi 4:2 as a prophecy relating to His identity as *Jehovah-rapha*: “...The Sun of righteousness shall come with healing in His wings” (emphases added).

In the New Testament, *LORD* is translated from the Greek term *kurios* that is derived from the Old Testament usages. Mark 2:27, 28 is an example of this when Jesus refers to Himself as the *Lord* of the seventh-day Sabbath. The term *kurios* is indicative that such an individual is the owner and controller of certain possessions (see Colossians 1:16, 17) and *master/ruler* in control of territories and subjects (Daniel 7:13, 14; Revelation 11:15). In the Revelation reference, the *Father* is referred to as *Lord* by the “voices” in heaven because He is the “head” of Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 11:3). After Jesus Christ has subdued all of God’s enemies, He will turn everything over to the Father (1 Corinthians 15:24-28; Revelation 21:1-4).

Another definition of hypostases (plural form of *hypostasis*) is “actual being.” Some, in the “spirit” of defining “God” as a *trinity*, have given an odd addition to the definitions. They call the above three characteristics “faces” – because, they claim, they indicate three separate “personages” within a single Being. It is as though this single “God” assumes the role of a specific character according to whatever He is involved in at the moment: “God” acting as Father; “God” acting as Son

and Savior; “God” acting as guiding, teaching Spirit. At best, when compared to scriptural revelation, it is a clumsy attempt to interpret properly who/what “God” actually is.

The Apostle John writes an interesting statement in John 1:18: “No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him” (see also 1 John 4:12). The expression “only begotten” tells us two things: (1) Jesus Christ was unique in all of creation to have been God-become-flesh, and (2) He was *especially loved by God the Father*.

Piecing Together the Revelation

Let’s review what we have seen thus far:

1. *Elohim* (Genesis 1) is a plural noun – what we in the English language refer to as a *collective noun* like group, family, team, church, et cetera.

2. *Yahweh Elohim* (Genesis 2:4 and following) is the name of a single, unique individual in the *Elohim* family. Although He is a separate Being from the one known as the “Father,” He is in total unity with Him in the will and plan they have agreed upon (John 10:30; Ephesians 1:4-14).

3. *Yahweh Elohim* is a *redemptive* name. Clearly, the Father is as interested in the salvation of mankind as is Jesus Christ. Otherwise, why would He sign off on a plan to expand the *Elohim* family? We have seen the evidence that the responsibility for the plan of salvation was specifically assigned to *Yahweh Elohim*.

4. *Yahweh Elohim* voluntarily gave up His equal rank with the “Father” and agreed to become a human being for the purpose of providing an atoning sacrifice for any sins humans might commit (Philippians 2:5-8; Hebrews 10:5). So, Jesus Christ was *Yahweh Elohim* in the flesh.

5. *Yahweh Elohim*, before He came in the flesh, was given unrestricted authority and power to

put into effect and bring to reality the plan that He and the “Father” laid out before the creation of the orderly universe (Matthew 28:18; Philipians 2:9-11).

6. Attempts to define “God” have overlooked vital scriptural revelations about the true nature of “God.” Because of that, many doctrines that were supposed to define the true *essence*, or “actual being” of “God,” have been incomplete, syncretic, and lacking in true substance.

We are left, therefore, to search the scriptural record to see what God has placed there as the revelation of His *actual being*. Let’s piece together those revelations.

How can I defend the scriptural claim in John 1:18 that there is a “God” who *has not* been seen? Read Exodus 24 as one example among many where the LORD GOD (*Yahweh Elohim*) was both *seen* and *heard*. Read Genesis 32:24-32 where Jacob saw, spoke to, and wrestled with “God”: “...*I have seen God face to face*, and my life is preserved” (emphases added). You can see similar statements in Exodus 33:11; Numbers 14:14; and Deuteronomy 5:4; 34:10. **John the Baptist** brought it up. He was a prophet of God.

In order to avoid getting bogged down in a long, drawn-out dissertation, I will “cut to the chase.” The Apostle John writes an interesting statement by John the Baptist in John 1:18: “No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him” (see also 1 John 4:12). The expression “only begotten” tells us two things: (1) Jesus Christ was unique in all of creation to have been God-become-flesh, and (2) He was *specialily loved by God the Father*.

You can see an example of this in Hebrews 11:17 where Isaac is called Abraham’s *only begotten son*. We know that Abraham fathered Ishmael before he fathered Isaac. We also know that Abraham remarried after Sarah’s death and fathered six more sons with his wife Keturah. Isaac was Abraham’s *legal heir* and, therefore, in a very special position relative to Abraham.

John also describes Jesus as being “in the bosom of the Father.” That is not a claim that Jesus and the Father are one-and-the-same being. It is descriptive of a relationship of the deepest intimacy. The entire statement tells us that the Father has *never been seen* in any shape, form, or fashion. Jesus’ own statement in John 5:37 adds to this piece of the puzzle: “You have neither *heard* [the Father’s] *voice* at any time, nor *seen His shape*” (emphases added). The Father has never been seen in any shape, size, or description.

While you can argue that Jesus was referring to the crowd then present, that statement, coupled with John 1:18, presents a more complete picture of man’s historical relationship with the Father. Jesus says in Matthew 11:27 that He was the only one at that time who knew the Father...and He had come to *reveal* the Father to whomever He chose to reveal Him. That suggests that the people of the Old Testament were generally unaware of the existence of this member of *Elohim*.

How can I defend such claims in the face of the historical claim by mainstream Christianity that “God” is a single Being who plays three separate roles relative to mankind? I invite you to read Exodus 24 as one example among many where the LORD GOD (*Yahweh Elohim*) was both seen and heard. I invite you to read Genesis 32:24-32 where Jacob saw, spoke to, and wrestled with “God”: “...*I have seen God face to face*, and my life is preserved” (emphases added). You can see similar statements in Exodus 33:11; Numbers 14:14; and Deuteronomy 5:4; 34:10.

What does this mean? Simply this: Either Jesus is a liar, or there is a member of the *Elohim* Godhead who had never been seen nor heard by mankind. Jesus came to *reveal* His existence! You also must remember that *Yahweh Elohim* is the member of the *Elohim* godhead who *reveals Himself*. If that is true – and I have no reason to doubt it – then the LORD GOD of the Old Testament was not the “Father.” He was the one who became Jesus Christ. That means that *Yahweh Elohim* was the one who made the covenant with Abraham and the metaphoric “marriage” covenant with Israel based on the Ten Commandments. How does that help us in understanding Deuteronomy 6:4? We’ll cover that ground in the next article.

“Yahweh, our Elohim, is our only Yahweh.” (Deuteronomy 6:4)

The Shema:

“Hear, O Israel...”

(Deuteronomy 6:4)

The Interpreter's Bible admits that the language in Deuteronomy 6:4 (“The Lord our God is One Lord”) is somewhat *enigmatic* (baffling or perplexing) because of the variety of possible translations. The Hebrew simply says: “*Yahweh, our Elohim, Yahweh, one.*” The one thing that *Interpreter's* makes clear is that *Yahweh* is mentioned twice in connection with *Elohim*. The *Revised Standard Version* of the Bible offers three possible translations: (1) “The Lord our God, the Lord is *one*”; (2) “The Lord *is our God*, the Lord is one”; and (3) “The Lord is our God, *the Lord alone*” (emphases added).

Interpreter's says that the *meaning* is clear...although the English translation is not – which is a bit puzzling if that conclusion is based on an *enigmatic* expression. How can you derive a *clear* meaning from a *baffling* or *perplexing* statement? Based on the *RSV* variants, *Interpreter's* concludes that the essential idea is that “...Israel's exclusive *attention, affection, and worship* (cf. vs. 5) is *not diffuse* but *single*” (vol. 2; pp. 372, 373; emphases added). Notice that they did not conclude that the essential meaning has to do with *monotheism* as it is commonly understood. That quote is easy to understand *clearly* when you consider the focus of Exodus 20:1-11: The *10 Commandments* are the legal bases for *Yahweh Elohim's* metaphoric “marriage” to Israel (Exodus 34:29; Deuteronomy 9:11). There is a way to understand the declaration of the *Shema* more clearly.

Yahweh Elohim's “Marriage” to Israel

Exodus 19:1-8 recounts the initiation of the covenant agreement between Israel and *Yahweh Elohim*. *The NIV Study Bible* identifies this covenant as a “Suzerain-vassal” covenant. In this covenant, there is a *conditional* divine pledge made by *Yahweh Elohim* to be Israel's God, her Protector, and her Guarantor of a blessed destiny as His “peculiar treasure...above all people” (v. 5). They would be to Him “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (v. 6). This “favored nation” status would be conditioned upon the following: (1) Israel would totally consecrate herself to Him as His *kingdom*; (2) they would live by His rules; and (3) they would serve His holy purpose throughout history (*NIV*; p. 19 under “Sinaitic” [covenant]). Many prophetic writings (examples: Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Amos, and others) refer to this as a “marriage” between *Yahweh Elohim* and Israel.

Exodus 20:1-10 lays out the premise that *Yahweh Elohim* is not willing to share His relationship with Israel with any other so-called “gods.” Why? Because that relationship is not *diffuse* but *single*, then it would have to do with committing *adultery* against Him if they got cozy with other “gods” (see Jeremiah 3:8, 9; 5:7; 7:9; 13:27 and others). This relates to what Jesus refers to in Matthew 22:36-38 (quoted from Deuteronomy 6:5) – that is, loving God with all your heart, soul, and mind (might). If you do that, then there is no room for you to get cozy with other “gods” (which, by the way, are generally the imaginations of men). The expression “the Lord is *one*” is widely understood to focus also on *Yahweh's* uniqueness and difference.

Given the understanding about *Yahweh* that I have shown above, I would favor the translation that says: “*Yahweh* is our God, *Yahweh* alone.” Why? It has to do with the “marriage” concept in Genesis 2:24 and the Suzerain-vassal type covenant in which “love” of the

Suzerain consists of total loyalty and service (John 14:15; Romans 13:10). Because it is *conditional*, the Suzerain reserves the right to impose sanctions on those who violate the terms of the covenant – ultimately including “divorcing” them and expelling them from his lands. He is not *obligated* to restore the covenant just because the vassals realize that they have made a grave mistake and want to change their thoughts and ways.

With the translation that affirms that the relationship is with “*Yahweh alone*,” I would not be defending the doctrine of *monotheism*. I would be admitting the bases of a metaphoric “marriage” covenant. I would be taking a hint from Yahweh Elohim’s own play book as laid out in Genesis 2:18-24. When He determined to create a “marriage” partner for Adam, He was concerned that the relationship should be *monogamous*: one man and one woman – “forsaking all others for him/her alone.” In other words, Israel was not being “married” to the one otherwise known as the “Father.” She was being married to the one who later became flesh as Jesus Christ. Read Jeremiah 3 and 4 and Ezekiel 16 to get the idea.

Paul’s statement in 2 Corinthians 11:1-4 and John’s statement in Revelation 19:6-9 must be understood in the context of Romans 7:1-6 – in which Paul discusses the idea that the sinner is “married” to *sin*. Both the sinner (who wants to be “joined” to Jesus Christ) and Jesus Christ (who wants to “marry” the Church) must have “died” to the law of God (which *Yahweh Elohim* gave to Israel) that governs “marriage” and “divorce” (see Exodus 20:14 and Matthew 19:3-9). Such a death does not do away with the Law itself; it satisfies the demands of the Law regarding *divorce* and *re-marriage*.

It is clear in the prophetic books cited above that He became weary of Israel’s adulteries and “divorced” her. It is equally clear in Hebrews 6:4–8 that He is not *obligated* to take her back as His “wife.” However, the prophetic books of Hosea and Amos declare that He is intent on doing just that. Isaiah 1:9 and Romans 11 make it equally clear that He has reserved for Himself enough of a remnant of Israel to make that possible (see Romans 11:1-7). The disciples and other faithful Israelites provided the “holy root” of the “Bride of Christ” – the *New Testament* Israel (see Jeremiah 31:31-34).

Yahweh Elohim’s “marriage” to *Israel* was the symbolic shadow of His “marriage” to the *Church* – the spiritually restored Israel whom He swore to recover and take again as His wife (see Hosea 2:14-23; Romans 11:15, 25-36; Jeremiah 31:31-34; Matthew 26:26-29). The Gentiles who are “grafted in” will be considered as

genuine Israelites – just as any natural-born Israelite is *genuine* (see Exodus 12:43-50). That is what Paul means in Romans 11:16-24 when he shows that the Gentiles are being grafted into the *holy root* (Romans 11:1-6; Isaiah 1:9). That *holy root* is what has become the True Church of Jesus Christ.

Neither “marriage” is to God the Father. The *Shema* of Deuteronomy 6:4 is related to the “marriage” of *Yahweh Elohim* to *physical* Israel – who did not know of the existence of the “Father” until Jesus Christ came to *reveal* Him. The “God” (*Elohim*) who *revealed* Himself to Israel was *Yahweh Elohim*. In essence, Jesus Christ, in the person of *Yahweh Elohim*, was the only “God” Israel knew. This is, no doubt, the basis for His statement in John 5:39: “Search the scriptures; for in them you think you have eternal life: and *they* [the Old Testament scriptures] are they that *testify of me*” (emphases added). We must consider the various contexts in which Jesus Christ is revealed in the Old Testament.

With the translation that affirms that the relationship is with “*Yahweh alone*,” I would not be defending the doctrine of *monotheism*. I would be admitting the bases of a metaphoric “marriage” covenant.

Taking *Yahweh Elohim*’s Name in Vain

Let me say up front that the following discussion is out of the scope of most discussions about Exodus 20:3-7, but it is well within the larger meaning of those first three commandments – if the above discussion about His “marriage” to Israel is a valid account of the covenant agreement. In other words, the focus of the third commandment is squarely on how one “takes” His name for whatever purpose they do so. The offer made to Israel in Exodus 19:5-8 is one by which Israel would, in effect, “take” *Yahweh Elohim*’s *name* to be *His* people who would be a “...peculiar treasure...above all [other] people.” This is no different from Christians “taking” the name of Jesus Christ upon themselves.

Part of that covenant agreement stipulates that Israel will not use His *name* for vain purposes – that is, for selfish, personal purposes rather than for the holy, righteous purposes of the agreement into which they were entering (see Deuteronomy 4:5-9). Central to the relationship is that Israel will “love” *Yahweh Elohim* supremely and demonstrate that “love” by obeying the 10

legal requirements for maintaining that relationship (see Matthew 22:36-40). Four of these Commandments regulate their relationship with Yahweh Elohim, and six of them regulate relations among the “body” of Israel. The adherence to the “rules of the relationship” with Him is demonstrated by not having any kind of relationship with other “gods,” not making images of other “gods,” and not bowing in worship of them or service to them. That is the focus of the *Shema*. Deuteronomy 12:29-32 and Jeremiah 10 are two Old Testament examples of these laws. Matthew 7:21-23 and 2 Corinthians 6:14-18 are two New Testament examples of these laws.

Yahweh Elohim's “marriage” to Israel was the symbolic shadow of His “marriage” to the Church – the spiritually restored Israel whom He swore to recover and take again as His wife (see Hosea 2:14-23; Romans 11:15, 25-36; Jeremiah 31:31-34; Matthew 26:26-29).

Ask yourself what you should do about traditional “Christian” doctrines that mix and mingle paganism into scriptural concepts...if you know and understand the point of the following quote:

Augustine said that Socrates, antedating Christianity by five hundred years and feeding his mind on the contemplation of the mean attributes, *the poor and empty moral and spiritual natures, the pagan gods*, was as grand a Christian as any Churchly saint or martyr. And he said that the *pagan brand of Christianity* was as lofty and pure a type of it as the kind he knew. He himself [that is, Augustine] received the Christian doctrine of the *Trinity* from Plotinus [a pagan philosopher], who had fed his mind on the attributes of the *pagan divinities* and was steeped in Hellenistic rational religion and esotericism.

...If Christian mental clarity and moral purity were of so uniquely superior a quality above all *paganism*, why for some twelve subsequent centuries did the schools of Christian theologians have to go back to two *pagan thinkers*, Plato and Aristotle, to discover the principles of truth and organic rational structure upon which they could base any dialectical systematization of *Christian* theology itself? The mind that was in Jesus

Christ was apparently not substantial enough or not capably enough known to save Christianity the need of partaking of the mind that was in Plato and Aristotle! Many a claim of cloistered theologians is belied in the record of history. (Alvin Boyd Kuhn, *Who is this King of Glory?*; Elizabeth, NJ: Academy Press, 1944; pp. 282, 283; emphases added)

Kuhn was not a Christian. He was a *pagan* who believed that Christianity is the greatest *pagan* religion on earth...and that it could be even greater if it would simply admit its *pagan roots!*

This is an extraordinary example of how the first three commandments have been violated by those who take the name of “God” (that is, *Yahweh Elohim*) in vain. You cannot draw a line in history where either the Father or Jesus Christ ever abolished or annulled the covenant law – the New Covenant being based on the same 10 legal/spiritual principles as the Old Covenant. In fact, Jesus Christ said as much in Matthew 5:17-19. His point is that the Law and the Prophets contain information about “God’s” plans that *cannot be negated* – they have to be *fulfilled*. What does that mean?

We can look at Isaiah 55:10, 11 and see that Yahweh Elohim claims that He does not utter words in vain, but He causes them *to accomplish the purpose for which they are uttered*. You also can get the sense of this in Luke 24:44 where Jesus Christ told His disciples: “While I was with you, I told you that *all things* that were written *about me* in the law of Moses, in the prophets, and in the psalms *must be fulfilled*” (emphases added). *All of that was not fulfilled merely by His dying on the cross*. There is much that is not presently fulfilled.

In other words, the Old Testament was about *Him*; so, all that was set out as the plan that He is executing *must be fulfilled as planned* without change or abandonment (see Deuteronomy 12:32) – especially by mixing and mingling it with *paganism*. If you do such a thing, then you will have taken His name for *vain purposes*. In the bargain, you will have violated the covenant and become open to sanctions and/or expulsion and/or death (read again Matthew 7:21-23).

Romans 1:18-32

Please understand this point clearly: The New Testament makes a distinction between the Father and Jesus

Christ. Sometimes the Father is referred to simply as “God.” For examples: In 1 Corinthians 8:6, Paul says: “...To us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by Him.” Paul is not promoting a *triune* concept of “God” here – as many claim. He is making a distinction between the Father and the Son as unique, individual Beings. He does a similar thing in 1 Timothy 2:5: “...There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Jesus Christ.” Paul is not declaring that there is one “God” who plays *three different roles*. If that was his point, where is his mention of the Holy Spirit?

Some claim to have the solution to that query by citing 1 Peter 1:2, which is directed to those in the *diaspora* who are called: “...The elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ” (see also Matthew 28:19). Does the mention of the three together “prove” the *triune* nature of “God”? No.

As you will see in another section of this article, the Father *draws* men to Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the means by which *salvation* is possible. The Holy Spirit is the power of God by which repentant man is set aside for holy purposes and identified as God’s “property” (see Acts 2:38, 1 Corinthians 6:19, 20, and Ephesians 1:4-14). Mentioning in a single sentence the *three elements* by which our salvation is made possible is not “proof” of *monotheistic Trinitarianism*. With that in mind, we can now discuss Romans 1:18-32.

If you want to get a good picture of a failing covenant at work, this part of scripture provides it in stark language. If you want to get a good indication of God’s reaction to covenant breaking, then Paul provides that picture here in “living color.” He addresses the central issue in v. 18: God exercises His wrath against “...*all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men...*” (emphases added). Why? Because such ungodliness and unrighteousness *suppresses* His truth. God has made His existence and His character traits known to mankind in a variety of ways – especially in what has been created (vv. 19, 20). Therefore, *all* are without excuse.

Instead of worshiping *Him* as God, they became self-infatuated and created “God” in their own image, and, in the process, they reduced Him to an image that is more like the creature than the Creator that He truly is. Genesis 1:26-31 is the first vestige of a *covenant* that was offered to humans once they were created. In v. 28, it says

that *Elohim blessed* (that is, gave *divine favor* to) mankind once they were created. In that blessing, they were given duties and responsibilities. Yahweh Elohim, the Being who actually created everything (John 1:1-3; Colossians 1:16), would have been the one who explained to the first man and his wife the conditions of the covenant. This is the point at which *Elohim* was going to initiate the *Kingdom of God* and begin the process by which man would be added to the *Elohim kind* (see Matthew 25:34 and Ephesians 1:4-14).

We can tell by Genesis 2:16, 17 that Adam was told by *Yahweh Elohim* (before Eve had been created) the penalty for violating the terms of the covenant. This indicates that this was a *Suzerain-vassal* covenant – a *conditional* covenant. (You can study this more completely in Lesson 4 of our free downloadable *Bible Study Course*.) As explained above, the vassal could be sanctioned and/or expelled from the land and/or summarily executed for non-compliance.

In 1 Peter 1:2, the mention in a single sentence of the *three elements* by which our salvation is made possible *is not* “proof” of *monotheistic Trinitarianism*.

Genesis 3:1-7 is the account that shows how man actually broke the covenant agreement and “worshiped” the *creature* rather than the *Creator*. By subtlety and subterfuge, Satan was able to bring about a *coup d’etat* by bringing the human head of the *Kingdom* under his control. What this amounted to was simple: Satan now became the “god” of this world (2 Corinthians 4:3, 4). They, in essence, “married” Satan and his system.

Since Satan was a *created* being who had become perverted (see Isaiah 14:12-15 and Ezekiel 28:12-19), this is the point at which they exchanged *God’s truth* for a *lie* and began worshiping and serving the creature rather than the Creator (Romans 1:25). As per Genesis 2:17, *Elohim’s* reaction could have been the summary execution of Adam and Eve. However, *Elohim* had a *contingency plan* in place that would be executed and administered by *Yahweh Elohim* – a plan by which mankind could be *redeemed* and brought to *salvation*. But... what would be done to mankind in the meantime? Paul provides the answer in Romans 1:18-32.

In vv. 24, 26, and 28, Paul uses an expression that is somewhat odd if not understood correctly. It is as if God decided to make an object lesson out of the situa-

tion: Let man see the great *disadvantage* between living under the sway of Satan and their own moral judgments rather than that of God. Paul says that "...God gave them up/over to...". What this means is very telling: God decided to allow mankind to experience the "fruit" of their sins. What would a *kingdom* be like if: (a) the True God is out of the picture; (b) an adversarial spirit is in charge; and (c) the results of man's sins are allowed to be heaped upon him without any checks or balances or interventions by God? What would *that* "marriage" be like?

You can see that the results are an eventual total breakdown of social and sexual values (v. 24). This will eventually bring about rampant perversions (vv. 26, 27). As the sins multiply – sin giving rise to more and more sins – the mental faculties and abilities of mankind to be truly wise will degenerate to the point that the reprobate (unprincipled; depraved) mind will be the rule rather than the exception (vv. 28-31). The world will become awash with all manner of social, moral, and sexual perversions to the point that it will deserve to be *destroyed* (v. 32). In fact, it could destroy itself!

Paul rejoins this conversation in Romans 8:20, 21 by revealing that the creation was also subjected to *vanity* and the *bondage of corruption*. What does this mean? It's relatively simple: (a) *vanity* means "emptiness, futility, purposelessness, transitoriness"; and (b) *bondage of corruption* means "slavery/servitude to evil, depravity, decay, and degeneration." Together, this presents an awful picture of being subject to a *temporary* existence *dominated* by the forces of evil – to a seemingly endless stream of *purposeless futility*...a style of life that leads nowhere because it is not supported by a Being who can perpetuate it beyond the grave to which it is going.

The incident in Genesis 14:18-20 demonstrates that the *subordination* of *Yahweh Elohim* to His divine Partner was in effect during Abraham's day – and, as we have seen, this is congruent with the Philippians 2:5-11 account, which shows that His *subordination* began *before* the creation of the heavens and earth (Ephesians 1:4).

Yahweh Elohim was offering Israel an exemption from all of that if she would accept the conditions of His covenant "marriage." She did accept the terms of the covenant twice (Exodus 19:8; 24:7), but she very early violated them (Exodus 32). (You can get a more com-

plete explanation of this in our free downloadable book *God: Accused or Defended?*, chapters 10 and 12.)

What does this teach us about taking *Yahweh Elohim's* name in vain? About surrendering to other "gods" instead of remaining in a *singular* relationship with Him? About trying to mix and mingle *paganism* (1 Corinthians 6:19, 20; 10:20-22) with God's truth? We have seen in many instances where those who would be called by the name of *Christ* have done exactly that. Are we so naive that we think that we can get away with it *unscathed*? That is the sense and seriousness of the *Shema* in Deuteronomy 6:4, 5. It is a clarion call to submit to the covenant agreement about being His peculiar people (see 1 Peter 2:5-9).

Is the Father to be Worshiped as *God*?

The next logical question, I suppose, is whether or not the Father should be worshiped as "God." After all, if *Yahweh Elohim* established the Law whereby Israel was not permitted to worship any other God, that would *seem* to make it unlawful to worship the Father. This, however, is not the case. The *Shema* of Deuteronomy 6:4 is about the "marriage" covenant between Israel and *Yahweh Elohim*. You have to understand the much broader objective that the *Word* and His companion had in mind when They set forth their plan to expand Their *kind* (Genesis 1:26-28; John 1:1-3).

In John 6:44, 65, Jesus Christ explains part of the present role of God the Father: He is the one who *draws men to Jesus Christ*. Why? For the purpose of salvation (remember Acts 4:12 and John 10:1-18). Did Jesus Christ come to draw attention to *Himself*? No. Matthew 11:27 explains that it is through Jesus Christ that the Father is revealed to mankind ("...he to whomsoever the Son will *reveal* Him"). There are several reasons why this is done in this manner:

1. When *Yahweh Elohim* divested Himself of His *equal* status with His divine Partner (Philippians 2:5-8), He accepted the position of a *subordinate* (see also John 15:10).
2. Because He became a *subordinate*, He was in a position where it was possible for Him to say: "The Father is *greater* than I" (John 14:28-31). Ephesians 1:2, 3 describes the resultant relationship as follows: The Father is our God, and Je-

sus Christ is our Lord (v. 2); The Father is both the *Father* and *God* of Jesus Christ (v. 3). It should be obvious, therefore, that the Father is our God and Jesus Christ is our Lord.

3. Jesus admitted that the Father had sent Him and told Him what message to deliver to mankind (John 12:49, 50). This puts *Yahweh Elohim* in the role as the *Logos* (Spokesman) in John 1:1-3. This is a *subordinate* position to the Father.

4. Although He was vested with great authority and power (Matthew 28:18; Philippians 2:9-11), *Yahweh Elohim/Jesus Christ* was/is still in a *subordinate* position to the Father (1 Corinthians 15:24-28).

5. Jesus taught His disciples to pray to the Father: Matthew 6:9-15 and John 15:16 are two examples out of many.

These reasons help us to understand why the Father is referred to as the *Ancient of Days* (Daniel 7:13) and *Most High God* (Genesis 14:18-20). These are titles that designate the Father's status *above* the Son (notice the *subordinate position* of the *Son* to the *Father*).

Melchizedek (note the description in Hebrews 7:1-4) was the *priest* of the *Most High God*. In essence, Paul discusses the identity of *Melchizedek* in Hebrews 7 – He was *Jesus Christ* in His *pre-incarnational* form: that is *Yahweh Elohim*. This incident in Genesis 14:18-20 demonstrates that the *subordination* of *Yahweh Elohim* to His divine Partner was in effect during Abraham's day – and, as we have seen, this is congruent with the Philippians 2:5-11 account, which shows that His *subordination* began *before* the creation of the heavens and earth (Ephesians 1:4).

Conclusion

The point of the above discussion was to demonstrate that the *Shema* is not a basic “proof” of *monotheism*. Rather, it is part and parcel to the “marriage” covenant concluded between *Yahweh Elohim* and Israel. That covenant was not a “marriage” between Israel and *God the Father*; it was between Israel and the one who became Jesus Christ.

Israel violated the conditions of the covenant by committing “adulteries” with pagan gods and pagan nations. She took His “name” for vain, useless purposes. *Yahweh Elohim* eventually had no choice but to divorce her. Traditional Christianity has fared no better because it has mixed and mingled paganism with God's revealed truth – in many cases, even adding to and taking from God's word (Deuteronomy 4:2; Matthew 4:4).

The appearance of Jesus Christ on the world scene complicated Israel's so-called *monotheism*. Even if the *Shema* had “proved” that Israel was *monotheistic*, there is nothing in it that suggests that they had a *triune* concept of God. Any who attempt to read that into Old Testament scriptures are stretching the revelation beyond the pale of reality.

The entire sordid history of this “marriage” provided proof that “Flesh and blood cannot not inherit the Kingdom of God” (1 Corinthians 15:50; John 3:3). It is impossible for the *corruptible mortal* to inherit an *eternal inheritance*. The *corruptible mortal* would never fully achieve the character and holiness of *Elohim* (Genesis 1:26, 27; 2:7); so, a fundamental change in *composition* would be necessary (1 Corinthians 15:51-58; John 3:3-8). What's a human to do if s/he wants to become a member of the *Elohim kind*? We'll discuss that more fully in our next article.

There is More to Salvation Than Meets the Eye

This free, downloadable book is an in-depth study of what is involved in the salvation process. It is 97 pages packed full of scripturally-based, easily understood, straight talk and plain truth about what a person must do in order to be “saved.” Download your free copy now at: www.theseventhdaychristianassembly.org.

Born Again?

The question “Are you a *born again* Christian?” is an expression used by many in traditional Christianity to try to determine the veracity of one’s Christian faith. It is a *litmus test* used to determine the depth of one’s decision to be a disciple of Christ. It is based on Jesus Christ’s discussion with Nicodemus in John 3:1-8, as well as Paul’s discussion of baptism in Romans 6. The rationale is simple: If you have *symbolically* “died” in baptism and have been *symbolically* “raised from the dead,” then you have been *born again* as a “new person” (Romans 6:4). In essence, being *born again*, by this criteria, means to be *spiritually renewed*, not literally being *born a second time* (John 3:4). Is that a correct basis for the teaching?

Our objective in this study is to understand the true meaning of being *born again* as Jesus used the term in John 3:1-8. Is this something that takes place when an individual repents, is baptized, and receives the Holy Spirit? Or, is this something that takes place during a future event associated with the return of Jesus Christ? What is the true purpose of being *born again*? **You need to know the answers to these questions.**

The Scriptural Background

If you understand the scriptural background to the development of a doctrinal position, then it is not overly difficult to determine the veracity of the doctrine. You can also understand how that doctrine should fit into the overall plan of God – how it is *motivated* and *controlled* by that overall plan. If you insert into the background concepts that are not originally there, then you brink on perverting the original idea and making it something that it was not intended to be. That is the basis of Paul’s statement in Romans 1:25 that God’s *truth* has been changed into a *lie*.

If we take Ephesians 1:4-14 at face value, then we see a plan constructed by *Elohim* “...before the creation of the orderly universe...” (v. 4). What is it revealed to be? *Elohim* decided to create a being that ultimately could be *adopted* into the “God” family through Jesus Christ (v. 5). I have discussed the *adoption* process in a previous issue of *Spirit and Truth*; so, I will not belabor the point with the same material.

As you continue to read the Ephesians 1 account, you come to v. 14 where Paul shows the culmination of the *adoption* process: “...the *redemption* of the purchased possession....” What does this have to do with *adoption*? Paul told the Corinthians that Christians are “...bought with a price...” (1 Corinthians 6:20). And,

he told the Romans that the *adoption* is “...the *redemption* of our body...” (Romans 8:23). The word *redemption* is translated from the Greek word *apolutrosis*, which means “to be freed from sin and the limitations of the flesh” (see also Luke 21:27, 28).

We see in Hebrews 2:11 a phrase that is given different translations by many versions of the Bible, but... the combination of the translations poses an interesting picture. Allow me to demonstrate:

KJV: “For both he that sanctifies and they who are sanctified are all *of one*...”

The Jerusalem Bible: “For the one who sanctifies, and the ones who are sanctified, are of the *same stock*...”

RSV/Moffatt: “For sanctifier and sanctified have all *one origin*...”

NIV: “Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the *same family*...”

Modern Language: “For the One who makes holy and those who are being made holy all have *one Father*...”

It is evident that the meaning of this part of the scripture is that Christians will *ultimately* be part of the “God” Family – and that’s why Jesus Christ refers to us as *brethren/brothers* and *children of God* (vv. 11-13; 1 John 3:1-3). It is also plain that this is made possible through Jesus Christ, the captain/pioneer of our salvation (see Romans 1:1-4).

In this sense, the term *family* is applicable. That term expresses the idea that the members are descended from a *common ancestor* and, therefore, constitute a group of *similar* or *related* things. If *Elohim* planned before the creation of the orderly universe to expand the *family* of the *Elohim kind*, then Genesis 1:26-28 must be understood in relationship to that plan. It is patently obvious from scripture that mankind did not appear on its own, out of nowhere. The source of mankind’s origin was *Elohim* – and...specifically through the work of *Yahweh Elohim*, who later became Jesus Christ (John 1:1-3, 14).

Does one’s repentance, baptism, and receipt of the Holy Spirit make him *totally free* from *sin* and the *limitations of the flesh*? If not, then he has not been *born again*. He has only entered a time in his life during which he must now be spiritually converted to learn the thoughts and ways of God (Romans 12:1, 2). God *treats* him like he has been freshly created, but he is still subject to the pulls of the *flesh*.

If that *New Testament* explanation is clear to you, then what do you suppose is behind the account in Genesis 1:26-28? Can you in any way compare that to Hebrews 1 and derive a solid idea about what *Elohim* was up to when They decided to create man in Their own image – and...*not* in the image of the *angels* (see also Hebrews 2:5-11)?

Can you understand that Genesis 1:26-28 has to do with the creation of the “God” *kind* – a repetition of the other creative acts in which a *kind* would bring forth its own *kind* (see vv. 11, 12, 21, 24, 25)? The *human* would multiply its own *kind* (v. 28; John 3:6). Does it seem credible that *Elohim* was now going to execute Their longstanding plan to create a being that is *ultimately* destined to be added to the “God” *kind* at some future time? Measure your conclusion to those answers by what scripture teaches you, not by eliminating scriptures that do not agree with *your* concept.

In Genesis 2:7, we see that *Yahweh Elohim* sets out to create the first human. Before He began to gather together the *clods of dirt* from which He would accomplish this, there was *nothing* that existed of an *Adam*. Now, what did *Yahweh Elohim* create out of the clods of dirt? Genesis 2:7 shows that the clods of dirt were fashioned into the type of body that *Yahweh Elohim* desired – a *replica* of “God’s” own body. He “...breathed into his *nostrils* the breath of life...”. In other words, He performed something like our present-day cardio-pulmonary resuscitation. Once that process was completed, man “...became a living *soul*...” (*KJV*; emphases added). What does that term *soul* mean?

The Hebrew term is *nephesh*, which means “a living, breathing being.” It does not imply in any shape, size, or fashion, as some teach, that man was *given* an immortal soul, or that he pre-existed as an immortal soul. Nor does it mean that this dirt-become-flesh body was created for the purpose of being the *animating force* for the *real person* (an already existing immortal soul) to be put into it. It simply teaches that what had at one time been dirt clods had now become *flesh* and was capable of living on its own with breath and blood flow. What became flesh-and-blood was in the *image* of “God,” but it was not in the *spirit realm* of “God” (1 Corinthians 15:46).

Pay attention to Paul’s explanation in 1 Corinthians 15:35-58 of the transformation from *flesh* to *spirit* that is part of what is called the *resurrection of the dead* that is set to take place in the future. Here are the major points he makes:

◆ Vv. 35-38 – The body that goes into the grave is not the same kind of body that will come out of the grave.

◆ Vv. 42-46 – The body that is put into the grave is *corruptible* (that is, capable of being broken down into its primary “building blocks”; see Genesis 3:19). The body of flesh is a *natural body*; the body that will replace it is a *spirit body*. The *spirit body* did not come *first* – that is, the spirit body is *subsequent* to the natural body. Adam was made to be a *natural body*; Jesus Christ, by a resurrection from the dead, became a *life-giving spirit body*.

◆ Vv. 47-50 – Each body type will operate according to its given powers. All who are in the *flesh* (“earthy” body) will have life consistent with the properties of the body made from the *clods of dirt*. When the *earthy* body is changed to *spirit*, it will then have the properties associated with the *spirit realm*. All humans will bear the *earthy* image until it is time for that image to be changed. Understand this: The *earthy* body cannot enter the *kingdom* of God as an *earthy* body. It must be changed into a body that has the properties of those who are in the *kingdom* of God. The word *kingdom* is translated from the Greek term *basileia*, which, in this case, has the meaning of “the royal reign and greatest conceivable blessings” (see Revelation 5:9, 10; 20:4-6). Therefore, you cannot rule and reign with Jesus Christ for 1,000+ years if you are not properly equipped to do so.

◆ Vv. 51-54 – ***When Jesus Christ returns***, He will execute the power necessary to cause the change in *body composition* that is necessary for the *earthy* body to be properly equipped to rule and reign with Him in that eternal kingdom. The *corruptible, mortal body* will be changed into an *incorruptible, immortal body*. If the *earthy* body were already vested with any kind of *incorruption* and *immortality*, then it would be *unnecessary* for them to be “put on.” This means that man is not vested with an immortal soul or a “divine spark” of “God.”

◆ Vv. 55-58 – From that point on (not before), *death* will have no power over the individual thus changed (read Hebrews 6:4-8 and John 15:1-6). The *earthy* body will be *born again* at the moment that it is changed to *spirit* (see 1 John 3:1-3).

It is this concept that Paul had in mind when he wrote that Abraham expected God to raise Isaac from the *dead* at the mountain in Moriah (Hebrews 11:18, 19; Genesis 22:1-14).

Jesus spoke of two types of resurrections in John 5:21-29: (1) the resurrection to *life* and (2) the resurrection to *damnation*. One will issue in the *born again* experience into the *spirit realm of Elohim*; the other will issue in the *destruction* of the unrepentant *earthy*

body (see Malachi 4:1-3; Revelation 20:14, 15).

How Man Has Changed God’s Truth Into a Lie

Paul makes the charge in Romans 1:25 that man has changed God’s truth into a lie. Jesus Christ imposes upon those who want to worship God that they are to do so “...in spirit and in ***truth***...” (John 4:23, 24). It is patently clear, then, that there should be some kind of scriptural principle that separates the *truth* from the *lie*. Here is the simplest two-part principle that is revealed in scripture:

(1) God’s word is truth (John 17:17 – compare that to 2 Timothy 3:16, 17); and

(2) we are not allowed to ***add to*** it or ***diminish from it*** (Deuteronomy 4:2; 12:32; Joshua 1:7; Proverbs 30:5, 6; Revelation 22:18, 19; Matthew 4:4).

One simple examination of a prevailing doctrine can serve as a *litmus test*. By applying the above-stated two-part principle to the doctrine of the *immortal soul*, we can move more definitively toward God’s revealed truth about what Yahweh Elohim created from the dirt clods.

Several years ago, I heard a young minister compare a dead elderly woman’s “discarded” body to a “rusty, old junk car” from which she had exited to continue her journey “home to heaven.” In saying that, he essentially said that the *body* is merely the *vehicle* by which the soul transports itself while it is away from its “heavenly home.”

Here is the revelation that we have discussed thus far: Man was created from clods of dirt, breathed into in order to jump-start his life processes, and caused to become a living, breathing being capable of dying and returning to the dust (Genesis 2:7, 17; 3:19-24; Ezekiel 18:4, 20). Many religions, including traditional Christianity, consider man to be a creature endowed with some measure of *immortality* through either an *immortal soul* or a *spark of divinity* – neither of which agrees with the scriptural revelation. Let me demonstrate

how the two claims are made.

Alvin Boyd Kuhn, in his work *Who is This King of Glory* (Elizabeth, NJ: Academy Press; 1944) posits the following:

...The moral effect upon general humanity of being taught to look for salvation to a savior in the person of a historical man [that is, Jesus Christ] is inherently and inevitably degrading to the immanent *divinity of man*....the method of human salvation that would instinctively... commend itself as the obviously more natural one would be...in a power lodged *within* all men...a divine spirit among all men to act as a leaven of righteousness and *self-transformation*....It is psychologically hazardous for people to place *their* *divinity* in a person or locale outside themselves.... (pp. 22, 23; emphases added)

Thus, Kuhn posits that the body of flesh is merely a place where an immortal soul is housed while it makes its journey back to the heavens from which it fell. Once it has learned the necessary lessons for advancement, it will depart that body and inhabit another. This is called the *transmigration of the soul*. In effect, Kuhn claims that salvation through Jesus Christ is a bogus concept because man has all the *divinity* he needs within himself to effect his own salvation: “The only *Christos* that is available for him is that divine love *within him*” (Ibid.; p. 24; emphases added).

If the immortal soul, *the real person*, has always been and will never cease to be, then it is obvious that the *real person* cannot *die* in the sense given in Genesis 2:17 and 3:19-24.

Many within traditional Christianity (32,000+ denominations) would agree that Kuhn is very far off-base – that scripture has not revealed such *divinity within* to be what Yahweh Elohim created.

But...what would they think of the doctrinal concept accepted by most of the 32,000+ Christian denominations? Let’s look at it:

...[Man’s] soul, *the real person*, is immortal. *It will never cease to be*....Man is two-fold in nature. He is both *spirit* and *body*. Man is *not*

a body and *has a soul*. *He is a soul and has a body*. The body is mortal; the soul is immortal. (Herschel H. Hobbs, *The Baptist Faith and Message* (Nashville: Convention Press, 1971; p. 51; emphases added)

Here, Hobbs posits the doctrinal position of Southern Baptists regarding what man is.

He says that the *immortal soul* is the *real person*, and it is housed in a body of flesh. In declaring that, he also *tacitly* declares two other ideas: (1) the *immortal soul* existed *before* the body was made; and (2) the *immortal soul* is *incapable of dying* (he adds that the *body* will return to the elements from which it was made because it is only the *animating force* for the soul).

Hobbs concludes: “...Man’s *animal principle of life* shall cease; his *body* shall return to the ground (Gen. 3:19). But his *soul*, *the real person*, is immortal. It will never cease to be” (Ibid.; emphases added). This is a tacit admission that the *soul* pre-existed the creation of the “animal principle of life” (the body) and has never been capable of *dying* – that is, it has *never* been subject to thorough and complete obliteration or destruction.

Several years ago, I heard a young minister give an example of Hobb’s definition at a funeral. He compared the dead elderly woman’s “discarded” body to a “rusty, old junk car” from which she had exited to continue her journey “home to heaven.” In saying that, he essentially said that the body is merely the *vehicle* by which the soul transports itself while it is away from its “heavenly home.” That is the way the *transmigration of souls* concept teaches the role of the various “bodies” inhabited by the soul (the supposed *divine Christos* within man) as it makes its 12-stage journey back to the “heavenly heights.”

Congruent with that concept, it would be little wonder that a re-definition of *death* would be necessary. If the immortal soul, *the real person*, has always been and will never cease to be, then it is obvious that the *real person* cannot *die* in the sense given in Genesis 3:19-24. Read that carefully: (a) *Death* results in the person returning to the elements from which mankind was originally made (v. 19; read also Ecclesiastes 3:18-22; 9:4-20; 12:7; and Job 14 [soul in v. 22 is explained below]); (b) the “earthy” human body was not made to live forever (v. 22); and (c) something *outside of man* must be added to cause him to live forever (v.

22 re: the Tree of Life).

Why does Job mention the soul in Job 14:22? This is the same Hebrew word used in Genesis 2:7: nephesh. Here is the meaning of that word: “living being, life, self, person, desire, appetite, emotion, and passion.” Note that the definition has nothing to do with an indwelling immortal soul. More specifically, the definition has to do with two things: (1) man’s breath of life and (2) man’s innermost being.

Look at Jeremiah 15:9 where it says that “...she has given up the ghost...” (*KJV*; emphases added). This is the same word: nephesh. The *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew/English Lexicon* translates it to read “...she breathed out her soul...” (p. 659; emphases added). It can read “...she breathed out her nephesh...” You can read similar statements in Genesis 49:33; Job 10:18; 11:20; 14:10; and Matthew 27:50 (*KJV*).

“There is not one single instance in the Old Testament where the word “soul” should be thought of as that which survives death....If, therefore, the belief in the immortality of the soul is held to be a Christian doctrine, then it should be realized that it is not a biblical doctrine.” (Norman H. Snaith)

What it literally means is that she breathed her last breath. It has nothing to do with an immortal soul exiting the “hunk of junk” vehicle in which it has been riding. Read 1 Kings 17:17-22 with that in mind. This was not a case of an immortal soul leaving the dead body behind and then returning to it when it was revived.

It is with this in mind that you should understand Ecclesiastes 3:18-22. By implication, this also applies to animals because they are also “living, breathing beings” (see Genesis 1:20, 24, 29; 9:12, 15, 16). Thus, Ezekiel 18:4, 20 declares that, at least in the human realm, the “living, breathing being that sins shall die” (see Romans 6:23; emphases added).

What many in Christianity have done is “move the goal posts.” Take note of Hobbs’s definition:

When man sinned he was separated from God. The fellowship was broken; the image was destroyed....The moment that they chose Satan’s will instead of God’s will, they died spiritually. They were no longer innocent. Certainly they were not righteous. They were sinners lost

from God. (Ibid., pp. 53, 54; emphases added)

So, they have re-defined death to mean a “spiritual separation from God” and “loss of fellowship with God.” How clever of them! Of course, that re-definition was necessitated by their adoption of the belief in the immortal soul...which they adopted from paganism. That doctrine posits that the real person is the immortal soul, and it is incapable of dying in the classic sense of the term. Hobbs says the body is made subject to physical pains and injuries until it perishes, but the immortal soul cannot be similarly affected.

Note the following comments from two recognized Old and New Testament scholars: (1) Norman H. Snaith, former Tutor in Old Testament Literature at Wesley College (Methodist) at Leeds in the United Kingdom and (2) John Short, former pastor of Richmond Hill Congregational Church in Bournemouth, England.

1. ...There is not one single instance in the Old Testament where the word “soul” should be thought of as that which survives death....If, therefore, the belief in the immortality of the soul is held to be a Christian doctrine, then it should be realized that it is not a biblical doctrine. The biblical doctrine is of a resurrection life for those who “have the Spirit” and are “in Christ...” (Norman H. Snaith, “The Language of the Old Testament,” *The Interpreter’s Bible* [New York: Abingdon Press; vol. I, 1952]; p. 230; emphases added)

2. ...Man’s hope for survival [of death] depends not on the inherent immortality of his soul, but on the act of God....*There is nothing in Paul’s writings nor in the N.T. to suggest that the soul is inherently immortal.* (John Short, commentary on 1 Corinthians 15:51-58, *The Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. 10; p. 253; emphases added)

Snaith says that the doctrine is not present in any form in the Old Testament and that it can be “Christian” and not be “biblical.” Short says that there is nothing belonging to the essential nature of the term soul that smacks of immortality – and that concept is consistent throughout the New Testament.

Both men agree that any hope man has of surviving

death is dependent on God through Jesus Christ. Neither man has any affiliation with The Seventh Day Christian Assembly. You can get a more complete discussion of this subject in our free downloadable publication *A Statement of Beliefs* (pp. 48-68).

You should understand that Hobbs did not create this doctrine – nor did the Southern Baptists. It has been a doctrine among “Christianity” at least since Augustine of Hippo introduced it from his experience with the pagan philosopher Plotinus (as received from Plato). It was among Judaism before that – having been introduced from the Greeks (Plato, in particular, who got it from the Egyptians...who got it from the Orphic and Eleusinian Mystery religions spawned from the Babylonian Mystery Religion). Whew! Such a longstanding history!

“There is nothing in Paul’s writings nor in the N.T. to suggest that the soul is ***inherently immortal***.”
(John Short)

If you understand that this concept originated in *paganism*, then what would you surmise from Deuteronomy 12:29-32 and Jeremiah 10? Would such a practice actually *change* God’s *truth* into a *lie*? Have they done such a thing by ignoring the definition of *nephesh* and making the *KJV* term *soul* relative to the *immortal soul*? Have they done so by ignoring the scriptural definition of *death*? You cannot afford to ignore God’s revealed *truth* if you want to worship Him in spirit and in *truth*.

This re-definition also necessitates that the expression *born again* has to do with the *spiritual conversion of the mind*, rather than the change of body composition from *flesh* to *spirit*. For those who consider it necessary for the body and soul to be *eternally* together, it becomes necessary for Jesus Christ to bring their souls from heaven when He returns in order to transform the resurrected body and re-unite it with the soul. Yet, no one ever mentions resurrecting the dissolved body of the incorrigibly wicked so that it, too, can be re-united with the wicked soul so they can burn eternally together in hell! If they have, I missed that one.

Man’s Incredible Potential

Let me make sure that you understand what is in-

involved in being *born again* because it involves a potential for the human being that is *staggering!* As a matter of fact, it is so *staggering* that many are very shy about even considering the possibility of what I am about to show you from God’s word. This conclusion is based on two expressions: (1) “bringing many sons to glory” (Hebrew 2:10) and (2) “partakers of the divine nature” (Hebrews 12:10; 2 Peter 1:4). What is involved in our being brought to *glory* and being made partakers of God’s *divine nature*?

First, what is *glory*? Jesus uses this term in John 17:5 where He asks the Father to “...*glorify* me with your own self [look back at v. 4] with the *glory* that I had with you before the world existed.” The term *glorify* is from the Greek verb *doxazo*, and the term *glory* is from the Greek noun *doxa*. *Doxazo*, which generally has to do with “being clothed in splendor,” is the performance or action that leads to *doxa*, “the state of the Christian in the next life by which s/he participates in the radiance or glory of God.” Now, let’s sort out what that means to the true Christian.

If the Christian is brought to this state-of-being through Jesus Christ, then it is for the purpose of sharing in the *holy nature of God* (see Hebrews 12:10 and 2 Peter 1:4). That *holy nature* far exceeds simply being *bright* and *radiant* and *splendid*. It has to do with what “God” is at His very core – His *spirit* and *power*. The spirit and power expresses His ability to know and plan and execute...even if there is a great expanse of time between the planning and the executing (Isaiah 44:6-20). The idea expressed in Hebrews 1 is that the “son” (in this case, specifically *Jesus Christ*) is, for all intents and purposes, a *replica* of “God” Himself (remember Genesis 1:26, 27).

Even in His human form, Jesus Christ was able to do many miraculous “works” because of the spirit and power which the Father put under His control. In John 3:2, Nicodemus admits that “...No man can do the miracles that you do unless God is with Him.” So, it was apparent, to at least this man, that Jesus was vested with incredible powers because of the relationship between Him and God the Father. The basic idea presented by Jesus Christ in John 5:17-31 is that this *glory* He had in His body of flesh manifested itself in the *works* that He performed, as well as other works He will perform beyond the body of flesh – note especially v. 20. This includes the authority to judge and the ability to raise the dead to “life” or “damnation.”

The interesting part of the continuing narrative

comes in John 14:6-12 where Jesus explains that He is able to do the things He does because of the Father being *in Him* (v. 10). I do not detect that Jesus means that the Father has actually entered His body and mind and taken control of them. It has to do with the *spirit and power put under the control of Jesus Christ* to do the work He has to do.

Then, we come to v.12: “...He that believes on me *shall also do the works I do...even greater works than the ones I do*” (emphases added). This, at face value, seems to indicate that *flesh-and-blood* humans will be made capable of also doing miraculous works through God’s *spirit and power*. Here is the question: If that is true for *flesh-and-blood humans*, of what will the *born again* Christian be capable? ***Greater works than these?*** Let’s follow the evidence.

Notice Jesus’ explanation to Nicodemus in John 3:8 about what it means to be *brought to birth by the Spirit*: “The wind blows where it will blow, and you can hear it pass and see the effects of its passing, but you cannot detect its source or ultimate destination. This is what it is like to be brought to birth by the Spirit” (author’s paraphrase).

In John 20:11-29, there are examples of Jesus doing exactly this kind of thing on three different occasions: (1) with Mary Magdalene at the tomb (vv. 11-17); (2) with the disciples (except Thomas) on the evening of the first day of the week after His resurrection (vv. 19-23); and (3) eight days later when Thomas was present (vv. 26-29).

John 20:26 makes it apparent that Jesus simply *appeared out of nowhere* in a room in which the doors were shut and locked. Matthew 27:62-66 sets the stage for Him to get out of a tomb that had a huge stone rolled into its entrance and then was sealed to prevent the theft of Jesus’s body. He had the ability to go where He wanted to go and when He wanted to go without being detected unless He wanted to be detected (see also Mark 16:1-4).

Notice also Mark 16:12, 13 and Luke 24:13-31. Combined into one narrative, this shows that Jesus was able to assume different forms and appear and disappear at will. This is not inconsistent with His ability in His pre-incarnation life as shown in Genesis 12:7 and Genesis 18 – He came and He went at His pleasure.

The gist of this instruction is that there is greater power to be had by *born again Christians* than merely appearing and disappearing at will. There is greater

power to be had than penetrating or escaping from places that humans would find to be impossible – or traveling at the speed of thought. Think of all that the Word created before He became flesh as Jesus of Nazareth (John 1:1-3, 14). If you can wrap your mind around all of that, then you should be *staggered* at what God has planned for you to become as His child (see 1 John 3:1-3). ***Deal...or no deal?***

Do you want to be *born again* the way God has revealed it – or, according to the perverted doctrines of man? Who of the two has the greater power to perform that transformation into eternal life?

Conclusion

We have seen the scriptural definitions of *death*, *born again*, and *what man is*. We have seen that God did not take a pre-existing immortal soul and put it into a body created from the clods of the earth. Scripture reveals that the “earthy” body will be changed from *flesh* to *spirit* when Jesus Christ comes – that immortality is something that must be put on...not something that is *inherent* in the human body. And...we have seen evidence that the problem that well-meaning people have had with understanding God’s *truth* has to do with how God’s *truth* has been *changed into a lie* through deceptive practices (see 2 Corinthians 4:4, Ephesians 4:11-20, and Jude 3, 4).

I have read Genesis 4:26 and noticed in my *KJV* marginal notes an interesting comment. In the place where the verse says: “...Then began men to call upon the name of the *Lord*...”, there is a marginal note that says: “Or, to call themselves *by the name of the Lord*.” In researching this, it appears that there is the possibility that men began to call themselves *Yahweh* – that is, *the self-existent one*. I wonder if this is the place in history where men began to consider that they were *inherently divine* by virtue of an *immortal soul* or a *divine spark of divinity*. Sometimes what is not *clearly* said is most intriguing.

Here is your question: Do you want to be *born again* the way God has revealed it – or, according to the perverted doctrines of man? Who of the two has the greater power to perform that most marvelous transformation into eternal life?

What is the True Gospel?

I heard the television minister say that the “gospel” spoken of in the Bible is the “gospel of *grace*.” After a sermon he had given on the topic, a woman approached him and said: “I thought that the gospel was the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.” He replied to her: “Those are *parts* of the gospel of grace.”

My first thought about the matter went back to Mark 1:14, 15: “...Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the *gospel of the kingdom of God*, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and *the kingdom of God* is at hand: repent and believe *the gospel*’” (emphases added). You can safely say that *grace* is a *part* of believing *the gospel of the kingdom* – just as you can safely say that *salvation* is a *part* of *the gospel of the kingdom*. As a matter of fact, grace, mercy, forgiveness of sins, the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and our ultimate salvation are all *concomitant parts* of the *gospel of the kingdom of God*.

Our objective, therefore, is to understand why *the kingdom of God* is such “good news” for sinful, rebellious mankind. What is so special about believing that God has a *kingdom* that He is going to bring to the *earth*? *Is this the focal point of every mention of the gospel in the New Testament?* You need to know so that you can believe the *true gospel!*

From the “Beginning”

It is noteworthy that scripture has a few places where it is necessary to take the reader back to a “beginning.” For instance, Mark 1:1 says: “The *beginning* of the *gospel* of Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (emphasis added). Mark was not saying that this is the “good news” *about Jesus Christ*. He was saying that this is the “good news” on which Jesus Christ focused in His earthly ministry. From that point on, we can understand that all that Jesus Christ taught, in one way or another, had something to do with *the kingdom of God*.

That being the case, when did this concept of a *kingdom* arise and under what circumstances did it do so? When we understand the answer to those questions, then it will be easier to understand what the true gospel is and what makes up its concomitant parts.

Some claim that Jesus’ *kingship* has to do with Him being the Lord of Truth – and that His kingdom is the

kingdom of Truth. They believe that the sovereign reign of God’s kingdom is established in the hearts of men through the truth that Jesus taught. As Hobbs puts it:

His is the kingdom of truth to which he came to witness (John 18:37)...In the New Testament, the major emphasis is placed upon God’s reign *in the hearts* of all who receive Jesus Christ as Savior. (*The Baptist Faith and Message*; pp. 98, 99; emphases added).

He bases this conclusion on Luke 17:21: “...The kingdom of God is *within* you” (emphases added). Could this question be based on a faulty translation? What would we find out about the kingdom of God if we went back to the *beginning* of the concept?

Some translators prefer to have it read: “...The kingdom of God is *among you/in your midst/within your possession/within your reach* [now or in the future]”

(RSV, Modern Language, The Jerusalem Bible, Moffatt, and Luther, to name a few. Admittedly, there is more to the concept than meets the eye. We must understand what else there is to consider.

With Luke 17:21 in mind, Hobbs further defines *kingdom* as follows:

Jesus sought to guard against the idea of *an earthly territorial kingdom*...the thought is that the kingdom of God is not an observable political unit; it is the reign of God among/within men...One's position at this point is not a test of orthodoxy among Baptists. (Ibid.; p. 99; emphases added)

The question, in the face of this claim, is: What does the *beginning* of the concept tell us? Does it give us any reason at all to believe that God *intended* for there to be an observable, earthly kingdom reigning and ruling over a real territory and real population? Would God's revelation of such a kingdom make that concept a matter of *orthodoxy* (in this sense, an established doctrine of *truth*)?

In Isaiah 45:18, the Lord God says that He did not create the heavens and earth *in vain*. This is not the same term used in Exodus 20:7. This is the Hebrew term *tohuw*. This means that He did not create it to lie desolate, empty, and as a worthless thing.

We have "beginnings" in Genesis 1 and John 1 that teach us about the creation of the heavens and earth. *Genesis* is about the emergence of "first things," part of which were the heavens and earth and their inhabitants. In Isaiah 45, Yahweh Elohim expresses the importance of His ability to *create* something and make it stand (vv. 5-12). Here we must focus on His *motivation* and *intention* for creating things like the heavens and earth.

Isaiah 45:18 is an excellent example of His *motivation* and *intention*:

For thus says the Lord that created the heavens; God himself that formed the earth and made it; He has *established* it, He created it *not in vain*, He formed it *to be inhabited*: I am the Lord; and there is none else. (emphasis added)

Note the three italicized areas because they are part and

parcel to His *motivation* and *intention* for His creative activities in the "*beginning*."

The primary definition of the word *establish* shows that something is "ordered, ordained, or enacted *permanently*." This indicates that God did not *intend* for the heavens and earth to be *temporary* fixtures in the creation. We can see further indications of this in some of the covenants He made with people like Abraham (Genesis 15; Galatians 3:26-29) and David (Jeremiah 33:14-26). It is also evident in prophecies for the future (see Isaiah 65:17-25; Revelation 21, 22) – which include the statement in Revelation 11:15 that *the kingdoms of the earth* will ultimately become *the kingdoms of our Lord* over which He will reign *for ever and ever* (refer also to Daniel 2:44, 45; 7:13-27 and Zechariah 14:1-9). It is patently apparent that this speaks to the *permanence* of the planet earth *from the beginning*! If we listen to the Spirit-breathed word of Colossians 1:16, it was created by Him and *for* Him. To what end?

Next, in Isaiah 45:18, He says that He did not create the heavens and earth *in vain*. This is not the same term used in Exodus 20:7. This is the Hebrew term *tohuw*. This means that He did not create it to lie *desolate, empty, and as a worthless thing*. This indicates that He created it for a *divine purpose*. Isaiah 55:10, 11 says that His words do not fall uselessly to the ground, but they accomplish the purpose for which He *intends* them. What were His *intentions* when He created it all? Jesus Christ says in Matthew 5:17, 18 that He came to *accomplish* all of the *intentions* of the Law and the Prophets (see also Luke 24:44). What is in the Law and the Prophets that reveals His *intentions*?

Finally, in Isaiah 45:18, He says that He created it to be *inhabited*. Does scripture tell us that this was to be a *temporary* or *permanent* inhabitation? The answer to that question will open doors for understanding the original purpose for the earth (at the least) to be *inhabited*. I think that it is reasonable to understand that any type of *kingdom* would consist of four basic elements: (1) a ruler, (2) inhabitants who are ruled, (3) law by which that rule is executed, and (4) a given territory within which that rule is maintained. Can it be shown that such was the case in the "beginning" for which we seek? Yes. Let me, first of all, demonstrate the *intention* of God to construct such a *kingdom* that will have those four basic elements.

Read Matthew 25:31-34, and note especially Jesus Christ's comment in vv. 31, 34:

...The Son of Man...shall...sit upon *the throne* of His glory....and say to those on His right hand: “Come, you who are blessed of my Father, and inherit the *kingdom* prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” (emphases added)

Here we see *actual* rulership over a given territory. It would be reasonable to understand that rulers must have subjects; therefore, they must also have rules of conduct in order to have the best interests of everyone in mind.

The expression from the foundation of the world must be properly understood in order to make the connection to the “*beginning*.” The foundation has to do with the “building blocks” upon which something is brought into existence, maintained, and given longevity. The term world is translated from the Greek term *kosmos*, which, in this case, is “the orderly universe.” Thus, we are told by Jesus Christ that the Father, at the laying of the “building blocks” of the orderly universe, conceived of creating a kingdom for mankind! There is evidence in the definition of the term foundation that it can go all the way back to the conception of the idea – *before* the “building blocks” actually began to be laid. Is there any scriptural evidence that such a thought is valid? Yes.

The Concept (Foundation) of the Kingdom

Ephesians 1:3-14 is a little noticed explanation of the “*beginning*” of the *conception* of the *kingdom of God*. Paul begins his letter to the Ephesians with an explanation of the way “...the God and Father of Jesus Christ...has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly things in Christ” (v. 3). The *spiritual* part of this refers to the multitude of ways by which Christians have been infused with and affected by the Holy Spirit in order to conform their character and knowledge to that of God. It also has to do with revealing to the Christian the *secret, mysterious things of God* (see 1 Corinthians 2:6-16). The first thing that he explains is how God set forth His plan for the creation of mankind.

When did this take place? Paul explains in v. 4 that God’s plan was conceived “...before the foundation of the world...” Using the definition given above, you should be able to understand that this was done *before the creation of the orderly universe*. You can find similar statements in other scriptures:

1. John 17:5, 24: Jesus reveals that He shared God’s “glory” with the Father *before* the world [came into existence] (see Philippians 2:5-11) and that the Father loved Him *before the creation of the orderly universe*.

2. 1 Peter 1:18-20: Peter shows that Jesus was designated as the “Christ” *before the creation of the orderly universe* – but He actually appeared at a later time in human history.

The thought, no doubt, emphasizes that the *concept* existed in the mind of God *before* it was actually put into motion. This is the way all plans develop: *concept* precedes *implementation*.

We are told by Jesus Christ that the Father, at the laying of the “building blocks” of the orderly universe, conceived of creating a kingdom for mankind! There is evidence in the definition of the term foundation that it can go all the way back to the conception of the idea – *before* the “building blocks” actually began to be laid.

So, Paul explains in v. 4 that God conceived of a plan to bring into existence a being that would be able to have a spiritual connection to Him through the Christ. The term *Christ* implies that this personage is to be a *liberator* and *savior*. If there is the concept of a “Christ” *before the creation of the orderly universe*, then it demonstrates that God understood that this being that He intended to create would have the potential of getting into situations from which he would need to be *liberated* or *saved*. Even if everything went along as God *willed*, or *intended*, it to do (v. 4 – “...that we should be *holy* and *without blame* before Him in *love*...”), there would still be the necessity of this “Christ” for some other purpose beyond *saving* an individual out of any actions that would cause him to be *unqualified* to be chosen “in Christ.”

For what purpose would mankind be “chosen in Christ”? This is the discussion that Paul pursues in vv. 5-7. Paul uses the word *predestinated* in v. 5. This is not a statement that God had already decided every detail of every human life *beforehand*. It is a statement about the precedence of *thought* or *decision* over *action* or *execution*. It has to do with God’s *intentions* prior to His *actions*. What were God’s *intentions*? He intended

to expand the “God” *kind* by *adopting* into His family those in mankind who would subsequently qualify through Jesus Christ (vv. 6, 7).

So, God’s *election* is shown here to *precede* the time and space of the created order. If we couple this with Matthew 25:31-34, we can reasonably conclude that this plan of God involved the creation of a *kingdom* – that is, the ruler, the subjects, the territory, and the rules that would bring order to the *kingdom* and maintain it. It demonstrates that God’s mercy, grace, and forgiveness of sins in “Christ” actually *preceded* the implementation. Paul says as much in v.10 when he says that the Christ would have a point in time when He would unite all things in heaven and earth to God the Father (see also Colossians 1:20).

Man was merely a *representative figure* – a *typical example* (a type or shadow) of “God.” Man was not, at that point, all that *Elohim intended* him ultimately to become. No other type of *nephesh* was created for that purpose...no *cow* or *dog* or *elephant*, et cetera, et cetera, ad infinitum.

There will also be a time when He will *liberate* those chosen “in Christ” from the sins and limitations of the flesh. In fact, He gave a portion of His Holy Spirit to identify them and to *guarantee* that such will be the case (v. 14; see also 2 Corinthians 5:1-5). This knowledge and understanding is also one of the spiritual gifts He has made available to us (v. 9; 1 Corinthians 2:7-10). In this way, the *Law* of God that would govern *blamelessness*, *holiness*, and *love* would be given the *spiritual* support it needs in order for mankind to maintain a spiritual relationship with God that is consistent with His plan (see 1 John 1:5-2:14). That spiritual relationship is a determining factor in enabling the human to make the transition from flesh to spirit.

Setting the *Concept* Into Motion

Once the *concept* was finalized, the two members of *Elohim* set about to bring it into reality. According to Genesis 1:1, the first step was to create the *habitation* in which the *kingdom* would exist. That *habitation* was the *heavens* and the *earth*. *Eden* was the place from which this *family* would spread until it had inhabited (at the least) the entire earth. It must be understood that at the

moment the heavens and earth were brought into existence, there was already in place a plan for an *earthly, observable* place for the *kingdom* to be established. What’s next?

Genesis 1:26-28 demonstrates *Elohim’s intention* to bring into existence a being *similar* to Their *kind*. That information is given to us in vv. 26, 27 where it shows *Elohim’s intention* to create man in Their *image*. The Hebrew term from which *image* is translated is *tselem*.

At the point when man came into actual existence, he was made to have a *resemblance* to *Elohim* (see Genesis 2:7). Man was not, at that time, composed of the same “stuff” of which “God” is composed – he was merely a *representative figure*. As strange as it might seem, *tselem* is also the same word that is translated into the English term *idol* – but...*Elohim* was not making an *idol* of Themselves. Man was merely a *representative figure* – a *typical example* (a type or shadow) of “God.” Man was not, at that point, all that *Elohim intended* him ultimately to become. No other type of *nephesh* was created for that purpose...no *cow* or *dog* or *elephant*, et cetera, et cetera, ad infinitum.

The unfolding element in God’s plan was the *rulership* over the kingdom’s *territory*. That this *dominion* was to expand is seen in *Elohim’s intention* that man would do the following: (a) reproduce their *kind*; (b) *replenish the earth* – which means “to make full or complete *again*” (as if something had made it empty and incomplete after it had at one time been full and complete); (c) *subdue* the earth – that is, bring it under control and establish order in it; and (d) *govern* the plant and animal life on the earth.

Adam was created at a specific spot on the earth, but his influence and rulership ability was to develop to the point that he would be the “head” of the fleshly *kingdom* of which *Elohim* was intent on putting him in charge. Paul says in Romans 5:14 that Adam was a *figure* (that is, a *pattern* or *representation*) of *Him that is to come*. Who might that be? The “Christ.”

All of this is the fundamental revelation that *Elohim* set into motion the concept They agreed upon *before* the creation of the orderly universe. Man was given all of the necessary physical and mental components by which he ultimately could become *formally* admitted into the *Elohim* family and *recognized* as the *God-kind*. Genesis 1:26-28 is the point at which *Elohim* began to put into motion the great plan by which mankind could be adopted into the *family*. This was merely the starting point, not the final product.

Consider Jesus Christ's citation of Psalm 82:6 in John 10:34: "I have said that you are *gods*." This was in answer to the Jews who accused Him of blasphemy and were about to stone Him to death because "...you, being a *man*, make yourself to be *God*" (John 10:33; emphases added). So, Jesus points out that it is written in the Spirit-breathed Law of God that man was created to be *gods*: the *children* of God.

When Jacob referenced *Shiloh* in Genesis 49:10, he used a word that means "him to whom it belongs" or "that which belongs to him." This is recognized as being an epithet to the Messiah. Some, in this vein, extend the definition of *Shiloh* to be rendered "whose is the *kingdom*."

Asaph's point in this prophetic psalm is that God is standing in judgment of these "gods" because they have not adopted the thoughts and ways of their Creator. They, instead of conducting themselves with *righteousness* and *justice* and *mercy* and *equity* and *grace*, have caused the earth (the *territory* in which the *kingdom* is to be placed) to be all out of "whack" (that is, not in its proper working condition).

God's judgment against these who have the *potential* to become part of His eternal family will be that they will die like the *nephesh* that they are (v. 7; see Ezekiel 18:4, 20; Ecclesiastes 3:18-20; Genesis 3:19). Why should this concern mankind?

Sharing in an Inheritance

Psalm 82:8 reveals that it is God's *intention* to *inherit it all nations*. If all of this was created *by* Jesus Christ and *for* Jesus Christ (John 1:1-3; Colossians 1:16), then it is to be *His* by *inheritance*. *The promises made to Abraham in Genesis 15 and elsewhere were made to secure the inheritance for both God and man – His future family*. Paul says as much in Galatians 3:13-18, 26-29. Jacob said as much in Genesis 49:10 when he pronounced the *scepter blessing* on Judah. When Jacob referenced *Shiloh*, he used a word that means "him to whom it belongs" or "that which belongs to him" – this is recognized as being an epithet to the Messiah and, like Jesus revealed in Matthew 6:10, 13 ("...may your kingdom come...[because] the kingdom is yours, and the power, and the glory, for ever..."), it is a *kingdom* that is

to come and last for ever. Some, in this vein, extend the definition of *Shiloh* to be rendered "whose is the kingdom." So, whose *kingdom* is it?

A quick check back to Matthew 25:34 shows that God intended this *kingdom* also to be *mankind's inheritance*. *If the Spirit-breathed word of God is of any value*, then we must all understand Paul's comment in Romans 11:29: "The gifts and calling of God are *irrevocable*" (emphases added). We must also understand Romans 4:13, Galatians 3:26-29, and Hebrews 6:13-29 better: the *earth* is a *permanent* fixture in God's relationship with mankind because it is part of God's *promise* and *oath*. We must more fully understand Paul's confident assertion in Romans 8:15-17:

For you have not received again the bondage to fear; but you have received the Spirit of *adoption* [see vv. 19-23] by which we cry: *Abba* (*Father*). The [Holy] Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit that we are the *children of God* [see v. 9 above in the text]: and if *children*, then *heirs*; *heirs of God*, and *joint-heirs with Christ*; if, in fact, we suffer with Him so that we might be glorified together. (emphases added)

Remembering the lesson of Psalm 82, what other evidence do we need in order to understand that the *kingdom of God* is not merely God's reign *in our hearts*? That it is to be an *earth-based* kingdom that will be *observable*?

Understanding John 18:33-37

We must understand the following discussion in the context of the above. Here, Jesus is on trial for His life and His beliefs. Pilate is attempting to find just cause, according to Roman law, for putting Jesus to death. One of the accusations against Jesus was that He claimed to be the king of the Jews – which would make Him an enemy of Rome and subject to death.

So, Pilate's interrogation focused on His *kingship*. It would be assumed that the Jewish nation would, therefore, represent His *kingdom* and the Jews His *subjects*. If the rumors were true, then Jesus Christ represented the Messiah who was supposed to come and throw off the Roman yoke and restore Israel to the glory of the days of David and Solomon. Let's focus our attention on Jesus' defense in vv. 36, 37.

Jesus' first claim is that *His* kingdom "...is not of *this world*" (emphases added). Does that statement, as Hobbs claims, demonstrate that His kingdom is, therefore, to be found in the *hearts of men* as they surrender to God through Jesus Christ? No. You must understand what Jesus is saying. The term *world* is from the Greek term *kosmos*, which has numerous different definitions. What does it mean in the context in which Jesus uses it?

It should be plain that the *kingdom of God* has *nothing* to do with a *kingdom* that exists only *in the hearts* of mortal man. It will be *on the earth* (Zechariah 14:9; Revelation 5:10), and it will be *observable*.

Don't ask me how Pilate would recognize the specific definition that Jesus had in mind. I do not know. But...the *meaning* attached to Jesus' statement is a disclaimer that He would have anything to do, as a king, with the world system (and all that belongs to it) that is at enmity with God, lost in sin, fully at odds with anything divine, ruined, and depraved (see 1 John 5:19 and Revelation 12:9) – as the Christmas song "Oh, Holy Night" refers to it: "...Long lay the world in sin and error pining...." Jesus repeats this disclaimer by saying: "*My kingdom* is not of *this world*" (emphases added).

Note what follows in v. 37: (a) Jesus, nevertheless, claims to be a *king*, (b) He claims to have been born into this sin-filled world (in the flesh) to bear witness of the *truth* of the fact that He is to be a *king*, and (c) those who understand God's truth about the matter know what He is talking about. He left Pilate to his own devices to draw whatever conclusion he might draw from all that.

Just to emphasize the *truth* that Jesus referenced, I'll take one Old Testament segment of scripture: Daniel 2:34, 35, 44, 45. Daniel is inspired by God to interpret a dream that King Nebuchadnezzar had about a great statue. The conclusion of the dream involved "...a stone that was cut out without hands..." that came and completely destroyed the entire great statue (which represented the Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Greek, and Roman *types* of kingdoms of the *world*). They were ground to dust and completely blotted out of existence (vv. 34, 35). Verse 44 says that, once that destruction is completed, no *human* government will ever again exist.

The interpretation of this dream has to do with the establishment of God's *kingdom* on the *earth* that will "...*stand for ever*" (v. 44; emphases added). It should be

plain that this has nothing to do with a *kingdom* that exists only *in the hearts* of mortal man. It will be *on the earth* (Zechariah 14:9; Revelation 5:10), and it will be *observable*. That explanation represents *God's orthodoxy*...regardless of how *man's denominational orthodoxy* might or might not agree with it.

It would follow, then, that Jesus' comment in Luke 17:21 would have to mean that the *kingdom of God* is *within the reach* of mankind through Jesus Christ – that mankind has *available to him* the means by which he can be *born again* in order to be a part of that *kingdom*.

Conclusion

Paul was absolutely correct in Romans 3:4 that God must be true even if every man shows himself to be a liar. Denominational orthodoxy and traditions of men that are taught as though they proceeded from the very mouth of God are, at best, highly suspect (Matthew 15:1-9). It is possible to crow and strut about one's religious teachings and deeds – even attaching the name of Jesus to them – and "miss the boat" when it comes to God's truth and will (Matthew 7:21-23; 2 Corinthians 11:4, 13-15).

We have seen in this discussion that God decided *before the creation of the orderly universe* to bring forth mankind and to adopt them into His family through Jesus Christ. The foundation of that plan was the development of a *kingdom* that God would cause to spread over the entire planet (note Daniel 2:35: "...became a great mountain [that is: *kingdom*] and *filled the whole earth*" (emphases added).

It has been made obvious to God's people that they must be born a second time – going from mortal, corruptible flesh to immortal, incorruptible spirit (John 3:1-8; 1 Corinthians 15:50-58) – in order to enter the *ruling realm* (1 Corinthians 15:52: Greek = *basileia*: kingdom) of God. This suggests that God knew ahead of time that there would have to be a *resurrection of the dead*.

We have not even discussed Zechariah 14 and Isaiah 2:1-5 to more fully demonstrate the fact that this *kingdom will be observable*. We have not discussed Isaiah 9:7, where it is revealed that this *government* will continue to expand over an *increasing* population of *humans* (see Isaiah 65:17-25 again), wealth, productivity, and the like with peace and justice and equity prevailing for ever. You can add to that Isaiah 65:17-25 and Revelation 21.

I can stack scripture upon scripture to continue to make my point. At this point, I think that it will suffice to quote Jesus Christ with regard to the off-base religious concepts that pose as *God's truth*: "You [who purvey these doctrines of men] are in error because you do

not know the scriptures" (see Matthew 22:29 and 2 Timothy 3:16, 17). Since that has been shown in many instances, what are **you**, the reader, to do? Is it any wonder, then, that the *gospel* that Jesus Christ taught was the "good news" of the *kingdom of God*?

...just one last thing:

I would like to express my appreciation to those who are using our website to increase their knowledge and understanding of God's word. I would appreciate an email from you that expresses how our Christian Education Outreach Program is benefitting you – please include some suggestions about how we might improve it for you.

If you are interested in having me come to address a local group about our teachings, I would be interested in communicating with you about it. Please contact me at tsdca@hughes.net. Thank you, again.

Larry E. Ford, Pastor
The Seventh Day Christian Assembly

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