

*Comments on the Adult  
Sabbath School  
Bible Study Guide*

*Glimpses  
of Our  
God*

**Part 1**

**December 31 – February 3**

The January through March 2012 issue of the *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide (ASSBSG)* is entitled *Glimpses of Our God*. The principal contributor for the adult Bible study guide is Dr. Jo Ann Davidson, professor of theology at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University. Her husband, Dr. Richard Davidson, also teaches at the seminary. Having had the chance to attend some seminars where both Brother and Sister Davidson have taught, we can, without hesitation, state that they both are very kind and pleasant people who have, no doubt, enriched their students' lives in many areas. Much of their theology we would agree with, and there are some points in this quarterly to which we can say amen; however, without any personal malice, we will have to take strong exception to some of the material in this study guide, especially Lesson 1. This comments booklet will give brief comments on Lessons 1 through 5.

One of the principal concerns of the author, especially in the early lessons, is establishing the divinity of Jesus Christ and connecting this with the trinitarian doctrine to provide a complete atonement. Yet, as we shall see, these two teachings are not co-dependant upon each other, nor is the trinitarian doctrine necessary for the atonement. To provide additional study material beyond the scope we can offer here in the comments booklet, we have posted for easy download, an electronic copy of the book *The Atonement* by J. H. Waggoner. To access a copy of this book, please visit <http://www.smyrna.org> and click on the link near the bottom of the home page.

For a comprehensive study on God the Father and his only begotten Son, we encourage you to download a free copy of the book *The Foundation of Our Faith*. To access a copy of this book, please visit <http://www.smyrna.org> and click on the link near the top right of the home page.

Due to the lengthy nature of the comments for Lesson 1, the comments for Lessons 2–5 will, of necessity, be brief, but, we pray, helpful. We certainly are sorry, for

there is much that could be noted. Please read and study all things, including this comments booklet, with a prayer for divine guidance.

## **Lesson 1: The Triune God**

Both the leading doctrine of professed Christianity and the leading scientific teaching outside of Christianity are based upon assumptions. Assumptions are ideas or concepts that are accepted as fact without proof. Darwinian evolution is based upon many assumptions. People not knowledgeable of evolution may think it is all factual; however, as the fabric of the theory is studied, one finds a few facts mixed with many assumptions. The same is true concerning the leading doctrine of professed Christianity—the doctrine of the trinity. Much is assumed, as the various Bible texts which are used for its support are discussed. It does not come as a surprise that the “Key Thought” for Lesson 1 says: “Scripture contains references and *hints* to the deity and unity of the divine Godhead” (all emphasis in this booklet supplied unless otherwise noted). Besides the statement from the “Key Thought,” we have “subtle textual hints” as support for the trinity (p. 6).

As noted in the lesson, “the word *Trinity* doesn’t appear in the Bible” (p. 6). It also does not appear in the Spirit of Prophecy. It should be noted that such theological terms as incarnation and millennium are also not found in the Bible, but they certainly are mentioned in the Spirit of Prophecy.

In Lesson 1, an attempt is made to clarify the differences between trinitarianism, tritheism, and modalism. Some conflicting statements are made in the lesson concerning this. Dr. Davidson is a theologian trained in systematic theology, and it is doubtful that she has made these mistakes, but whether she made them or whether they occurred in the editing process, a clarification is needed.

Orthodox, or classical, trinitarianism does not teach three gods but, rather one God (in being or substance), with three persons or

centers of intelligence. This teaching is central to the theology of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination. The *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, also known as volume 12 of the Bible Commentary Series, has the following representative statements:

Yahweh, the God of Israel, is the God of Christianity. He is the only God. There is no other. At times “oneness” can involve the meaning of unity (i.e., John 10:30; 17:21, 23). However, if the “oneness” expressed in these texts is conceived only as a gathering of independent “onenesses” that come together in order to form a unity, the specific singleness characteristic of the one Godhead to which they testify is dissolved into a plurality of gods. The oneness of God plays a decisive, systematic role in determining the referent for the biblical revelations about God. In other words, since the God of the Bible is one and not many, all the various revelations about Him presented throughout the Bible refer to the same, *one divine reality and not to a plurality of divine beings*. (p. 121)

In God’s eternal being there is no eternal generation, and consequently, no eternal procession of the Spirit. The biblical concepts on the generation of the Son and the procession of the Holy Spirit must be understood as belonging to the historical personal acts of the Trinity in the work of Creation and redemption. In the being [singular] of God is an essential coprimordiality of three coequal, coeternal, nonoriginated persons [plural]. Moreover, Adventism conceives the idea of persons in its biblical sense, as referring to *three individual centers of intelligence and action*. (*Ibid.*, p. 150)

Later in the same paragraph, tritheism is then contrasted with trinitarianism:

The danger of Tritheism involved in this position becomes real when the oneness of God is reduced to a mere unity conceived in analogy to a human society

or a fellowship of action. Beyond such a unity of action, however, it is necessary to envision *God as the one single reality* which, in the very acts by which He reveals Himself directly in history. (*Ibid.*)

The trinitarian model of God is composed of three persons who are all essential for the one being to be God. If the Holy Spirit could be taken away from the Godhead, though it is said that it could not be done, God would cease to exist. If Jesus were somehow taken from the Godhead, then God (the entire being) would cease to exist!

This position from the *Handbook of Seventh-Day Adventist Theology* is the official position of the denomination today and, according to Martin Hanna, director of the masters of arts in the religion program at Andrews University, is the theology taught at the seminary. This may come as a shock to some Adventists who believe that the godhead is composed of three co-equal beings, each separate and distinct from the others and each fully divine and capable of existence apart from the others.

Many Adventists have a model of God that is called tritheism. Here the oneness of God has nothing to do with numeral essence but, rather, a oneness of substance, unity, and purpose. The result of this position is that the model presents three different gods. This model is a type of polytheism—many gods. All evangelical Christians, as well as many mainline denominations, account this belief as anathema, or heresy.

Modalism is the belief that there is one being who takes the role of three different persons at different times. In the Old Testament he is God, the stern Father. This god becomes incarnate and lives as Jesus and then comes, in the New Testament, as the Holy Spirit. This teaching has never found a home in Adventism.

Of these three teachings we find trinitarianism to be the official teaching of the church, as well as the view of theologians and of some church members. Tritheism is a view accepted by some church members, but

totally renounced by the official theologians of the church.

In the past the trinitarian teaching of the church allowed for each member of the trinity to have interchangeable roles. This would appear to be the theology of the *Handbook*, for there we read:

The subordination expressed in these texts [about God] must not be understood in an ontological sense, as if the reality of God the Son were dependent on the reality of God the Father. The biblical idea of the subordination of God the Son to God the father belongs, not to the inner structure of divine reality, but rather to the sphere of the accomplishment of the plan of salvation. (*Ibid.*, p. 126)

The doctrine of the trinity states that the terms Father and Son, as revealed in Scripture, do not really mean Father and Son but, rather, express roles they accept in carrying out of the plan of salvation. For example:

In the New Testament, Jesus used Father to bring us into a close and personal relationship with God (*Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . .*, p. 20).

It may be inferred from the Scriptures that when the Godhead laid out the plan of salvation at some point in eternity past, They took certain positions or roles to carry out the provisions of the plan (*The Signs of the Times*, July 1985).

A plan of salvation was encompassed in the covenant made by the Three Persons of the Godhead, who possessed the attributes of Deity equally. In order to eradicate sin and rebellion from the universe and to restore harmony and peace, one of the divine Beings accepted, and entered into, the role of Father, another the role of the Son. The remaining divine Being, the Holy Spirit, was also to participate in effecting the plan of salvation. All of this took place before sin and rebellion transpired in heaven.

By accepting the roles that the plan entailed, the divine Beings lost none of the powers of Deity. With regard to their eter-

nal existence and other attributes, They were one and equal. But with regard to the plan of salvation, there was, in a sense, a submission on the part of the Son to the Father. (Gordon Jensen, *Adventist Review*, October 31, 1996)

Yet in the new lesson, we read that the members of the Godhead “are equal but not identical or interchangeable” (p. 6).

As we noted earlier orthodox, or classical, trinitarianism does not make allowance for three divine beings. The *Handbook* states: “. . . one divine reality and not to a plurality of divine beings” (p. 121), yet in Tuesday’s lesson we read that the “three Divine Beings are viewed as One” (p. 9). This is clearly not trinitarian. It is hard to believe that a systematic theologian such as Dr. Davidson would be confused on this issue, and it may have been in the editorial process that this phrase was inserted.

The teacher’s edition of the lesson continues this confusion by speaking of “three distinct Beings all equally divine and all coeternal” (p. 13). On the same page the triune god is compared to an atom with its protons and electrons. We, however, have been seriously counseled against such physical representations of God, for they are spiritualistic:

I am instructed to say, The sentiments of those who are searching for advanced scientific ideas are not to be trusted. Such representations as the following are made: “The Father is as the light invisible; the Son is as the light embodied; the Spirit is the light shed abroad.” “The Father is like the dew, invisible vapor; the Son is like the dew gathered in beautiful form; the Spirit is like the dew fallen to the seat of life.” Another representation: “The Father is like the invisible vapor; the Son is like the leaden cloud; the Spirit is rain fallen and working in refreshing power.”

All these *spiritualistic representations* are simply nothingness. They are imperfect, untrue. They weaken and di-

minish the Majesty which *no earthly likeness can be compared to. God cannot be compared with the things His hands have made.* (*Special Testimonies*, series B, no. 7, p. 62)

Before moving to the specific comments in this lesson, page 616 of the book *Evangelism* is quoted on page 6 of the lesson, and some have used this as proof that Ellen White believed in the trinity. The statement speaks of “the eternal heavenly dignitaries—God, and Christ, and the Holy Spirit.” In spite of many non-trinitarian statements from Ellen White, does this and a few similar statements, provide proof that she believed in the doctrine of the trinity? It is helpful here to notice a statement made by Uriah Smith, speaking before a General Conference:

You will notice in these few verses the apostle brings to view the three great agencies which are concerned in this work: God, the Father; Christ, his Son; and the Holy Spirit. (Uriah Smith, March 14, 1891, *General Conference Daily Bulletin*, vol. 4, pages 146, 147)

Uriah Smith has been clearly documented as a non-trinitarian, perhaps the strongest non-trinitarian of any of the early brethren, if such a matter can be quantified. This statement is very enlightening, as it demonstrates that the pioneers understood the use of the term “three great agencies” in a manner that is not in harmony with the trinitarian doctrine, but in harmony with the teaching that the Holy Spirit is not a third, separate being apart from the Father or Son but is, rather, the Spirit of the Father and his Son.

In fact Ellen White made some very strong statements concerning the dynamic dual nature of the Godhead. She wrote:

In order that the human family might have no excuse because of temptation, Christ became one with them. *The only being who was one with God lived the law in humanity*, descended to the lowly life of a common laborer, and toiled at the carpenter’s bench with his earthly parent.

(*The Signs of the Times*, October 14, 1897)

*The Sovereign of the universe was not alone in His work of beneficence. He had an associate—a co-worker who could appreciate His purposes, and could share His joy in giving happiness to created beings.* ‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God.’ John 1:1, 2. Christ, the Word, the only begotten of God, was one with the eternal Father—one in nature, in character, in purpose—the *only being that could enter into all the counsels and purposes of God.* ‘His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.’ Isaiah 9:6. His “goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.” Micah 5:2. And the Son of God declares concerning Himself: “The Lord possessed Me in the beginning of His way, before His works of old. I was set up from everlasting... When He appointed the foundations of the earth: then I was by Him, as one brought up with Him: and I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him.” Proverbs 8:22–30. (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 34)

By the power of His love, through obedience, fallen man, a worm of the dust, is to be transformed, fitted to be *a member of the heavenly family, a companion through eternal ages of God and Christ and the holy angels.*...—Manuscript 21, Feb. 16, 1900. (*The Upward Look*, p. 61)

Let the brightest example the world has yet seen be your example, rather than the greatest and most learned men of the age, who know not God, nor Jesus Christ whom he has sent. *The Father and the Son alone are to be exalted.* (*The Youth’s Instructor*, July 7, 1898)

**Sunday, January 1:** Being a theology instructor at Andrews University, Dr. Davidson knows well that none of the Adventists pioneers were trinitarian, as former professor George Knight wrote:

Most of the founders of Seventh-day Adventism would not be able to join the church today if they had to subscribe to the denomination's Fundamental Beliefs.

More specifically, most would not be able to agree to belief number 2, which deals with the doctrine of the Trinity. For Joseph Bates the Trinity was an unscriptural doctrine, for James White it was that "old Trinitarian absurdity," and for M. E. Cornell it was a fruit of the great apostasy, along with such false doctrines as Sundaykeeping and the immortality of the soul. (*Ministry*, October 1993, p. 10)

Depending upon the Bible only and not the creeds of men, the pioneers rejected the doctrine of the trinity. They read the Shema of Israel which said, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD" (Deuteronomy 6:4).

Special attention has been given by theologians to the word *one* in Deuteronomy 6:4. It is translated from the Hebrew **אֶחָד** - *echad*. *Echad* is mentioned at the bottom of Sunday's lesson. There we are told it is "a complex unity." For instance, a cluster of grapes could be called one (*echad*), yet that cluster would contain several individual grapes. This is the sense that the trinitarian would understand *echad* in Deuteronomy 6:4. An example of such usage from Scripture is quoted as from Genesis 2:24: "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one (*echad*) flesh."

However, *echad* can also be translated *one* in the sense of an individual thing, a single unit. If we go back to Genesis 2:21, we find such a usage: "And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one (*echad*) of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof." Another such usage can be found in Genesis 42:11, where Joseph's brothers stated: "We are all one (*echad*) man's sons; we are true men, thy servants are no spies." Here the meaning of *echad* is a single unit—one man (Jacob) was their father. We must, therefore, examine the rest of the Scriptures to see

which meaning of *echad* is to be understood. The Jews understood *echad* here to be a single unit, more than simply a unity, as we see how Deuteronomy 6:4 is interpreted in the New Testament. Notice carefully:

And one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, and perceiving that he had answered them well, asked him, Which is the first commandment of all? And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these. And the scribe said unto him, Well, Master, thou hast said the truth: for there is one God; and there is none other but he: And to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices. And when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly, he said unto him, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God. And no man after that durst ask him any question. (Mark 12:28–34)

Unlike others that questioned Christ, this scribe was a sincere seeker of truth. In answer to his question about "which is the first commandment of all," Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 6:4, 5 and then followed that with Leviticus 19:18. The scribe responded, "Well, Master, thou hast said the truth: for there is one God." Jesus did not say, "Excuse me, brother, you misunderstood; there are two Gods" or "There are three Gods." Instead the Scripture states that "Jesus saw that he answered discreetly." Furthermore, Jesus told him that he was "not far from the kingdom of God."

The Bible clearly teaches, without hints, that the Father is the supreme being of the universe, the one Jesus called "the only true

God” (John 17:3). Writing about eating food offered to false gods, Paul said: “For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be gods many, and lords many,) But 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” (1 Corinthians 8:5, 6). Here Paul does not define the one true God as “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a unity of three co-eternal Persons,” as quoted in the lesson introduction from fundamental belief number 2 of the Adventist Church. Instead Paul says that the one true God is the Father.

Writing to Timothy Paul also says: “For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 2:5). Jesus is not a part of the “one God,” of which Paul here speaks, for he could not be a mediator between God and man. Ephesians 4:5 says: “One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.” Again the one God is the Father!

**Monday, January 2:** Monday’s lesson promotes a misunderstanding that teaches that a denial of the trinitarian doctrine is a denial of the divinity of Jesus Christ. While the Adventist pioneers rejected the doctrine of the trinity, they all strongly upheld the divinity of Jesus Christ. In his book *The Atonement*, J. H. Waggoner stated:

It is not our purpose to present any argument on the doctrine of the trinity, further than it has a bearing on the subject under consideration, namely, on the Atonement.

Many theologians really think that the Atonement, in respect to its dignity and efficacy, rests upon the doctrine of a trinity. But we fail to see any connection between the two. To the contrary, the advocates of that doctrine really fall into the difficulty which they seem anxious to avoid. Their difficulty consists in this: They take the denial of a trinity to be equivalent to a denial of the divinity of

Christ. Were that the case, we should cling to the doctrine of a trinity as tenaciously as any can; but it is not the case. They who have read our remarks on the death of the Son of God know that we firmly believe in the divinity of Christ; but we cannot accept the idea of a trinity, as it is held by Trinitarians, without giving up our claim on *the dignity of the sacrifice* made for our redemption.

And here is shown how remarkably the widest extremes meet in theology. The highest Trinitarians and lowest Unitarians meet and are perfectly united on the death of Christ—the faith of both amounts to Socinianism. Unitarians believe that Christ was a prophet, an inspired teacher, but merely human; that his death was that of a human body only. Trinitarians hold that the term “Christ” comprehends two distinct and separate natures: one that was merely human; the other, the second person in the Trinity, who dwelt in the flesh for a brief period, but could not possibly suffer, or die; that the Christ that died was only the human nature in which the divinity had dwelt. Both classes have a human offering, and nothing more. No matter how exalted the preexistent Son was; no matter how glorious, how powerful, or even eternal; if the manhood only died, the sacrifice was only human. And so far as the vicarious death of Christ is concerned, this is Socinianism. Thus the remark is just, that the doctrine of a Trinity degrades the Atonement, resting it solely on a human offering as a basis. (*The Atonement in the Light of Nature and Revelation*, pp. 164–166; 1884 edition.)

A correct understanding of the doctrine of the atonement (which involves a rejection of the trinitarian teaching) does not require “a denial of the divinity of Christ.” In fact, the atonement is based on the concept that the sacrifice upon Calvary was a divine sacrifice instead of a merely human one.

Jesus never denied his divinity nor worship that is associated with divinity. However, was the basis of his divinity being one third of a three-person god? No, Jesus did not make any such claim. Jesus claimed to preexist (John 8:58); he claimed to have come from heaven (John 1:18); and he claimed to be the Son of God: “Say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God” (John 10:36)?

Jesus claimed to be the “only begotten Son of God” (John 3:16), and this is the proof of his divinity. There is a law of nature called the law of inheritance. That which produces, produces like kind. A dog does not have kittens, nor a cow have puppies. Dogs have puppies and cows have calves because they produce like kind. In Genesis 5 we read about this: “And Adam lived an hundred and thirty years, and begat a son in his own likeness, after his image; and called his name Seth” (Genesis 5:3). The Bible says that Jesus is “the express image of” the Father (Hebrews 1:3). Because Jesus is the only begotten Son of the Father, we have the assurance that he is no less divine than the Father. My daughter is human. How human? Well, that seems like a stupid question doesn’t it? She is fully human because she is of the human race. Jesus is divine not because he is a part of a three-person God but because he is the only begotten Son of God. This is why Paul could write in Philippians 2:6 that Jesus “had always been God by nature” (Phillips translation).

At the bottom of Monday’s lesson we read:

At His trial, one accusation against Jesus was that He claimed to be the Son of God (*John 19:7, Matt. 26:63–65*). If Jesus did not regard Himself as God, this was a critical opportunity for Him to correct a mistaken impression. Yet He did not. In fact, it was at His trial before Caiaphas that He affirmed His own deity under oath. Hence, we have powerful evidence from the Bible of the deity of Christ.

If Dr. Davidson means that Jesus was God in the sense of being a part of a three-person god, we must note that Jesus swore under oath that he was the “son of God,” not a part of a triune god. However, if the author means that by stating his sonship to God, Jesus is divine, then we would be in complete agreement. However, based upon the rest of the lesson, the former, rather than the latter, appears to be the intent of the author.

**Tuesday, January 3:** The opening statement on Tuesday’s lesson would almost be funny, if the nature of the subject were not so serious. The following statement is made:

If God can be “one,” with two Persons of the Father and the Son, adding a third Person to the Godhead should not particularly add more difficulty. We are talking here about the Holy Spirit. (p. 9)

If God and Jesus are not a literal Father and Son, this statement might make some sense, but why, then, stop at three? Perhaps there could be four, five, six, or more, “without difficulty,” added to the godhead!

Genesis 1:2 is noted, where the Bible says “the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.” However, the Bible does not say that this Spirit is a third person of a three-part god. Interestingly, Paul makes a comparison of God’s spirit and man’s spirit, when he writes:

But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. (1 Corinthians 2:9–11)

Paul is saying that as man is to his spirit, so God is to his spirit. He is saying that we can understand the spirit of God by understanding our spirit. God created man as a two-part individual. Man is body and spirit (Genesis 2:7, James 2:26). If I were to speak

of my spirit, nobody would think I am speaking of another intelligence, separate and apart from myself. If I were to speak harsh words to you, you might say, "You have wounded my spirit," but you would not mean someone separate and apart from yourself but your very person on the inward level. When a person is very wicked, it might be said that such a person has the spirit of Satan; however, we do not mean a being with intelligence apart from the devil. Yet when we think of God, our minds take a giant leap beyond all realm of reasonable thought, and we use tradition to rocket into another sphere of reasoning!

But what about Matthew 28:19 which is mentioned in Tuesday's lesson? There Jesus said: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." This text is probably used more than any other verse in the Bible to try to prove that God is a triune being. This text is typically understood to mean that when an apostle or minister baptizes someone, he is supposed to baptize them using the formula "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." But what is the record of the apostles who directly heard Jesus? Acts 2:38 records the first time this command was carried out. Peter said: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." Peter instructed these people to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ rather than in the names of three separate persons. In Acts 10:48, Peter "commanded [Cornelius and his brethren] to be baptized in the name of the Lord." From these verses it is plain that Peter didn't understand Christ to have commanded him to baptize into a trinity.

Peter must have understood the command of Jesus differently than most trinitarians understand it today. As we continue in the book of Acts, we find that Peter was not alone in his understanding of this command.

When Peter and John came to Samaria, they found a group of people who had been

"baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 8:16).

Let us also consider Paul, who claimed he received the gospel directly from Jesus Christ. When he visited Ephesus and met some brethren who had only been baptized with John's baptism, he instructed them about Christ, and the Bible says "when they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 19:5).

There is no record in the Bible of anyone baptizing in three separate names of three individual persons. There are a few possibilities that could explain why the disciples always baptized in the name of Jesus:

1) The disciples may have been in direct rebellion against Jesus.

2) They may have misunderstood what he said.

3) The disciples understood the command of Jesus differently than most trinitarians understand it today.

I do not believe that we can accept any of the first three possibilities, but the fourth statement offers a reasonable solution. Jesus was not trying to teach us that God is a trinity, or he would have been contradicting other statements he had made and many statements made by other Bible writers. This verse says nothing about God being three persons. However, Ephesians 4:6 says that there is "One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all." The Bible uses the phrase "God the Father" thirteen times, but it never says "God the Son" or "God the Holy Spirit."

To literally baptize someone in the name of a person we must know the person's name. Yahweh (Jehovah or other similar spellings) is the personal name of the Father. Jesus (Yahshua or some other similar spellings) is the personal name of the Son, but the Scripture nowhere gives a name for the Holy Spirit. The Bible does not even hint that such a name exists, so we can see that Jesus was not giving a specific formula of words for the preacher to recite at a baptism. We know this, first of all, because all the recorded examples of people

baptizing after this command was given were done in the name of Jesus and, secondly, because it would not be possible to literally baptize in the proper name of the Holy Spirit because the Bible makes no mention of such a name.

The word *name* in the Bible at times refers to a person's character. Jacob's name was changed to Israel because his character had changed. The word *name* in Matthew 28:19 has reference to the character, rather than to the proper names of individuals. Once we realize that Christ was commissioning his disciples to baptize into the character of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, it is easier for us to understand his words. This command is closely connected with the command to teach. Christ wants his disciples to understand the truth about God, his Son, and the Holy Spirit. All three of these are vital in a Christian's life. The Father loves us so much that he gave his Son to die for our sins, and he gives his Spirit to guide us in our lives. If a person lacks the knowledge and experience of any of these aspects, his relationship with God will suffer. This is why Christ specifically mentioned all three.

From this we can see that Matthew 28:19 certainly does *not* prove a triune god, nor does it prove that the Holy Spirit is a separate being from the Father and from his Son. If we are to find proof of these doctrines in the Bible, we must look somewhere else.

About two thirds of the way down the page of Tuesday's lesson, mention is made of Luke 1:35. In connection to this verse, we would add the following statement from the Spirit of Prophecy:

Think of Christ's humiliation. He took upon himself fallen, suffering human nature, degraded and defiled by sin. He took our sorrows, bearing our grief and shame. He endured all the temptations wherewith man is beset. He united humanity with divinity: *a divine spirit dwelt in a temple of flesh.* He united himself with the temple. "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us," because by so doing he could associate with the sinful, sorrowing sons

and daughters of Adam. (*The Youth's Instructor*; December 20, 1900)

This divine spirit was not a person different than Jesus, but Christ himself. On the night before Calvary, he told his disciples: "I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you" (John 14:18). The divine spirit that dwelt in flesh would come back to the disciples as the comforter.

**Wednesday, January 4:** This lesson seeks to prove the triune god by Bible verses that actually disprove the concept. For example, Genesis 1:26, 27 is listed as revealing "God's plurality" (p. 10). These verses state:

And God said, Let *us* make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.

The Hebrew text does not contain a pronoun in verse 26; however, the verb *asah* is in a plural form and requires a plural noun or pronoun. We do not know from the text how many are required in order to use the word *us*, but if we compare text with text, we find the following verses to be helpful:

[God] Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds. (Hebrews 1:2)

God, who created all things by Jesus Christ. (Ephesians 3:9)

These are not hints or suggestions that must be twisted to a desired result. They tell of two who were involved in creation. The testimony of Jesus is in complete agreement:

The Father and the Son engaged in the mighty, wondrous work they had contemplated, of creating the world. ... and now God says to his Son, "Let us make man in our image." (*The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 1, pp. 24, 25)

**Thursday, January 5:** This lesson on the trinity and salvation begins: “The Gospel of John gives direct and conscious attention to the unique nature of God. John seems to be fully aware of the oneness, yet ‘threeness,’ of God” (p. 11). We ask: Where in the gospel of John do we find any such threeness? On the contrary, John tells us the reason he wrote his gospel: “But 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 John is “fully aware” of the threeness of God, why does he not make such a revelation plain? For someone who lived with Jesus and who was visited by him at Patmos, he should have an idea if there is a threeness to God, but he is silent on such a matter. John says, in fact, that the reason he wrote his gospel account was to help people understand that Jesus is the Son of God, and the result of this is that people “might have life through his name.” Writing his first epistle near the same time as his account of the gospel, John states there:

And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God. (1 John 5:11–13)

In Thursday’s lesson we again find the phrase “co-equal, three-Person Godhead” (p. 11), yet nowhere in inspiration is such a concept written or taught. Jesus is the Son of God. God the Father declares it (Matthew 3:17; 17:5). Jesus said he is the Son of God (John 3:16; 10:36; Mark 14:62). The apostles agreed that Jesus is the Son of God. When Jesus asked the disciples whom he was, Peter declared: “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16). Jesus gave his complete approval to this answer and noted that Peter was inspired by God the Father to speak it and upon this truth he would build his church (Matthew 16:18).

Ellen White was not silent concerning the importance of Peter’s confession:

The truth which Peter had confessed is the foundation of the believer’s faith. (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 412)

Peter had expressed the truth which is the foundation of the church’s faith. (*Ibid.*, p. 413)

While “God the Father” is used thirteen times in the Bible (John 6:27; 1 Corinthians 8:6; Galatians 1:1, 3; Ephesians 6:23; Philippians 2:11; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Timothy 1:2; Titus 1:4; 1 Peter 1:2; 2 Peter 1:17; 2 John 1:3; and Jude 1:1), the titles *God the Son* and *God the Holy Spirit* are never used in inspiration. The Son of God and the spirit of God, however, are found in many places.

One more point needs to be clarified concerning Thursday’s lesson. We fully agree with Dr. Davidson that in no way is Jesus a creature or a “created” being. He is begotten. God gave his Son for our salvation. Some trinitarians say that begotten and created mean the same thing. If they do, however, then we have a very big problem because Jesus says that he is begotten of the Father (John 3:16) and John, Christ’s closest disciple, also agrees, when he writes: “Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him” (1 John 5:1).

**Friday, January 6:** Ellen White notes that “from the days of eternity the Lord Jesus Christ was one with the Father” (*The Desire of Ages*, p.19). How can this be, if Jesus is begotten of the Father, as Proverbs 8:22–24 and other texts teach? Micah 5:2 and Colossians 1:16 are key texts that help us. Micah 5:2 is a prophecy about Jesus’s birth but also teaches his pre-existence:

But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting. (Micah 5:2)

E. J. Waggoner interpreted this to mean that Christ was brought forth, or begotten, “so far back in the ages of eternity as to be far beyond the grasp of the mind of man” (*Christ and His Righteousness*, p. 9). A vital point, though, that Waggoner does not cover is found in the expression *goings forth*. The Hebrew means *origins* and is so translated in the NIV. The text is then saying that Jesus has an origin, but it is before “the days of eternity” (Hebrew). How can that be? Colossians 1:16 has the answer, where we are told that Jesus is the creator of all things “visible and invisible.” While we might wish to consult Einstein, time is not a self-existing entity (neither is space!), but, rather, something invisible, created by Jesus Christ. If this were not so, then time would be equal to God and exist apart from God; however, no such thing can be. Since eternity is a concept based in time and Christ is the author of time, then he is the author of eternity and has existed since all *time*.

We wish to consider the following statement from Friday’s lesson:

Some early Adventists struggled with the doctrine of the Trinity. Today the church has taken a firm stand on the doctrine. How does this change over time reveal to us the unfolding nature of truth? (p. 12)

Firstly, let us clarify that it was not *some* but *all* early Adventists who rejected the trinity. Secondly, let us listen to inspiration to see if this change was one from error to truth. Writing in 1881, many years before anyone believed trinitarianism was taught in Adventism, Ellen White wrote:

*It is as certain that we have the truth as that God lives; and Satan, with all his arts and hellish power, cannot change the truth of God into a lie. (Testimonies for the Church, vol. 4, p. 595)*

How could Ellen White say this, if we were teaching deadly errors about God? Over two decades later she wrote, during the Kellogg crisis:

Where shall we find safety unless it be in the truths that the Lord has been giving for the last fifty years? (*The Review and Herald*, May 25, 1905)

In prophesying of the omega of deadly heresies, Ellen White wrote:

The enemy of souls has sought to bring in the supposition that a great reformation was to take place among Seventh-day Adventists, and that this reformation would consist in giving up the doctrines which stand as the pillars of our faith, and engaging in a process of reorganization. Were this reformation to take place, what would result? The principles of truth that God in His wisdom has given to the remnant church, would be discarded. Our religion would be changed. *The fundamental principles that have sustained the work for the last fifty years would be accounted as error.* A new organization would be established. Books of a new order would be written. A system of intellectual philosophy would be introduced. The founders of this system would go into the cities, and do a wonderful work. The Sabbath, of course, would be lightly regarded, as also the God who created it. Nothing would be allowed to stand in the way of the new movement. The leaders would teach that virtue is better than vice, but God being removed, they would place their dependence on human power, which, without God, is worthless. *Their foundation would be built on the sand, and storm and tempest would sweep away the structure. (Special Testimonies, series B, no. 2, p. 54)*

The foundation of Christianity is the truth that Jesus is the Son of God. Ellen White gives a prophecy that the fundamental principles that had sustained the work in the early part of the movement would be discarded. Clearly the doctrine of God has changed radically in Adventism. This foundation has been replaced with the doctrine of the trinity, the very foundation of the man of sin!

The Doctrine of the Trinity is the central doctrine of the Catholic faith. Upon it are based all the other teachings of the Church (*Handbook for Today's Catholic*, p. 16).

No wonder the prophetess stated that this foundation would be built upon sand! No wonder that, in 1903, Ellen White wrote:

Let none seek to tear away the foundations of our faith—the foundations that were laid at the beginning of our work by prayerful study of the word and by revelation. Upon these foundations we have been building for the last fifty years. Men may suppose that they have found a new way and that they can lay a stronger foundation than that which has been laid. But this is a great deception. Other foundation can no man lay than that which has been laid. (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, p. 297)

## Lesson 2: In the Beginning

This lesson deals with God and creation. Today the theory of evolution is considered a fact, even by many professed Christians. Forty percent of the population of the United States accepts this theory, but we have been told:

Had the Sabbath been universally kept, man's thoughts and affections would have been led to the Creator as the object of reverence and worship, and there would never have been an idolater, an atheist, or an infidel. (*The Great Controversy*, p. 438)

And the theory of evolution, a plan of Satan to attack the plan of salvation, would not have found acceptance either!

**Sunday, January 8:** The Bible teaches that God “created all things by Jesus Christ” (Ephesians 3:9). Psalm 33, coupled with Genesis 1, gives the manner of creation:

By the word of the LORD were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth. For *he spake*, and

it was done; *he commanded*, and it stood fast. (Psalm 33:6, 9)

And God *said*, Let there be light: and there was light. (Genesis 1:3)

When God speaks creation happens instantly. The creation week is marked off by six literal, successive days of evenings and mornings of creation and followed by the Sabbath.

**Monday, January 9:** The discussion of the spirit of God *hovering* at creation is accurate to the Hebrew. As noted in the lesson, the Hebrew word *rachaph*, translated *moved* in Genesis 1:2, is translated *fluttereth* in Deuteronomy 32:11. The lesson then attempts to make a comparison between the emotions of the eagle raising its brood to the Holy Spirit working for man. While Deuteronomy 32:11 is a nice text comparison with Genesis 1:2, this takes matters way too far. We must take serious objection to the statement on page 16 that says Moses “under inspiration, ... pictured the same emotions in the Holy Spirit's heart as our human ‘nest’ was being constructed.” We do not find that in the text, and no reference will ever be found for it, either.

**Tuesday, January 10:** Psalms 19 and 92 are very good examples of chapters in the Bible which tell us that the heavens declare God as the great creator. However, to state that “the progression of thought [in Psalm 19] is audacious” (p. 20) is not right. To say that David is taking a bold risk or showing a lack of respect is hardly the case. Perhaps this was an editing error.

**Wednesday, January 11:** This lesson on the cross and creation helps to contrast the different processes of creation versus those of evolution. One is beautiful and brings life, the other is supposed to be long and drawn-out, requiring much death and destruction along the way. This clarification is good. We would that such a good clarification could be made in the lesson with the terms *God* and *Lord*. Both of these terms appear to be used to mean God the Father at times, and sometimes they mean Jesus Christ. Perhaps they mean the whole triune

god at times, but sometimes it is hard to tell. The Bible says that Jesus is Lord (Philippians 2:11; 1 Corinthians 8:6).

**Thursday, January 12:** The importance of creation is fully realized in redemption, for redemption is a process of creation. When David wished to be restored with God, he prayed: “*Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me*” (Psalm 51:10). In the New Testament Jesus speaks forgiveness to the sinner, and their sins are pardoned (Mark 2:1–11). Paul links creation and redemption in the first chapter of Colossians. In Ephesians 2:10, we are his “workmanship, *created* in Christ Jesus unto good works.” No wonder Paul could say: “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new *creature*” (2 Corinthians 5:17). I am personally thankful that God did not need millions of years to create this earth. If he had, he might have needed a long time to create a new heart in me, and that would have been too long!

**Friday, January 13:** Under the second discussion question, it is asked what was wrong with Darwin’s assumption that a good God could not have created a world with the evil we see in it. What Darwin failed to understand or choose to believe is that God did create all things well, and until sin entered, there was no death nor misery. But Darwin, like many people, failed to account for sin, perhaps as a way to silence his own conscience over sin in his life. Even professed Christians do this today. The Bible teaches that “sin is the transgression of the law” (1 John 3:4), but to avoid condemnation, they redefine sin to be something else, such as a broken relationship; therefore, they may continue in their sin while thinking that they are carrying on a relationship with God.

## Lesson 3 — God as Redeemer

The “Key Thought” to this lesson is: “The Triune God is our Creator and Redeemer” (p. 22); therefore, when we read in this lesson about God redeeming mankind, we should assume it is speaking of the three-person god

called the trinity, but here again we find a great deal of confusion. Did the Father die on the cross? Can the Holy Spirit rightfully be said to be our redeemer? Throughout the New Testament the term *God* is applied almost exclusively to the Father and not to some three-in-one god. Note the following verses:

*Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed. (John 6:27)*

*Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. (Romans 1:6)*

*Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 1:3; Philippians 1:2)*

*Grace be to you and peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Corinthians 1:2; Galatians 1:3; Ephesians 1:3)*

*We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you. (Colossians 1:3)*

Paul writes that God is the Father. God is not called the Father, Son, Holy Spirit. In fact, Paul says that the Father is the God of our Lord Jesus Christ. This agrees with what is written in Hebrews 1:9: “Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; *therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.*”

**Sunday, January 15:** The confusion over the identity of God continues on Sunday’s lesson, where Romans 5:8 is quoted. Who is this God that commendeth his love towards us? According to John 3:16, it has to be the Father, for there it says that this God sent his only begotten Son to die for the sins of humanity.

**Monday, January 16:** The second half of Monday’s lesson focuses on the story of Abraham being commanded to offer Isaac upon Mt. Moriah (Genesis 22:1–19). Let it not be forgotten that this story is the plan of

salvation illustrated, but according to the trinitarian doctrine, this story is not about a real father or a real son. We fully agree, however, with the statement on the bottom of page 24:

The Son Himself would die on the altar. The Father would truly give up His Son, and the Son would give His life.

The only way this story can be true is if there is a literal Father and Son, for according to 1 Timothy 6:16, God the Father is immortal and cannot die under any circumstances. Since the three-person god cannot die at Calvary, it is now taught that the atonement is not made by the literal death of the Son of God, but by a sundering of the trinity:

The disjointing of the Son of God from the other members of the Godhead resulted in indescribable suffering not only to Jesus but also to the Godhead. Jesus' cry of dereliction points to a voluntary breach within the Godhead, to the sundering of the Trinity as Christ voluntarily surrendered His life for you and me. Atonement is a Trinitarian event and it took place in the mystery of the divine sundering. (Ángel Manuel Rodríguez, "Incarnation, Death, and Enthronement [sic]: Atonement as a Narrative," p. 5)

**Tuesday, January 17:** This lesson is on salvation in Isaiah, specifically the 53rd chapter. Isaiah 53:6 says that "the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." It should be clear that the *LORD*, Jehovah, is the Father and the *him* in the verse is Christ. Isaiah 53:10 says: "Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him." Here again, the *LORD* is the Father and the *him* in this verse is Jesus. These verses tell us that the Father had a decisive part in the plan of salvation. How it must have torn at his heart to lay our sins upon Jesus and to bruise his only begotten Son. The Hebrew word translated *bruise* is *daka*, and it is also translated in the Bible as *to break, crush, or beat to pieces*.

**Wednesday, January 18:** This lesson is on the gospel and the cross. It speaks of the different phases of the plan of salvation, such

as Christ's birth, life, and death, but there is one piece of the picture that is strangely missing here—the high-priestly ministry of Jesus Christ. We have no problem with a presentation that has its focus on Calvary, for it provides the sacrifice needed for the priestly ministry of Jesus. But let the following not be forgotten:

The intercession of Christ in man's behalf in the sanctuary above is as essential to the plan of salvation as was His death upon the cross. (*The Great Controversy*, p. 489)

**Thursday, January 19:** The cry of Jesus, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:63), only makes sense if we consider this to be addressed to the Father, but if one is a consistent trinitarian, God must be defined as "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." It would be a mockery for Jesus to cry out to himself, but it would also be a terrible slight for Jesus to fail to cry out to the spirit that has supposedly been guiding and directing his life, if the trinitarian doctrine is true.

## Lesson 4 — The God of Grace and Judgment

This week's memory verse is Ecclesiastes 12:14. It begins with the word *for*, indicating that verse 14 is dependent upon what is said earlier. Verse 13 states: "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man." While man is saved by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8), he will be judged by his works.

**Wednesday, January 25:** John 3:17–21 is referenced in this discussion of condemnation and grace. Because God sent his only begotten Son to die in the place of man, we need not come under condemnation. The Greek root word translated *condemn* in John 3:17 is *krino* (κρίνω), and it means "to judge a person to be guilty and liable to punishment" (*Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament based on Semantic Domains*).

**Thursday, January 26:** The second paragraph of the Thursday's lesson states: "Thus, if God is just, and if justice was His only major attribute, who among us would stand before Him?" The implication is that somehow God is not just and does not live up to the standard of his law in dealing with humanity, but Romans 3:26 declares: "To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that *he might be just*, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." God's mercy does not stop his justice. No, not one bit. Because Christ became the sacrifice of humanity, he took all the judgment that the law demanded. This is proven when Paul declares that the righteousness of the believer is "witnessed by the law and the prophets" (Romans 3:21).

**Friday, January 27:** In connection with our thoughts on Thursday's lesson, we note the fourth discussion question, where it mentions that "grace isn't cheap—it's free!" However, I am reminded of the story of the king who wanted to learn all that was essential about economics. After rejecting volumes upon volumes of economic textbooks as being too complex, one wise counselor finally told him all he needed to know in just one sentence. The economic counselor told the king, "Sir, there is no such thing as a free lunch!" The reality is that somebody pays for that lunch and somebody paid for the grace that we receive!

## Lesson 5: The Holiness of God

Holiness is wholeness for God. It means perfect obedience to every precept of the law of God. This is the only true moral excellence. A character in harmony with the law of God is the only character which will receive His approval. It shows that man has by faith received Jesus Christ, who came to this world to die for the transgressors of God's law. Christ by His own obedience to the law places man on vantage ground with God, giving him another trial. Thus probation is granted to man, opportunity is given him to show his hatred of sin, the transgression of the law,

and to return to his loyalty to God. (*Manuscript Releases*, vol. 12, p. 145)

God's very nature is holy. If we are to be holy, we are to become like God in character. We have been told:

Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. (1 John 3:2)

When the character of Christ shall be perfectly reproduced in His people, then He will come to claim them as His own. (*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 69)

**Monday, January 30:** The Sabbath is time that is set apart for sacred use. The true holiness of the Sabbath comes not simply from a command of God, though that is enough, but rather from having the presence of God, who is holy.

**Tuesday, January 31:** The following statement goes well with Daniel 10:5–8, referenced in this lesson:

What is justification by faith? It is the work of God in laying the glory of man in the dust, and doing for man that which it is not in his power to do for himself. (*Special Testimonies*, series A, no. 9, pp. 61, 62)

**Wednesday, February 1:** *The Desire of Ages*, page 246, is quoted on this page, explaining the miracle of the draught of fishes as being to Peter "a manifestation of divine power. In Jesus he saw One who held all nature under His control." This is speaking of divine authority, rather than physical power, for we also read in the same book: "The miracles of Christ for the afflicted and suffering were wrought by the power of God through the ministration of the angels" (p. 143). In an earlier work Ellen White said "all the miracles" and "all the blessings from God to man are through the ministration of holy angels" (*The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 2, pp. 67, 68).