

## Lesson 4

# “The Nature of God: Who He Is”

## Acts 17:16-34

### Purpose:

Your students will learn the perfections of God as His greatness, His goodness, and His personhood. Understanding these attributes of God will help them avoid imagining God for themselves, which is the heart of idolatry.

### In a Nutshell:

When the apostle Paul visited Athens, his spirit was deeply troubled by the idolatry he saw (Acts 17:16). We need that same stirring of heart as we minister to an equally dark day of idolatry. The problem we face today is the same one Paul faced in Athens – the true God of the Bible was to them the Unknown God (v. 23). It was He whom Paul declared in this world of darkness. Paul wanted this city to better understand the nature of God, what He is like (v. 29). Theologians call this study *theology proper*.

To explain what God is like is to describe His attributes and His works. Lesson 4 focuses on His attributes, and Lesson 5 on His works. Roland McCune defines the word *attribute*: “these attributes are the qualities which are inherent in and manifestations of the being or essence of God” (*A Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity*, 1: 203). Ordinarily, an attribute can be either a quality or a lack of quality, something positive or something negative. All of God’s attributes are perfect, however, so they are often called His *perfections*.

As Paul declared to the men of Athens what God is like, he spoke of God’s greatness (vv.24-25a), God’s goodness (vv. 25b-28), and God’s personhood (vv. 29). These categories will organize our study of the nature of God, along with an additional section on the Trinity.

### To the Testimony!

#### God Is Great

Deut. 10:17-22 1. Moses affirms the greatness of the biblical God in this passage. As we begin to fathom God’s greatness, our study should cause us to fear Him, to serve or worship Him, to cling to Him in love, and to swear by His name in faith (v. 20). Simply put, the God Who is great is our God. In theology, when we say God is great, we mean especially that His nature is unchangeably infinite in many important respects. The attributes of God’s greatness speak of the ways in which He surpasses the limitations known to those who are not God. In the chart that follows, match each attribute and passage with the limitation God surpasses.

<u>God's Greatness</u>	
<u>Attribute/Passage:</u>	<u>Limitation Surpassed:</u>
Omnipotence – Jer. 32:17, 26-27	The inability to do all you please
Omniscience – 1 John 3:20	Ignorance about something
Eternality – Psalm 90:2	To be too late
Immutability – Malachi 3:6	Inconsistent instability
Transcendence – Psalm 123:1	To be earthbound
Independence – Acts 17:25	To need something from another
Omnipresence – Jer. 23:23-24	To be absent
Imminence – Acts 17:27-28	To be too far away
Immensity – 1 Kings 8:27	To be too small

**Answer:** A brief definition of each of these attributes will prove helpful here.

- *Omnipotence* means that God can do and does anything and everything He desires to do. He is all-powerful.
- *Omniscience* means that God is ignorant of nothing. He is all-knowing and all-wise.
- *Eternality* means that God is not temporal or limited by time. Time is part of His creation, not something that can limit the Creator. He is from everlasting to everlasting simultaneously.
- *Immutability* means that God's nature does not change. He is always the same, never inconsistent, contradictory, developing, or devolving.
- *Transcendence* means that God is above and beyond His creation. He is not merely a force of nature, but the supernatural God who rules as sovereign over nature.
- *Independence* means that God is completely self-sustaining. He can be in need of nothing in any sense whatsoever.
- *Omnipresence* means that God is entirely (not partially) present everywhere. He is altogether in every place at all times.
- *Imminence* means that God is intimately involved in His creation. He is near, not just far away.
- *Immensity* means that God has no spatial limitations in regard to His creation. He is larger than it, and nothing in it is too small to escape His notice.

**Application:** As finite beings, we must accept that we will never fully comprehend our infinite God. When it comes to many of these attributes, important questions can come to mind that are difficult to answer. At times, the Bible has a clear answer to our question, and at times we must simply bow in awe of the incomprehensibility of our God's greatness (Ps. 139:1-6). Here are some questions that Bible students have sought answers for in regard to a few of the attributes of God's greatness:

1. Omnipotence – Is there anything that God cannot do? Answer: Yes; the Bible is clear that God's power cannot violate the other attributes of His nature. For that reason, we know that God cannot lie (Tit. 1:2) because God is true, and that He cannot deny Himself (2 Tim. 2:13) because He is

faithful. In addition, God is truth and not a lie (1 John 2:27), light and not darkness (1 John 1:5), good and not evil (3 John 11). In fact, for every thing that God is, He is not its opposite. This means His nature reflects the laws of logic. God is rational. The laws of logic are intrinsic to His nature – they come from who and what He is. Therefore, God cannot do the logically contradictory (like make 2 plus 2 equal 5). Finally, God cannot exhaust His power. As an omnipotent being, He always has an infinite amount of additional power available while executing feats of His infinite power (Isa. 40:12).

2. Omniscience – How can God know future events yet to be caused by creatures with free will? Answer: *Open theism* is a serious error that denies God’s knowledge of events yet to be caused by free creatures (mankind). The thought is that if God knows these events, they are fixed, and therefore not caused by truly free creatures. But this limited understanding of God’s omniscience flies in the face of clear statements of Scripture about God’s knowledge of future events caused by man (Isa. 46:9-11; Dan. 2:20-23, 28, 45). What is even further beyond our comprehension is the truth of these passages that God has this knowledge of the future as a byproduct of His sovereign providential plan and purpose for His creation. He knows what will happen because He is going to make it happen. He works all things after the council of His will (Eph. 1:11). He is even able to work acts of wickedness into the furtherance of His plan to such a degree that they become part of that plan, though He is never the author of wickedness (Acts 2:23; Job 2:3, 10). More will be said about this mystery in Lesson 5 under God’s work of providence.
3. Eternality – Is it ever too late for God? Answer: No, because God exists in the beginning, beyond the creation of time and space limitations (Gen. 1:1; John 1:1). “Lateness” is caused by what is sometimes called nature’s “arrow of time,” i.e., that time passes in one direction, from past to future (past → present → future). Creatures exist within this time/space limitation, but the Creator does His works before the foundation of the world, including time (John 17:24, Eph. 1:4, 1 Pet. 1:20). Scripture indicates a difference between *before* (πρὸ) *the foundation of the world* and *from or since* (ἀπὸ) *the foundation of the world* (Matt. 13:35, 25:34, Luke 11:50, Heb. 4:3, 9:26, Rev. 13:8 [“has not been written . . . since the foundation of the world”], 17:8). The former phrase describes realities beyond limitations of natural time, whereas the latter describes events within the limitations of natural time.

While the limitation of time is a reason future events are unknown to man, as the God of eternity the God of the Bible does not suffer from this limitation. The Scripture indicates that God’s unalterable planning of future events is in some inscrutable sense related to His eternal nature, which is unlimited by time (Dan. 7:13-14; 2 Tim. 1:9; 2 Pet. 3:7-9). Roland McCune offers the following thought in this regard: “And it must be remembered that the future is future only to human beings. To God all events and objects of knowledge are a single act of eternal intuition. Technically, God has neither memory nor foreknowledge (prescience) because the whole of His knowledge is simultaneously and perpetually present. But, He is able to see in one instant all sequential events. In this sense, He knows the future” (*A Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity*, 1:229).

3. Immutability – Has not God changed His mind? Answer: The Bible does indicate that God’s dealings with men change when those men change in their response to His dealings (Gen. 6:5-7; Exod. 32:9-10; 1 Sam. 15:11; Jonah 3:3-5, 10). God’s expressed plans can include

contingencies either expressed or unexpressed (only implied). For example, as Jonah preached to Nineveh, the expressed plan of God was “after forty days Nineveh will be overthrown.” The unexpressed contingency was “if you fail to repent.” More difficult is God’s expressed plan to raise up a nation from Moses, a son of Levi, in view of the promise He had made to Judah (Gen. 49:10). Here the unexpressed but implied contingency may have been, “if Israel has no intercessor.” Moses, of course, proved to be that intercessor and God’s promise to Judah was fulfilled, all according to His immutable plan.

In order for God’s nature to not change, His dealings with men must change when they respond differently to those dealings (Jer. 18:7-10). This, however, is an expression of the consistency of His nature. Although He could as the immutable God regret that He had made Saul king given the change of mind in Saul (1 Sam. 15:11), it nevertheless must still be said of Him as the Glory of Israel that He would not lie nor change His mind the way Saul did, “for He is not a man that He should change His mind” (1 Sam. 15:29).

5. Transcendence – What is “heaven”? Answer: That God transcends His creation also means that He dwells in a place called *heaven* (John 14:2-3). This heaven is the abode of God (1 Kings 8:30, Matt. 6:9), from which Jesus descended to earth (John 6:33, 38, 41, 51), to which He ascended after death (Luke 24:51, Eph. 4:10, Heb. 4:14, 9:24), and from which He will return to earth (Mark 14:62, 1 Thess. 1:10, 4:16) [See Gordon R. Lewis and Bruce A. Demarest, *Integrative Theology: Three Volumes In One* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 3:462]. It is also the homeland of the faithful (Phil. 3:20, Heb. 11:16). The word *heaven* in Scripture may also refer to earth’s atmosphere (Matt. 6:26, 8:20, Luke 8:5), as well as to the stellar region (Mark 13:25, Rev. 6:13, 9:1, 12:4). So the abode of God is once referred to as the *third heaven* (2 Cor. 12:2). It is also called *Paradise* (Luke 23:43, 2 Cor. 12:4, Rev. 2:7). Unlike the Old Testament temple built by human hands, God’s abode, like God Himself, transcends the physical universe (Heb. 9:24).
6. Independence – Can God suffer? Answer: Because God is not dependent upon others for freedom from suffering, He cannot be made to suffer by another. Theologians call this His *impassibility*. The authors of Scripture speak of God’s unassailable glory, which is a closely related theme (Ps. 72:19, Isa. 42:8, 48:11, Rom. 11:36, Eph. 3:21, 1 Pet. 4:11, Jude 25, Rev. 7:12). God’s glorious existence is never made less glorious. It cannot be taken from Him; and He will not give it to another. This is not to say, however, that God does not experience emotions and even circumstances that are less than positive in His estimation, as they are in our own. We are told that He is afflicted in the afflictions of His people (Isa. 63:9), and their unfaithfulness vexed His Holy Spirit (v. 10; Eph. 4:30). Especially as the incarnate Son of God, God learned obedience through the things which He suffered (Heb. 5:8). He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezek. 33:11), and the judgement of sinners is His strange work (Isa. 28:21). Although God can feel and experience these negative things, they can never make His existence any less glorious. In fact, these feelings and experiences only manifest His glory in a greater way.
7. Omnipresence – Does not God dwell in some places more than in others? Answer: The Bible speaks of God being more present in some places and less present in others. He is with believers in a way that He is not with unbelievers (Matt. 28:20). This is especially true in our age when two or three are gathered together in His name as a local church (Matt.

18:20). In the days of God's dealings with Israel, He was present especially between the cherubim above the mercy seat in the Holy of Holies of first the tabernacle and then the temple (2 Kings 19:15). The indwelling of God's Spirit puts a believer in union with Christ (Rom. 8:9), and there is a sense in which to be in hell is to be banished from the glory of God's power and His presence (2 Thess. 1:9). This variety can be reconciled with the doctrine of the omnipresence of God by understanding these verses in terms of varying degrees of the manifestation of God's presence (see McCune, 1:231). Whereas God's omnipresence is a fact, the manifestation of that presence is the blessing we need (Num. 14:14, Ps. 13:1, 27:8, Song of Sol. 2:14, Acts 23:11, 2 Tim. 4:22).

8. Immanence – Can I know the inscrutable God personally? Answer: Yes. Because God is intimately involved in all aspects of our lives, even granting us our next breath, He is someone we can know personally (Acts 17:28). In spite of God's personal proximity, however, the Athenians failed to know God personally (v. 23). Paul explained to them how the "unknown God" becomes known: (1) reject the temptation of idolatry, i.e., of making your own version of a knowable god (v. 16); (2) learn from God what He is like and what He has done (vv. 24-26); (3) understand God's desire that you seek to know Him personally (vv. 27-29); (4) respond to these learnings and understanding by repenting of the sin that separates you from Him, finding forgiveness in Christ (vv. 30-31). In the end, to know God is to fear Him (Prov. 2:5, 9:10). To know Christ is to know the Father (John 14:8-9).
9. Immensity – "Does God's immeasurable size really matter?" Answer: Yes. God's size mattered to Solomon, and it should matter to us in the same way (1 Kings 8:27). God was bigger than Solomon's temple. He could not be limited to the house that Solomon had built. With Solomon we must recognize that the sheer size of God means that He is more important than even the things we build for Him. One glimpse at our increasingly rapidly expanding universe tells us that earth is but a minor speck in the cosmos. One glimpse at the immensity of the God who cannot be contained within that universe reminds us that our lives and work are a mere speck in all that He is doing. In this way, God's immensity humbles us by reminding us that we are very small in comparison.

But the immensity of our God reminds us also that *small* must not be confused with *insignificant*. Every grain of sand has  $5 \times 10^{19}$  atoms in it. The DNA of a human cell stretched out is about 2 meters long, so all the DNA in single human body stretched out would be about twice the diameter of the solar system. There is a sense in which the immense Creator's creation is immensely small. There is no detail too minute to escape His notice or care. For this reason, Solomon could be confident that in spite of His immensity, God had placed His name upon the house that Solomon build as His own special dwelling place, and that He would incline His ear to answer their prayers (1 Kings 8:28-30).

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Exod. 33:7-34:9      2. Exodus 32 records one of the most tragic events of the history of Israel, the golden-calf incident. Aaron did not deny the Lord's existence. He redefined His attributes in a way more acceptable to the sinful people of Israel (Exod. 32:1-14). On the heels of that horrific episode, Moses's approach to the Lord greatly contrasts what had just happened. He prayed, "Show me now thy way, that I may know thee, that I may find grace in thy sight" (33:13). Later He prayed in the same vein, "Show me Your glory!" (33:18). How does the Lord answer Moses's prayer (v. 19), and what attributes specifically did God show Moses (34:6-7)?

**Answer:** When Moses asks the Lord to show him His glory, His answer was that He would show Moses all His goodness (33:19). That goodness is intrinsic to His name, and it is expressed according to His sovereign will. The specific attributes of God's goodness shown to Moses on Sinai (34:6-7) were (1) His name LORD (Heb: Yahweh), (2) His name LORD God (Heb: Yahweh El), (3) His mercifulness or compassion (Heb: rāḥûm), (4) His graciousness (Heb: ḥānnûn), (5) His longsuffering or slowness to anger (Heb: 'ērēk 'āpāyîm; literally, *long nostrils*), (6) His abundant covenantal-love (KJV: *abundant goodness*; Heb: rāb-ḥesēd), (7) His truthfulness or faithfulness (Heb: 'ēmēt), (8) His protection of the covenantal-love that belongs to thousands (Heb: nōšer ḥesēd), (9) His disposition to forgive (Heb: nōsē'), and (10) to be just or righteous (KJV: *and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation*).

**Application:** It is worth remembering the importance of God's name to the revelation of God's glory in this passage (33:19). A name is something God has in common with man (Gen. 32:24-30). Often the attributes of God's goodness are understood as communicable attributes, or those that God shares with man. Perhaps that is part of the reason why God says that he is declaring His name in this passage. The 19th century Old Testament scholar, Gustav Oehler observed the following about God's name(s): "God does not name Himself to man after the compass of His perfections, as the earlier theology was wont inexactly to define the biblical notion of the divine name, but according to the relation in which He has placed Himself to man, according to the attributes by which He wishes to be acknowledged, known, and addressed by man, in the communion into which He has entered with him. In short, God names Himself, not according to what He is for Himself, but to what He is for man; and therefore every self-presentation of God in the world is expressed by a corresponding name of God" (*Theology of the Old Testament* (1873; reprint, Minneapolis: Klock & Klock, 1978), 125). Two names of God mentioned here in Exodus 34 are the following:

1. *Yahweh* (KJV: *LORD* or *GOD*) – Oehler: "God is rather Jahve [Yahweh] in as far as He has entered into an historical relation to mankind, and in particular to the chosen people Israel, and shows Himself continually in this historical relation as He who is, and who is what He is. While heathenism rests almost exclusively on the past revelations of its divinities, this name testifies, on the other hand, that the relation of God to the world is in a state of continual living activity; it testifies, especially in reference to the people who address their God by this name, that they have in their God a future" (p. 95).
2. *Yahweh El* (*LORD God*) – Robert Reymond: "[El] means etymologically something on the

order of 'Mighty One' or 'Powerful One' [it is a participle of a verb meaning *to be strong*]” (*A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 154). Oehler: “In general, all universally cosmical action of God, going out toward the heathen as well as toward Israel in the creation and preservation of the world, is traced to El and Elohim” (98).

Other names that communicate the goodness of God listed by Reymond (153-160) include 'elōah, one of the words translated *God* meaning *Revered One*, 'ēl 'elyōn meaning *God Most High*, 'ādōn meaning *Lord* or *Master*, 'ēl šadday meaning *God All-Sufficient*, yhwh šebā'ōt meaning *Yahweh* or *LORD of Hosts (Armies)*. Many others could be mentioned.

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Exod. 34:8-9	3. When Moses witnessed God’s goodness pass by, he had a reaction that is similar to the one that Isaiah experienced when he saw the Lord high and lifted up.
Isa. 6:1-7	What was that reaction? Why did these men of God have that reaction? What attribute of God’s goodness does Isaiah see especially?

**Answer:** Moses reacted with humble confession over his own sin and that of his people. That was Isaiah’s reaction too (Isa. 6:6-7). These men had that reaction because the correct vision of God’s goodness highlighted their own lack of this goodness. Isaiah was especially troubled over a vision of God’s holiness.

**Application:** God’s goodness is best understood by starting with God’s holiness. His holiness is the way He is set apart from all that is less good than He is. It is His exclusiveness as the only God of Isaiah’s vision, whose train filled the temple (v. 1) and whose glory filled the whole earth (v. 3). There is simply no room for anyone else’s train or glory. So these men demonstrate that we must always think of our goodness in terms of God’s goodness, and not God’s goodness in terms of ours. It is we who are lacking, not He.

As the seraphim cry out with covered face, “Holy, Holy, Holy!”, they praise the fundamental attribute of God’s goodness. To illustrate, while it is true that God is love, God’s holiness is not always loving, and so there are some things that God does not love (Prov. 6:16). But God’s love is always a holy love, and He has no relationship with any of His creatures that does not include His holiness in relation to them.

### **Interesting Insight!**

“Christians in Our Time sometimes act as though they were the first to recognize that God is a God of love. Of course the Bible tells us that God is love, but the Christians of modernity seem to think that this constitutes an adequate theology in itself, that God is fundamentally if not exclusively love – and hence that talk of divine holiness is distracting or intrusive. Protestant liberalism pioneered this displacement of God’s holiness in the nineteenth century, but in this century evangelicals have taken up with distressing carelessness the wholesale re-ordering of the Christian faith that it introduced, from the meaning of Christ’s atonement to the meaning of Christian sanctification.

“. . . the tenet that has been most characteristic of Protestant thought since the earliest days of the Reformation – namely, that holiness fundamentally defines the character of God. This must be so. If God’s holiness is his utter purity, his incomparable goodness, the measure of all that is true and right, the final line of resistance [separation] to all that is wrong, dark, and malignant, then love must be a part of this. If love is virtuous and right, it must be an expression of divine holiness, the essence of which is truth and right. God’s love is inescapably a manifestation of his holiness, as are his goodness, righteousness, mercy, and compassion. Holiness is what defines God’s character most fundamentally, and a vision of this holiness should inspire his people and evoke their worship, sustain their character, fuel their passion for truth, and encourage persistence in efforts to do his will and call on his name in petitionary prayers” (*God in the Wasteland: The Reality of Truth in a World of Fading Dreams* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 135-136).

### **God Is Personal**

Gen. 16:7-16      4. One of the wonderful names of God He used to reveal His nature comes by the lips of Hagar, Sarah’s Egyptian maid, the mother of Ishmael by Abraham. The angel of the Lord, a pre-incarnate appearance of the Son of God in the form of an angel, appeared to this destitute woman after she had fled the mistreatment of her mistress. The name was *El Roi*. What does the name mean in English (v. 13), and what does it say about God’s personhood?

**Answer:** The name means *Thou God seest me*. What it says about God’s personhood is that He can be known personally as *thou* by *me*. He knows me, and I can know Him person-to-person.

**Application:** All spiritual beings are personal and living beings. God is a spirit (John 4:23-24), and this explains why it is that He can and must be worshiped in a personal and living way. Blocks of wood are not spirits, and so they are neither personal nor living (Psa. 135:15-18). The same is true for sophisticated robots, computers, and phones. Neither are animals or plants spirits, and so although they have physical life like we do, they are not personal (Ps. 73:22). A spiritual being may or may not have a physical body, but that body is not the personal part of his being. Our bodies are not the persons we are. Our person is our spirit. God is a spirit, and so He is personal. We are to know Him personally.



1 Tim. 1:17; 6:16  
 Rom. 1:20  
 Col. 1:15

5. Each of the passages listed describes God with the same attribute. This truth about God can make knowing Him personally more difficult. What is the attribute, and how has God remedied this problem when it comes to knowing Him personally (John 1:18; 14:8-11)?

**Answer:** These passages all tell us that God is invisible, that He cannot be physically seen by man. The issue is not that He is translucent, but rather that the light that shines from Him is unapproachable. It can be hard to know someone personally under these conditions, but the remedy God has provided is the revelation of His Son in a personal way. This was true for Hagar, who personally met the Lord by meeting the angel of the Lord, a Christophany. It was also true for Philip and the other disciples, who saw the Father when they saw His Son, Jesus Christ. Christ is “the radiance of [God’s] glory and the exact representation of His nature” (Heb. 1:3; NASB), and He is altogether personal.

**Application:** God is not a distant inanimate force, whose effects we feel, but whom we cannot hope to know personally. To the contrary, we are persons because we were made in His image (Gen. 1:26), which is personal. In addition, God is altogether Christ-like, and Jesus Christ was very much a person (2 Cor. 4:6). Our personal relationship grows with our God as our appreciation for and understanding of the person of Christ grows. He is the one we have seen, and He has perfectly shown us the Father (John 12:45). The bifurcation of God from Christ is a personal rejection of Him, for He is personally known and revealed by Jesus Christ alone (Matt. 11:25-30). In addition, none can do for us in this regard what Christ can. Whereas some look to Mary for personal mediation, Jesus declared that it is far better to heed the word of God and avoid this idolatry (Luke 11:27-28).

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**God Is a Trinity**

Deut. 6:4, 13  
 10:20  
 Matt. 4:10  
 John 17:3  
 1 Tim. 2:5

6. The ancient faith of Israel was uniquely monotheistic among its pagan polytheistic neighbors. The Bible is clear that there is only one true God, not many gods. Nevertheless, hints of plurality exist even in the Old Testament revelation in regard to the one true God. Look up each of the passages below, and identify the phrase in each that hints at a plurality of sorts belonging to the one true God of Israel.

**Answer:** (shaded passages included in student’s chart)

Gen. 1:26	“Let <i>us</i> make man in <i>our</i> image” (v. 26); “God created man in <i>his own image</i> ” (v. 27)
Gen. 3:22	“the man has become as one of <i>us</i> ”
Gen. 11:7	“let <i>us</i> go down . . . So the Lord scattered them abroad”
Gen. 16:7-13	“ <i>the angel of the LORD</i> said unto her . . . ‘ <i>the LORD hath heard thy affliction</i> ’” (v. 11); “And she called <i>the name of the LORD that spake unto her, ‘Thou God seest me</i> ”
Exod. 3:2-6	“ <i>the angel of the LORD appeared unto him</i> in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush” (v. 2); “ <i>God called unto him</i> out of the midst of the bush” (v. 4)
Judg. 13:18-23	“the angel of the LORD appeared unto him and said. . . The LORD is with thee” (v. 12); “And the LORD looked upon him, and said” (v. 14)
Psa. 45:6-7	“Thy throne, <i>O God</i> ” (v. 6); “therefore <i>God, thy God</i> ” (v. 7)
Psa. 89:1-4	“ <i>I will sing</i> ” (v. 1), “ <i>I have said</i> ” (v. 2), “ <i>thy faithfulness</i> ” (v. 2), “ <i>I have made a covenant</i> ” (v. 3), “ <i>thy seed . . . thy throne</i> ” (v. 4)
Psa. 110:1, 5	“ <i>The LORD said unto my Lord</i> ” (v. 1); “ <i>The Lord at thy right hand</i> ” (v. 5)
Isa. 6:8	“Whom shall <i>I</i> send, and who will go for <i>us</i> ?”
Isa. 63:7-10	“ <i>the LORD</i> ” (v. 7), “ <i>the angel of His presence</i> ” (v. 9), “ <i>His Holy Spirit</i> ” (v. 10)
Zech. 2:10-11	“ <i>I come, and I will dwell in the midst of thee, saith the LORD</i> ” (v. 10); “ <i>my people</i> ” (v. 11); “the LORD of hosts hath sent <i>me</i> unto thee” (v. 11)

**Application:** Though somewhat veiled, the careful eye can see these hints of plurality throughout the Old Testament revelation. Certainly, prophecies of a divine-human Messiah could be added here (Isa. 7:14; 9:6). Benjamin Warfield commented insightfully about why it is that the Old Testament presents only hints of the doctrine of the Trinity: “The real reason for the delay in the revelation of the Trinity, however, is grounded in the secular development of the redemptive purpose of God: the times were not ripe for the revelation of the Trinity in the unity of the Godhead until the fullness of the time had come for God to send forth His Son unto redemption, and His Spirit unto sanctification. The revelation in word must needs wait upon the revelation in fact, to which it brings its necessary explanation, no doubt, but from which also it derives its own entire significance and value” (“The Biblical Doctrine of the Trinity” in *Biblical and Theological Studies* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1952), 34). Robert Reymond further explains, “It was, in sum, the two great objective redemption events of the Incarnation and Pentecost which precipitated and concretized the modification of the thinking of the first Christians about the one living and true God [in regard to His tri-unity]” (p. 211).

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Matt. 28:19  
2 Cor. 13:14  
Eph. 4:4-6

7. The two greatest evidences for the Trinity were the incarnation of God the Son in Bethlehem and the baptism of God the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. After these monumental works of special revelation, the doctrine of the Trinity is fully revealed. God is an indivisible one in essence, and a co-eternal three in person. Describe the part each person of the Trinity played first in regard to the incarnation of Christ (Luke 1:30-35; Gal. 4:4) and then at Pentecost (Acts 1:6-11).

**Answer:** In regard to the incarnation of the Son of God, the Father sends the Son into the world in the fullness of time to redeem sinners (Gal. 4:4) and ensures the royal dignity and greatness of the future of Mary's child (Luke 1:32-33); the Son of God becomes Jesus, the holy child (vv. 31, 35); and the Holy Spirit enables the virgin Mary with the power of the Most High to conceive a child, because nothing is impossible with God (vv. 34-37). In regard to Pentecost, the Father fixes times and epochs according to His own authority, including the event of Pentecost (Acts 1:7); the Son of God ascends to the right hand of the Father with the promise of His return, where from that exalted position He continues His church-building work, even unto the ends of the earth (vv. 1, 8, 9-11); and the Holy Spirit empowers the disciples of Christ making them witnesses who are enabled to accomplish Christ's work on earth as His body, and so He is poured out upon them resulting in New Testament revelation (v. 8).

**Application:** The Trinity is not a logical contradiction. God is both one and three, but He is one and three in two different senses. Analogies of this mystery hopelessly end in some form of heresy, denying either the co-eternality of the three persons of the Godhead (modalism or Sabellianism – like the idea that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit of the Godhead are analogous to the fact that I am a son, father, and husband), or else the indivisibility of God's essence (tritheism – like the idea that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit of the Godhead are analogous to the shell, white, and yoke of an egg). It is better to set the analogies aside and to be content to affirm what we understand of the Trinity, rather than to try and illustrate what is beyond our understanding. What we understand emphasizes three truths.

- (1) We affirm that each person of the Trinity is entirely God, or as Reymond states it, "that each Person has the entire fullness of God's being in himself (see Col 2:8). We must not think of the three Persons as each occupying a third of God's being. Being God as each is, each Person possesses the one whole being of God. This means that the three Persons taken together are not to be regarded as a greater divine being than any one of the Persons viewed singly and also that any one of the Person [*sic*] viewed singly is not to be regarded as a lesser divine being than when the three are viewed together" (321). So because Christ died for our sins by shedding His blood on the cross, we can say with confidence that God purchased His people with His own blood (Acts 20:28).
- (2) We affirm that each Person of the Trinity is personally distinct from the other two. Theologians sometimes refers to the Father's distinguishing property of personhood as paternity or fatherhood, the Son's as filiation or sonship, and the Spirit's as spiration or procession (Reymond, p. 322). God made man in His own image, male and female, to be fruitful and multiply (Gen. 1:26). Perhaps the family unit with father, mother, and child give us an incomplete but helpful picture of these distinguishing properties of personhood among the persons of the Trinity.

(3) We affirm that the eternal distinctiveness of the Persons of the Trinity are eternally relational. God the Father is eternally the Father of God the Son, and God the Son is eternally the Son of God the Father. The Holy Spirit is eternally the Spirit of the Father and the Spirit of the Son. The Persons of the Godhead self-identify in relation to one another as part of the independence and self-existence of God's one essence. Loneliness is a failing not possible for the nature of the triune God.

Like so much of the universe in which we live, God is unity in the midst of diversity. That the universe reflects its Maker's preference for the number three has been noted by scientists. There are three main types of stable particles in every atom: a proton, a neutron, and an electron. There are three main states of matter: solid, liquid, and gas. There are three dimensions in space: up/down, left/right, and back/forward. There are three sequences in time: past, present, and future. There are three aspects of reality: time, space, and motion. There are three primary colors: red, blue, and yellow. There are three fundamental subatomic forces: the strong nuclear force, the electromagnetic force, and the weak nuclear force. There are three notes in a musical scale's major triad: C, E, and G. This major triad together with the two minor triads make up the 3 fundamental underpinnings of harmony. In music, in the spectrum of light, and in mathematics, the number three contains seven absolute sequential combinations (that is, we may arrange them in no more than seven different combinations, regardless of the order in which they are arranged: 1-2-3, 1-2, 1-3, 2-3, 1, 2, or 3), and so the number three has an important relationship with seven in the Triune God's universe.

Ours is a God of diversity and unity. His universe is a place of creative variety in the midst of perfect order, incalculable complexity working in perfect harmony. His creation reflects His eternal Godhead and power (Rom. 1:20). Man fails to worship Him entirely without excuse.

**Notes:** \_\_\_\_\_  
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***NBBC Doctrinal Statement***

We believe there is one and only one Divine and True God, an Infinite Spirit, Maker and Supreme Ruler of heaven and earth, wholly independent from His creation, inexpressibly glorious in holiness, and worthy of all possible honor, confidence, and love; that in the unity of the Godhead there are three distinct persons – the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit – known as the Trinity, equal in every divine perfection and executing distinct but harmonious offices in the great work of redemption (Exodus 20:2, 3; 1 Corinthians 8:6; Revelation 4:11).