

The Godhead



Week Ten

inTro



Read This Week's Passage:
John 14:1-24

THREE PERSONS IN THE GODHEAD

The Millerites held a wide variety of beliefs about the Godhead in the 1840s. William Miller believed in the Trinity while his close assistant Joshua Himes and church founders James White and Joseph Bates rejected trinitarian teachings as unscriptural. Many early Adventists believed Jesus was created or begotten and denied the personhood of the Holy Spirit. They didn't prioritize this doctrine as the focus was on the sanctuary and the Second Coming. Prominent pioneers are sometimes quoted today to support a particular belief about the Godhead, but it's important to remember that views on this subject varied greatly among the first Adventists. It took the church over seventy years of Bible study and prayer to reach a conclusion on this issue, in part because of our unshakeable commitment to the *whole* Bible. This means the entire Bible must be considered when establishing new doctrines or teachings.

The 1888 GC session revived our beliefs about Jesus and the gospel, which resulted in deeper study of Christ's divinity. A.T. Jones became an early proponent of Jesus' divine nature and Ellen White's book *The Desire of Ages* made definitive statements regarding both the Holy Spirit's personhood and Christ's divinity, saying Jesus "announced Himself to be the self-existent one" and "in Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived" ([1898], 469, 530). Our church didn't adopt an official stance on this subject until the 1930s. This week's study explores how the Bible clearly shows that there are three Persons in the Godhead, all working together with different roles and functions.



inScribe

Write out John 14:1–24 from the translation of your choice. If you're pressed for time, write out a portion of the primary passage. You may also rewrite the passage in your own words, or outline or mind-map the chapter.



Go back to your scribed text and study the passage.

Circle repeated words/phrases/ideas

Underline words/phrases that are important and have meaning to you



Draw **Arrows** to connect words/phrases to other associated or related words/phrases

What special insights do your marks seem overall to point to?



Memorize your favorite verse. Write it out multiple times to help with memorization.

What can we do to ensure that we study the Bible holistically and not selectively on any given subject?

What are the differences between Jesus and the Holy Spirit? What are the similarities?



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DELVING DEEPER

Our current understanding of the Godhead likely took longer to develop than any other doctrine in the Adventist church. Though we now have a broad view that takes into account the various Bible texts on the subject along with their context, God's nature will be a topic of serious study and thought throughout eternity (see Job 11:7). God's greatness is beyond our finite understanding; for us, it's an inexhaustible topic of exploration.

In the early days of Adventism, the main differences of thought regarding the Godhead revolved around two questions: First, is Jesus God or a created being? Some interpreted the words "only begotten Son" (John 3:16) to mean that Jesus had a beginning and was therefore not eternal. Second, is the Holy Spirit a being and therefore part of the Godhead or is He just a power? One view was that the Holy Spirit referred to God's power—omnipresent, but not an actual being.

In the 1840s, 50s, and 60s, some well-known and respected pioneers such as James White, Joseph Bates, Uriah Smith, and J.N. Loughborough had beliefs on this subject that were at odds with what we finally settled on as a church. As we've noted, our church as a whole developed this belief very slowly, a fact reflected in how some of the pioneers' beliefs likewise developed and changed over time. Some, such as James White and Joseph Bates, held the beliefs of the churches they had left and therefore had to unlearn what they thought had been truth and learn instead what had been revealed. It's unfortunately quite easy to take a few texts out of context and form a conclusion that sounds right but doesn't hold up when every text on the subject is considered. Such was the case with some of the doctrines of the churches the pioneers had left, hence the need for a period of unlearning and relearning.

The first time the Bible mentions God's plurality is in Genesis 1:26: "Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image.' " The words "Us" and "Our" are, of course, plural, indicating that the title of God is attributable to more than one being. The New Testament describes the work of creation being accomplished through a close partnership between Father and Son by saying, "God created all things through Jesus Christ" (Eph. 3:9). The narrative in Genesis specifically notes the presence of the Spirit of God at the beginning of Creation (Gen. 1:2). In the verses describing Creation, we see the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit all working together in harmony for one purpose.

As the heavenly Trio worked together during Creation, so the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit work closely with each other in the work of redemption. John 14 describes all three Persons in the Godhead uniting for the purpose of saving lost humanity. Each Member of the Triune God has slightly different responsibilities, but each contributes to the same goal. Jesus connects heaven to earth by preparing a place in heaven for us (vv. 1–3), revealing the Father to us, and providing access to the Father (vv. 6–11). The Father sent two Helpers to us: Jesus and the Holy Spirit (vv. 16, 26). When Jesus left the disciples and returned to heaven, the Father sent the Holy Spirit to fill the void and provide continued Divine presence.

(Cont. on p. 85.)

THE ONENESS OF GOD

The Bible clearly states two clear and important aspects of the Godhead: First, the oneness of God is emphasized again and again, in both the Old and New Testaments (Deut. 6:4; Isa. 45:5; Zech. 14:9; Eph 4:4–6). This emphasis highlights the contrast between Israel and their surrounding neighbors—a contrast that exists in a similar way in God’s church today. The oneness of God sets Christianity apart from heathen religions that believe in a pantheon of deities. Second, the Bible is clear on the plurality within the Godhead, using the plural pronoun “Us” several times early on in Scripture (Gen. 1:26; 3:22; 11:7). At first glance, the simultaneous oneness and plurality of God appear to contradict each other, but we can understand how it’s possible for God to be both singular and plural when we grasp how each Member of the Trinity works with the Others.

In verses 7–10, Jesus declares that if we have seen Him, we have seen the Father, meaning He and the Father are so close that to see and hear One is to see and hear the Other. The Godhead is like a lifelong husband and wife who almost seem to know what the other is thinking, yet infinitely more so as they have been together for eternity. The oneness and plurality within marriage is a reflection of the oneness and plurality within the Godhead. Four times the New Testament quotes from Genesis 2:24 that in marriage “the two shall become one flesh” (Matt. 19:5; Mark 10:8; 1 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 5:31). In a healthy home, neither husband nor wife loses their individuality, but they do blend their lives to form a new unit. So the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are each a distinct personality and yet are joined together as one. “There are three living persons of the heavenly trio; in the name of these three great powers—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—those who receive Christ by living faith are baptized, and these powers will co-operate with the obedient subjects of heaven in their efforts to live the new life in Christ” (*Evangelism* [1946], 615). People who deny three living Persons in the heavenly Trio miss the full beauty of God’s nature. It’s only in the plurality of God that we can see the extent of His selfless nature. No Person in the Godhead exists to serve Himself. Each is focused on serving the Other.

The closeness between Jesus and the Father described in John 14:7–10 is the same kind of intimacy Jesus wants His followers to have with Himself and the Holy Spirit (vv. 17, 18). The Holy Spirit is sent to continue the work Jesus started. “The Holy Spirit is the Comforter, in Christ’s name. He personifies Christ, yet is a distinct personality” (*Manuscript Releases*, vol. 20 [1993], 324). Much like the Father and Son, the Holy Spirit has various titles in the Bible. Verse 17 describes Him as the Spirit of Truth, a name that appears again in John 15:26 and 16:13. This title clearly emphasizes the Holy Spirit’s role in teaching, convicting, and reminding people of the truth. As Jesus came to bring truth (John 1:14), so the Spirit is promised to continue in the ministry of truth.

(Cont. on p. 85.)



inTerpret

After looking at your scribed and annotated text, what special insights do your marks seem to point to overall?



What questions emerge after studying this passage? What parts are difficult?

What other principles and conclusions do you find?

What are some ways we can interact with each Member of the Godhead?



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What relationship do the following verses have with John 14:1–24?

The oneness of God:

Deuteronomy 6:4

Isaiah 46:9, 10

The triune God:

Genesis 1:26

Matthew 3:16, 17

Matthew 28:19, 20

Hebrews 9:14

Divinity of Jesus:

Isaiah 9:6

Micah 5:2

John 1:1–3, 14

Hebrews 1:8, 9

The Holy Spirit:

Matthew 12:31, 32

John 15:26, 27

John 16:5–15

(Cont. from inGest, p. 83):

Because of the Holy Spirit's presence, the disciples were to enjoy greater advantages in Jesus' absence than they experienced in His physical presence (John 16:7). Throughout John 14–16, Jesus consistently refers to the Holy Spirit with the personal pronouns *He* and *Him*, never as *It*, highlighting that the Holy Spirit is more than a thing; the Holy Spirit is a distinct Person in the Godhead. Sometimes in these chapters from John, Jesus and the Holy Spirit are described as going in two opposite directions: Jesus is returning to heaven while the Holy Spirit is being sent to earth. This again clearly illustrates that the Holy Spirit is a distinct Person, separate from Jesus.

(Cont. from inTerpret, p. 84):

Jesus also wants His followers to experience closeness with the Father. Verse 23 promises the Father's special attention toward those who reciprocate His love. He desires to dwell with us and make His home with us. That a holy God desires to tabernacle with sinful mortals like us will be our theme of study and praise for all eternity!

What other verses come to mind in connection with the primary passage?

Review your memorized verse from John 14:1–24.

THE RELATIONSHIPS OF THE GODHEAD

The end of John 13 adds depth to chapter 14. Jesus had just predicted Peter’s triple denial before saying, “Let not your heart be troubled.... I go to prepare a place for you... that where I am, there you may be also” (14:1–3). While Jesus said this directly to Peter, it’s Thomas who then asked where Jesus was going and how he and the others could know the way (v. 5). Jesus then proceeded to explain the relationship between Him and the Father and promised that another Helper would come: the Holy Spirit.

Jesus went from predicting Peter’s denial to promising eternity to offering us a deep abiding relationship with Him, all of which reveal several key aspects of His work as our Savior. Jesus is patient and desires to save us, and yet He will lovingly point out our sins and errors. He didn’t avoid the truth even when it was painful, pointing out to Peter his true spiritual condition, but He also didn’t leave him without hope, for He gave the promise of eternity in heaven. Then, in answer to Thomas’ and Philip’s relatively simple questions, Jesus patiently explained the relationship of the Godhead to His disciples—who didn’t seem to understand it despite all the time they had spent with Christ. Jesus expressed clearly that He and His Father have a very intimate relationship, saying, “He who has seen Me has seen the Father” (14:9). Jesus’ words and actions directly reflect the Father, who dwells in Him (vv. 10, 11). Through His relationship with the Father, Jesus embodies and demonstrates how we as His followers can also have a close connection with God.

In this passage, Jesus doesn’t just leave His disciples with promises of the future mansion in heaven; He provides something for here and now to enable them to get there: the Holy Spirit. Truly great leaders empower their proteges to go farther than themselves. Jesus followed this pattern by declaring that His disciples, empowered by prayer, obedience, and the Spirit, would do greater works than He did (v. 12). He wanted them to reach more people than He had; He didn’t want to limit their success and remain on top like so many human leaders do. In leaving, Jesus made room for the power of the Holy Spirit to enable His disciples to surpass His earthly ministry. Through His disciples, the work He began would continue and expand.

Jesus was not just emptying Himself and sharing His rewards and success with others, He was sharing His gifts with disciples who certainly did not deserve them. Peter was about to deny Jesus three times. Thomas already doubted Him. None of them were ready for what was coming and none were worthy of the responsibility or success Jesus was setting up for them, yet Jesus chose unworthy, unreliable, unremarkable disciples as the ones who would accomplish even greater works than those of Christ Himself. Jesus’ generosity toward weak, fallen disciples is beyond measure and beyond comprehension. It should give us great hope that even though we are also broken people, Jesus will still do mighty works through humble followers who cooperate with Him.



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Meditate on the primary passage again and look for where Jesus is.



In what other instances do we see Jesus confident in His identity and the role He plays in the Godhead?

How do you see Jesus differently or see Him again?

What is He saying to you personally through these texts?

Prayer Response:



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Review the memory verse.
How does it apply to your
life this week?

After this week's study of the
chapter, what are some personal
applications you are convicted of
in your life?

What are some practical
applications you must make in
your school, family, workplace,
and church life?



Read more inSight from the
Spirit of Prophecy at
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THE PROMISE OF THE SPIRIT

“The Holy Spirit is Christ’s representative, but divested of the personality of humanity, and independent thereof. Cumbered with humanity, Christ could not be in every place personally. Therefore it was for their interest that He should go to the Father, and send the Spirit to be His successor on earth. No one could then have any advantage because of his location or his personal contact with Christ. By the Spirit the Saviour would be accessible to all. In this sense He would be nearer to them than if He had not ascended on high....

“The disciples still failed to understand Christ’s words in their spiritual sense, and again He explained His meaning. By the Spirit, He said, He would manifest Himself to them. ‘The Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in My name, He shall teach you all things.’ No more will you say, I cannot comprehend. No longer will you see through a glass, darkly. You shall ‘be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge.’ Ephesians 3:18, 19....

“The Comforter is called ‘the Spirit of truth.’ His work is to define and maintain the truth. He first dwells in the heart as the Spirit of truth, and thus He becomes the Comforter. There is comfort and peace in the truth, but no real peace or comfort can be found in falsehood. It is through false theories and traditions that Satan gains his power over the mind. By directing men to false standards, he misshapes the character. Through the Scriptures the Holy Spirit speaks to the mind, and impresses truth upon the heart. Thus He exposes error, and expels it from the soul. It is by the Spirit of truth, working through the word of God, that Christ subdues His chosen people to Himself.

“In describing to His disciples the office work of the Holy Spirit, Jesus sought to inspire them with the joy and hope that inspired His own heart. He rejoiced because of the abundant help He had provided for His church. The Holy Spirit was the highest of all gifts that He could solicit from His Father for the exaltation of His people. The Spirit was to be given as a regenerating agent, and without this the sacrifice of Christ would have been of no avail. The power of evil had been strengthening for centuries, and the submission of men to this satanic captivity was amazing. Sin could be resisted and overcome only through the mighty agency of the Third Person of the Godhead, who would come with no modified energy, but in the fullness of divine power. It is the Spirit that makes effectual what has been wrought out by the world’s Redeemer. It is by the Spirit that the heart is made pure. Through the Spirit the believer becomes a partaker of the divine nature. Christ has given His Spirit as a divine power to overcome all hereditary and cultivated tendencies to evil, and to impress His own character upon His church.” (Ellen White, *The Desire of Ages* [1898], 669–671.)



Share insights from this week's memory verse and Bible study as well as any discoveries, observations, and questions with your Sabbath School class (or Bible study group). Consider these discussion questions with the rest of the group.



To what extent can we comprehend God's nature and to what extent will this topic remain a mystery?

How can we be open to God's leading when we need to unlearn and relearn certain things? How can we be sure it's really God who's leading us?

How can we reconcile the oneness and plurality of God?

What can we learn from Jesus' relationship with His Father in John 14?

What can we know about the role and personality of the Holy Spirit from John 14?

What does John 14 teach us about the kind of relationship God desires to have with us?

What holds us back from depending less on our own power and relying more on the Holy Spirit's power?