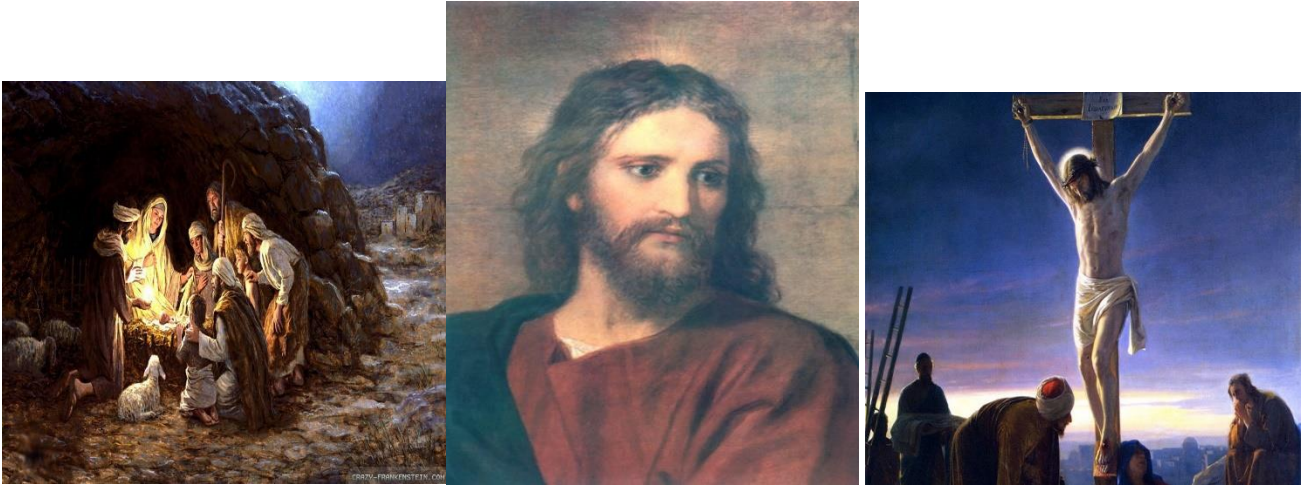


Winter 2022 Newsletter

Detroit Bible Students

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WHAT THINK YE OF CHRIST?

*“[Jesus] asked his disciples, **“Who do the people say that the Son of Man is?”** And they said, **“Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”** He said to them, **“But who do you say that I am?”** And Simon Peter answered and said, **“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”** Matthew 16:13-17*

The winter months from December through March are bracketed by the celebration of the Christian world’s two most important events—the birth of Jesus and the death of Jesus. Jesus is the centerpiece of the Bible narrative and the one upon whom man’s hope of salvation rests. Of the sixty-six books of the Bible, Jesus’ lifetime on earth is contained in only four Gospel accounts. However, despite his short three-and-a-half-year ministry, Jesus’ life and work is the focus of the scriptures from Genesis to Revelation.

The Old Testament pointed to Jesus with prophecies of his birth (Micah 5:2; Matt. 2:5,6; John 7:42) his ministry (Isaiah 53; Zech. 9:9; 11:12,13; Matt. 26:15) and his death (Psalm 41:9; John 13:18; Psalm 22) his resurrection (Psa. 16:10, Acts 2:27) and his future Kingdom (Gen. 22:18; Gal. 3:8,16,29). When Jesus spoke of the Scriptures, it was the Old Testament that he referenced.

The Old Testament Scriptures foretold of a great savior that would come to Israel and the Gospel of Luke tells us that a time had come when *“the people were in expectation and all men mused in their hearts of John [the Baptist], whether he were the Christ, or not.”* (Luke 3:15) They saw that John was doing a great reformation work in Israel. However, Jesus, too, was doing great healings and teaching things that were unlike the Pharisees (Matt.5:43-48). The people considered that Jesus

must be a great prophet. Jesus asked his disciples, *“Who do people say that the Son of Man is?”* They answered, *“Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”* (Matt.16:13,14) But the Pharisees and Doctors of the Law looked upon him with suspicion.

If the people were expecting their Messiah, why were Israel’s teachers in the dark? The Jews highly venerated the Hebrew Scriptures and carefully preserved and passed them on from one generation to the next. Jesus told them, *“You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me.”* (John 5:39)

Although the Scribes and Pharisees searched the Scriptures daily, there are different ways to search. One might search to find truth, or one might search to find support for a pre-conceived idea. The Pharisees and the Sadducees were in the latter category. Rather than weighing his miracles and teachings in the light of the scriptures, they repeatedly challenged Jesus hoping to trip him up. (Matt.12:10; 17:24-27; 22:17; 22:34-36; Luke 20:21-24; Mark 10:2; 12:18-27) Jesus said of them, *“in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.”* (Matt. 15:9, Isa. 29:13)

Tradition, coveting the approval of men, and the presumption

that only they were able to interpret the Scriptures, blinded the religious leaders to the testimony of their own sacred scrolls. When officers sent by the Pharisees to arrest Jesus came back empty handed, they challenged them, *“Why have you not brought him?”* The officers answered, *“No one ever spoke like this man!”* The Pharisees answered them, *“Have you also been deceived? Have any of the authorities or the Pharisees believed in him?”* (John 7:45-49 English Standard Version)

When Jesus asked the Pharisees, *“**What do you think of Christ? Whose son is he?**”* They answered, *“David’s.”* Their answer was only a half truth. So, Jesus asked, *“**If David then calls him Lord, how is he his son?**”* What did they learn? Not to ask Jesus any more questions! (Matt. 22:42-45)

Jesus asked his disciples the same question, *“**But who do you say I am?**”* Peter answered, *“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”* Jesus told him, *“**Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.**”* (Matt. 16:13-17)



The Jews challenged Jesus, asking, *“how long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.”* Jesus answered, *“**I told you and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father’s name bear witness of me.**”*

Although Jesus was clearly stating that his commission was from God, the Jews couldn’t hear him because they were blinded by their prejudices and jealousies. So, they drew their own conclusions and picked up stones to stone Jesus.

Jesus said to them, *“**I have shown you many good works from My Father; for which of these do you stone Me?**”* The Jews answered, *“We do not stone you for a good work, but for blasphemy, and because you, being a man, make yourself God.”* Jesus corrected them, *“**I said I am the Son of God.**”* (John 10:32-36) but it fell on deaf ears. At another time Jesus said of the people, *“**in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith... hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive.**”* (Matt. 13:14; Isa. 6:10)

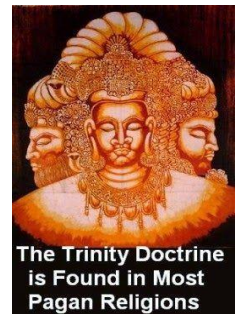
Just as the people and their religious leaders were confused about Jesus’ identity at his first advent, confusion has persisted throughout the ensuing centuries. As Christianity spread throughout the gentile world, a heresy called “Gnosticism” rose with it and began gaining a foothold among the new converts.

The Gnostics presented themselves as having higher knowledge. One of their ideas was that Jesus was an embodiment of the supreme being who became incarnate. Others adamantly denied that the supreme being came in the flesh, claiming that Jesus was merely a human who attained enlightenment through *gnosis* [Greek - knowledge]. Still others believed that Jesus’ physical body was not real, but only “seemed” to be physical, and that His spirit descended upon Him at His baptism but left Him just before His crucifixion.

It was this heresy that the Apostle John warned about when he wrote, *“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but try the spirits to see if they are of God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God; and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the antichrist you heard is coming, and even now is already in the world.”* (1 John 4:1-3, Modern KJV)

Once the Apostles and those church leaders who had had direct contact with the Apostles had fallen “asleep” in death, their teaching that the Heavenly Father alone is supreme and that Jesus is on his right hand as his beloved Son (Col. 3:1; Heb. 1:3; 1 Pet. 3:22), began to be challenged. The debate fueled by the Gnostic ideas grew in intensity and divided Christianity into two camps—the Arians, who accepted the headship of God over Christ, his son in the usual sense of the word, vs. the Athanasians, who considered God and Jesus co-equal and co-eternal. The Emperor Constantine saw the vitality of the growing Christian sect as a means of strengthening his empire, but their internal conflict jeopardized that end. So, as the solution to his political dilemma, he convened the of Council of Nice in A.D. 321. Constantine assessed the strength of the parties at odds and made the final decision in favor of the Athanasians. The Nicene Creed that was formulated became the first step toward the doctrine of the trinity, but only the first step. Not until the Council of Constantinople in A.D. 381 declared the Holy Ghost a God, was the trinity complete.

To most people today, “the Trinity” is a distinctly Christian concept, referring to the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. But this wasn’t the first religious trinity. The concept of a trinity was widespread throughout the Pagan world. The ancient Egyptians worshipped the three deities, Osiris, Isis, and Horus. In Babylon the trinity of Nimrod, Semiramis and Tammuz was worshipped. In the Canaanite language of the Old Testament these three are identified with Baal, Ashtoreth, and Tammuz. The Hindus worship the trinity of Brahma, Vishnu, and Siva, called, “Eko Deva Trimurti,” meaning “One God, three forms.”



So, is the God of the Bible a trinity as most Christian seminarians are taught and most Christians sitting under their influence believe, or is the doctrine of the trinity of Pagan origin? To answer these questions the only sure source of appeal is the Scriptures themselves, not tradition, not history, not human reasoning. Let's examine some key scriptures...

"I and the Father are one." (John 10:30)

Jesus said this in the context of the events already cited in this newsletter. The Jews had challenged him that he was claiming to be God when he had said he was the **"Son of God."** So how should we understand that Jesus and the Father are one? Jesus used the same metaphor in his last prayer and qualified it: *"Neither pray I for these [his current disciples] alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; **That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.**"* (John 17:20-23) Clearly, Jesus used this expression to indicate oneness of heart and purpose. When Jesus told Philip that if he had known him, he had known and seen the Father also, he was speaking in the same sense as above. (John 14:7,9)

So, *"What do you think of Christ? Whose son is he?"* Why is so vital a doctrine not more clearly presented in the Bible? Why is it an undefinable "mystery?" Of the terms used to distinguish the parts of the trinity—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost—only "God the Father" is found in the Scriptures, the term "trinity" never. The last words of the Apostle John in his Gospel are, *"these are written **that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.**"* (John 20:31) If believing that Jesus is God is so important to one's salvation, shouldn't John have said that rather than what he said?

Jesus gave the Apostles the commission to *"make disciples of all nations...teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you."* (Matt. 28:18-20) Why then did none of the Apostolic writers clarify the one doctrine that is considered so essential by some today? The salutations of their epistles to the churches from Romans to Revelation begin with references to "God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord" with no hint of their oneness and with no mention of the holy Spirit. (See the opening verses of each epistle)

If Jesus is God, many questions arise about him, and the things that were recorded about him in the "inspired" teachings of the Apostles.



Why did Jesus pray? The Gospel writer tells us that Jesus prayed —all night before selecting the twelve apostles (Luke 6:12), —while alone on a mountain after the feeding the 5000 (Mark 6:46, Matt. 14:23), —on the Mount of Transfiguration with Peter, James, and John (Luke 9:28), —aloud before the mourners at the tomb of Lazarus (John 11:40-44), —in the garden of Gethsemane. Did he expect help and comfort—from whom? (Matt. 26:36-44)

- Why did Jesus say his works were not his own? (John 5:30,43)
- Why did Jesus consistently say that the Father was greater than he? (John 5:19; 7:28; 8:28, 42; 10:29; 14:28)
- Why does John say, "No man has seen God at any time?" (John 1:18; Ex. 33:20)
- After his resurrection why did Jesus say he was ascending to "my Father...my God?" (John 20:17)
- Why did Jesus not know the "day and hour" of his second coming? (Matt. 24:36)
- Was Jesus dead and God alive at the same time? (Acts 2:22-24)
- Who raised Jesus? (Acts 4:10; 17:31; Gal. 1:1; Eph 1:20; Col. 2:12; 1Pet. 1:21)
- By whom was he "given" authority? (Matt. 28:18)
- What did the "voice from heaven" call Jesus? (Matt. 3:17; Luke 1:17; 9:35; 2 Peter 1:17)

- If Jesus was already God, how could he be exalted to a still higher position? (Phil 2:9)
- How could he sit at "God's right hand?" (Psa. 110:1; Heb. 10:12,13; Eph. 1:20)
- Why did Paul say the head of Christ is God? (1 Cor 11:3; Eph 1:17; 1 Cor. 15:28)
- Why did Jesus affirm "the LORD our God is one Lord?" (Mark 12:29; Deut. 6:4)
- Why is Jesus called "the first born of every creature?" (Col 1:15, Rev. 3:14; Prov. 8:22-31; Heb. 1:1-3; 1 John 1:1-3; John 1:1-3)

**"Prove all things; hold fast that which is good."
1 Thess. 5:21**

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