

**The Church of God, International  
Bible Correspondence Course**

**LESSON 3**

**Knowing God:  
The Mystery of the Gods**

In the last lesson we made a start on understanding the nature and being of God. Where is God and who is He? Is God even a "He" at all? What if God is beyond human comprehension, and all we can grasp of Him is a pale facsimile? A God that is so far away, so remote, is unthinkable. And pointless. Who cares about a God we cannot understand or know? He might as well be a visitor from outer space who got all this started and then left. He is no longer here, no longer involved, no longer interested. There is no point in praying to a God whom we cannot understand.

In that lesson, we dealt with the apparent conflict between the Old Testament, which insists that there is only one God, and the New Testament, which tells us that there are two who are called God.

In the early centuries after Christ, some theologians concluded that God was a "trinity," that He existed as three in one. Neither the word trinity nor any direct suggestion of a divine trinity is found in the Bible, but they reasoned that it had to be so. They concluded that God is one being, composed of three persons. The semantic discussions revolving around this are endless. Is God one person with three modes of existence? Is God one individual with three faces? To further confuse the issue, words have been borrowed from the Greek. God is said to be one being or person composed of three hypostases.

Everything about the doctrine of the trinity seems designed to turn God into a mystery, an enigma that man cannot understand. And what a man cannot understand, he cannot relate to. Yet God intends that man not only know and understand Him, He intends that man relate to him.

What is wrong with all this is that it attempts to reconcile an irreconcilable contradiction. One is not three, and three are not one. As long as we attempt to maintain that "one" means one person, one being, we will wander through a mystifying maze of contradictions. If we can accept that "one" means "united," then understanding is not far behind.

**HOW MANY GODS ARE THERE?**

It may be true that there are elements about God that man cannot understand in the flesh. To whatever extent that is true, it is also irrelevant. God has chosen to reveal Himself to

man in terms that man can understand. God is Father and Son, a family relationship familiar to us all. He has chosen to tell us that Father and Son are "one" in the sense that they are united. This is no mystery. God also ordained that husband and wife, another family relationship, should remain two persons while united as "one flesh" (Genesis 2:24).

Another response to the conflict was to conclude that God is a kind of being of which one is supreme. When we read about the "one true God," we are reading about that One who is supreme-God the Father.

Still another version concludes that God is a family, with a Father who is above all, a Son who is subject to the Father, and with many more sons to come. When God says through Isaiah, "This saith Jehovah the King of Israel, and his redeemer, Jehovah of hosts; I am the first, and I am the last, and beside me there is no God" (Isaiah 44:6), He is speaking as God the Father. When he says, "Beside me there is no Elohim," he is saying that there is no elohim who is His equal, for in fact there are other elohim. A Psalm will serve to illustrate.

### **Psalm 82:1-6**

1. Who does God judge?

Note: The word for "God" and "gods" is, in both cases, *elohim*.

2. Are "children of the Most High" called "gods" (*elohim*)?

3. Is it possible for "gods" to die like men?

4. How is it possible for elohim to "inherit all nations"? Doesn't one inherit something from another?

### **John 10:22-38; Psalm 82**

5. What was the provocation that led the Jews to attempt to stone Christ?

6. Of all that Jesus said, what led the Jews to accuse him of blasphemy?

7. Did they conclude from what He said that Jesus was claiming to be God?

8. The defense raised by Jesus cited the 82nd Psalm. How did He understand the word elohim from the psalm?

Note: it seems that to claim to be the Son of God is to claim to be the same kind of being as God--i.e. to be God. Otherwise, it is hard to see how the charge of blasphemy could be raised.

9. Was there, then, any conflict in Christ's mind that God could be one and without parallel, and yet there could be others who are also called "god"?

We are going to see that God is a family. God is also a kind of being. We will see that both Father and Son are of the same kind, and share the same name--as fathers and sons commonly do. But we will be surprised when we study man's encounters with God. Of all man's Old Testament interactions with God, no man ever saw the Father, or heard His voice.

## **THE OLD TESTAMENT GOD**

Here is where we must deal with an old assumption about God. We have long become accustomed to looking at things in a certain way, so this may prove disconcerting. First, did man encounter God in the Old Testament?

### **Exodus 33:1-23**

10. Who did Moses meet and talk to when he entered the Tabernacle? Note: Remember that LORD in capital letters is for the Hebrew YHVH, or Jehovah.

11. Was God hidden when He talked to Moses? (verse 11)

12. What kind of relationship existed between Jehovah and Moses?

13. Was it possible for a man to see the face of God and live?

14. How, then, was Moses able to see Him?

Note: There is a strange conflict in this passage. First, we are told that Moses talked to God face to face. Then, Moses is told that no man can see God's face and live. This may explain the presence of the cloud at the door of the Tabernacle. Moses spoke to God face to face, but God was obscured from view by the cloud.

### **Genesis 32:24-30**

15. With whom did Jacob wrestle all night?

16. Why was Jacob's name changed?

17. Is Jacob said to have prevailed with God?

18. Whom did Jacob say he had seen face to face?

19. Did he think it unusual that a man could see God and live?

## **HAS MAN SEEN GOD?**

Now all this might not pose a problem except for some important passages that, on the surface, seem to tell us something quite different. There are still more passages from the Old Testament that tell us man has seen God. Then, there are the following passages to consider:

20. According to John, when and under what circumstances has man seen God? (John 1:18)

21. Is "the One who has not been seen" the Father or the Son?

22. How is this God revealed or "declared" to man?

23. Whom did Jesus say had been able to see the Father? (John 6:45,46; see also John 5:37)

24. Is there One whom no man can approach or see? (I Timothy 6:13-16)

If no man could see or approach the Father, how could anyone come to know anything about Him? (Matthew 11:27)

### **Genesis 18:1-33**

25. Who appeared to Abraham in this passage? Who was with Him?

26. Who was it that promised a child to Abraham and Sarah, and then rebuked Sarah for laughing? (verse 13)

Note: Remember that "LORD" in capitals is the translation of the Hebrew YHVH or Jehovah.

27. With whom did Abraham share a meal?
28. With whom was Abraham pleading and receiving answers regarding the lives in Sodom?
29. Was Moses able to behold the similitude of Jehovah? (Numbers 12:8)

Now if these and others saw and heard Jehovah, while no man was able to see the Father or hear His voice, who then is Jehovah? To answer this, we must digress slightly.

## **ABOUT ANGELS**

The word angel comes from the Greek angeles or "messenger." Since it means "messenger," it can and does have a broad variety of uses. So does its Hebrew equivalent, malak. Both words really should be translated "messenger" everywhere. You could then determine what sort of messenger by the context: Is this a spirit being sent with a message from God, or a mere man bringing a message from one man to another? The following passages will serve to illustrate.

30. Was John the baptist an "angel" or merely a messenger? (Matthew 11:10)

Note: The word messenger in this passage is the Greek angeles.

31. Could Satan have an angel or "messenger"? II Corinthians 12:7, and 11:14)
32. Is a human priest a messenger or an "angel"? (Malachi 2:7)

Note: The word malak, commonly translated "angel," merely means "messenger" and is correctly translated that way repeatedly. See I Kings 19:2 and II Kings 9:18. In spite of all this, the word angel is useful, because it has come to mean a specific kind of messenger--a spirit being, sent by God to carry a message, or otherwise do His bidding--a divine messenger.

33. Are there different levels or kinds of divine messengers? (I Thessalonians 4:16; Jude 1:9)

Note: "Archangel" simply means "chief messenger."

34. Are angels worthy of worship? (Revelation 22:6-9)

### **Judges 6:11-23**

Note: This is one of many Old Testament passages where we are introduced to One called the "Angel of the LORD." This is better rendered "Messenger of Jehovah," because we shall soon see that this is no "angel" in the traditional sense of the word. Verse 13 illustrates the difference between "Lord" and "LORD." It should be rendered: "Oh my Lord, if Jehovah be with us..."

35. Is this conversation between Gideon and an angel, or between Gideon and Jehovah?  
(See verses 14,16)

36. Did Gideon know who he was talking to from the first?

37. Why was Gideon afraid for having seen the face of the Messenger of Jehovah?  
(Deuteronomy 4:33; Exodus 33:20)

### **Joshua 5:13-15**

38. Who was it that Joshua saw here? Could it have been the God whom no man can see?

39. Did the "man" allow Joshua to worship Him?

40. What is the significance of having Joshua remove his shoes?

### **Exodus 3:1-6**

41. Who appeared to Moses in the burning bush?

42. Who saw Moses turn aside to look at the bush? (Read carefully.)

43. Who called to Moses from the bush?

44. Why did Moses have to remove his shoes?

45. Does it seem likely that Joshua and Moses both encountered the same being?

46. Was this being an "angel" in the traditional sense, or a "messenger" speaking and acting as "God"?

### **Matthew 4:8-11**

47. Did the devil seek worship of himself!

48. What was Jesus' response?

### **Ezekiel 28:11-17**

49. Who is the "king of Tyre" in this passage?

Note: There are two major clues here. First, he is said to have been in Eden, the garden of God. Besides Adam and Eve, who was there? Second, he is called the "anointed cherub that covers."

50. Was he a begotten or created being?

### **Ezekiel 10:1-22**

51. Write a summary description of a cherub.

52. Are cherubim very close to the throne of God?

53. Are they spirit beings?

54. Are they a kind of "angel"?

### **Isaiah 6:1-7**

55. Who was it that Isaiah saw in this vision?

56. Does this passage suggest the existence of yet a different kind of angel?

57. How does a seraph differ from a cherub?

Note: In Hebrew, the im ending to a word signifies the plural. Hence a seraph is one, seraphim is plural.

58. Did Isaiah actually see Jehovah, or did he merely see Him in vision?  
59. Was it actually God the Father he saw, or could it have been another of the same name. Remember that Father and Son commonly share the same family name.

**Exodus23:20-21**

60. Was this an angel or a messenger?  
61. By what name would He have been called?  
62. Who would this messenger have been?

In this lesson we have established that there is One in the Old Testament called Jehovah who is other than the Father. That One is the Person we now know as Jesus Christ. He was the Word of God, the Messenger of the Father. In the next lesson, we will study the nature of Christ and the Holy Spirit. Watch for it next month.

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