COGMA

Church of God Mission Academy

STUDY GUIDE 30

One *God* in Jesus Christ

STUDY GUIDE 1 OF 10:

The One True God

An overview of Scripture's testimony to the one God.



Equipping and empowering for effective service

2 Timothy 2:2

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE STUDENT

My Study Plan

Preparing a Study Plan before starting this Study Guide will assist you in completing it within a designated timeframe. It also helps in developing the discipline required for studying God's Word effectively.

Proverbs 16:3:

> *Commit thy works unto the LORD, and thy thoughts shall be established.*

My Study Guide Journal

Keep a record as you progress through your Study Guide, including the Personal Responses for each section, for future reference and goal setting.

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- COGMA does not claim to be infallible or the authority.
- Infallibility and authority belong only to God and His Word.

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PREFACE

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Many sincere believers have been taught that God exists as three distinct divine persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. This teaching has been repeated through creeds, statements of faith and church tradition for many centuries. Because it is so widely accepted, many people have never stopped to ask a simple question: Is this how the Bible itself explains God?

This Study Guide does not question the sincerity of those who believe the Trinity doctrine. Sincerity, however, cannot determine truth. Every doctrine concerning God must be tested by the Word of God because Scripture, not tradition, history or theological language, is our final authority.

The purpose of this module, One God in Jesus Christ, is therefore not simply to reject the Trinity belief. It is to show from Scripture why we reject it and, more importantly, to establish what the Bible actually teaches. If Scripture declares that there is one God, we must allow Scripture to explain who that one God is and how He has made Himself known.

The Bible repeatedly declares that God is one. It does not define the one God as three distinct, coequal and coeternal divine persons. Those expressions belong to later theological language. Scripture speaks of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, but we must not assume that these biblical expressions describe three separate divine persons. We must allow the Bible itself to explain their meaning.

This module will therefore build its case step by step. We will begin with the Scriptural declaration that there is one true God. We will then examine how that one invisible God was revealed in Jesus Christ, how Scripture speaks of the Father and the Son, who the Holy Spirit is, who dwells within the born-again believer, and how the genuine humanity of Jesus Christ is to be understood.

The central truth must remain clear throughout: there is one true God, and that one God has made Himself known in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is not one divine person standing beside two other divine persons. He is the visible revelation of the one invisible God.

Our purpose is not to force Scripture into a predetermined doctrine. It is to read the Scriptures carefully, compare Scripture with Scripture and allow the Word of God to speak for itself. If the Trinity doctrine is true, it must be established from Scripture. If Scripture instead reveals one God making Himself known in Jesus Christ, then our belief must agree with that revelation.

This first Study Guide begins at the foundation. Before asking how God was revealed in Jesus Christ, we must first establish the clear and repeated testimony of Scripture:

There is one God.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why must we test beliefs about God by what the Bible says, even when many sincere people accept them?

Personal Reflection

Have you trusted a belief about God mainly because a respected person taught it? Why?

Action Step

Think of one belief about God that you learned from others. Compare it with the Bible. What should you now correct or hold firmly in your faith?

INTRODUCTION: WHO IS THE ONE TRUE GOD?

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The most important question in this Study Guide is not difficult to state: Who is the one true God revealed in Scripture? The answer must come from the Bible itself. We cannot begin with a theological definition of God and then interpret every Scripture through that definition. We must first hear what Moses, the prophets, Jesus Christ and the apostles actually said.

The Bible repeatedly declares that there is one God. This truth is stated plainly throughout both the Old and New Testaments. Yet Christianity has commonly come to define God as three distinct divine persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, each fully God while together remaining one God. Because this explanation has been accepted for centuries, many people read the biblical words Father, Son and Holy Spirit with that definition already in mind.

The Biblical Foundation We Will Examine

This Study Guide will take a different approach. We will first establish what Scripture says about the number and nature of God. We will examine the repeated declarations that God is one, that there is none beside Him, that He alone created the heavens and the earth, and that He is Spirit, invisible, eternal and present everywhere.

We will also examine what the Trinity doctrine actually teaches and how its distinctive terminology developed historically. This is important because expressions such as three persons, coequal, coeternal, essence and one God in three persons are not used by the prophets, Jesus or the apostles to define God. Their later development must therefore be distinguished from the language of Scripture itself.

Our purpose is not to avoid the biblical expressions Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Those words belong to Scripture and must be understood exactly as Scripture uses them. The question is whether the Bible itself teaches that these expressions identify three distinct divine persons within the one God, or whether Scripture gives another explanation.

This first Study Guide therefore establishes the foundation before the later Study Guides examine these questions in greater detail. We will not yet attempt to explain everything concerning the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, the indwelling Christ or the genuine humanity of Jesus. Those subjects will be developed progressively throughout the module.

Our task here is more fundamental. Before we can understand how God was revealed in Jesus Christ, we must first establish who God is according to His own Word.

If Scripture declares that there is one God, then that declaration must control everything that follows. If God says there is none beside Him, we must allow those words their full meaning. If He says that He created all things alone and by Himself, we must not introduce other divine beings alongside Him. If Jesus and the apostles continue the same testimony, then the revelation of the New Testament must agree with the foundation already established.

We therefore begin with the Word of God and with one clear question. Who is the one true God?

Personal Response

Key Truth

How do God's declarations that He is one and that none is beside Him guide our understanding of Him?

Personal Reflection

Which belief about God is challenged by the Bible's declaration that none is beside Him?

Action Step

Read **Deuteronomy 6:4** *and 4:35. What belief must you correct or affirm, and how should this truth shape your worship?*

JESUS CHRIST: THE ROCK AND FOUNDATION

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If we are going to understand who God is, we must begin where Scripture begins. Christianity is not built upon a creed, a council, a denomination or a human theological explanation. The foundation is Jesus Christ Himself.

Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 3:11**:

> *"For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ."*

Paul's statement is absolute. There is no other foundation upon which the Church can safely build. Our understanding of God must therefore agree with the revelation given in Jesus Christ. We cannot begin with a doctrine developed later in Church history and then attempt to make Jesus fit within it.

We must begin with Jesus Christ and allow Scripture to reveal who He is.

Jesus Is the Spiritual Rock

Paul used another powerful picture when writing about Israel in the wilderness. Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 10:1-4**:

> *"Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; And did all eat the same spiritual meat; And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ."*

Paul does not leave the identity of the Rock uncertain. He says plainly, *"that Rock was Christ."* The man Christ Jesus had not yet been born in Bethlehem, but the God who would later be revealed in Jesus Christ was already the spiritual source of His people.

This is important because it directs us beyond the human birth of Jesus to the eternal God who was revealed through Him. The genuine humanity of Jesus began in time, but the God made known in Him is eternal. We will examine that revelation more fully in the Study Guides that follow.

"Whom Say Ye That I Am?"

Jesus Himself brought His disciples to the question of His identity. Matthew recorded in **Matthew 16:13-17**:

> *"When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven."*

Many opinions surrounded Jesus. Some believed He was John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah or another prophet. Jesus did not ask His disciples to choose the most popular opinion. He asked them directly, *"But whom say ye that I am?"*

That question remains central today. Our understanding of Jesus Christ cannot be settled by tradition, majority opinion or theological terminology. Peter's answer came by revelation from God. In the same way, we must allow Scripture itself to reveal the identity of Jesus Christ.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why must the identity of Jesus be known through God's revelation rather than popular opinion?

Personal Reflection

Whose opinion has most influenced your view of Jesus, and why?

Action Step

Compare that opinion with **Matthew 16:15-17**. *What needs to change so God's revelation governs your understanding of Jesus?*

Upon This Rock

Jesus continued in **Matthew 16:18**:

> *"And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."*

The Church is built upon the revelation of Jesus Christ. This agrees with Paul's statement that *"other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ."*

The foundation is not a creed written centuries after the apostles. Neither is it a theological formula that must first be accepted before Scripture can be understood. The foundation is Jesus Christ and the Scriptural revelation of who He is.

This is why the question of His identity matters so much. If our understanding of Jesus is wrong, then our understanding of God will also be wrong. Every doctrine concerning God must therefore agree with the revelation of Jesus Christ given in Scripture.

The Son of the Living God

Peter called Jesus *"the Christ, the Son of the living God."* That expression must be understood from Scripture itself. We must not automatically read into the words Son of God the later idea of a second eternal divine person standing beside the Father.

The title must be allowed to develop within the biblical testimony. The later Study Guides will examine carefully how Scripture speaks of the Father, the Son, the Word made flesh, God manifest in the flesh and the Spirit of God.

The Scriptures Testify of Me

It is also important to see how Jesus explained the purpose of the Scriptures. When He spoke to the Pharisees in the Gospel of John, He taught that the entire written Word points to Him.

Jesus said in **John 5:39**:

> *"Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me."*

Jesus did not say *"us"*. He spoke with absolute clarity and authority, declaring that the Scriptures testify of Him. He revealed Himself as the one and only God made visible.

His words leave no room for shared identity or divided glory. The Scriptures, in their entirety, point to Jesus alone as the fulfilment and as the source of eternal life.

For now, the important point is clear: Scripture directs us to Jesus Christ as the foundation. We cannot understand the one true God by beginning somewhere else and then bringing Jesus into the discussion afterwards.

We must begin with Him.

The question *"Whom say ye that I am?"* therefore stands before every student of Scripture. Before we examine the Trinity belief, its historical development and the repeated biblical declaration that there is one God, our foundation must already be settled:

Jesus Christ is the Rock upon which our understanding must stand.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How do Jesus' words about the Bible and Paul's words about the foundation direct us to Christ?

Personal Reflection

When tradition differs from Jesus' words, which do you trust most? Why?

Action Step

Test one familiar teaching about God against Jesus' words. What needs to change in your belief or worship?

WHAT THE TRINITY BELIEF ACTUALLY TEACHES

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Before we compare the Trinity belief with Scripture, we need to understand clearly what the doctrine actually claims. It would be unfair to reject a teaching without first stating it accurately. Many sincere Christians who believe the Trinity do not believe in three Gods. They believe there is one God who eternally exists as three distinct divine persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

According to traditional Trinitarian teaching, the Father is fully God, the Son is fully God and the Holy Spirit is fully God. Yet these three are not said to be three separate Gods. They are described as sharing one divine being or essence. The doctrine therefore attempts to hold two statements together: God is one, and within that one God there are three distinct persons.

Three Distinct Persons

A central part of the Trinity doctrine is that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are genuinely distinct from one another. Traditional Trinitarian teaching does not say that the Father is the Son, that the Son is the Holy Spirit, or that the Holy Spirit is the Father. According to the doctrine:

- The Father is not the Son;
- The Son is not the Father;
- The Father is not the Holy Spirit;
- The Holy Spirit is not the Father;
- The Son is not the Holy Spirit;
- The Holy Spirit is not the Son.

At the same time, each is said to be fully and equally God. The Father is not considered more God than the Son, and the Son is not considered more God than the Holy Spirit. All three are described as possessing the same divine nature.

This distinction is important because we must examine the Trinity belief as it is actually taught. Our question is not whether Christians use the words Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Scripture certainly uses those expressions. The question is whether Scripture defines those expressions as three distinct divine persons who are each fully God.

Coequal and Coeternal

Traditional Trinitarian teaching also describes the three persons as coequal and coeternal. Coequal means that no one person is less divine than another. Coeternal means that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are all understood to have existed eternally without beginning.

Under this definition, the Son is not a created being and the Holy Spirit is not a lesser divine power. Each person is regarded as fully possessing the one divine nature.

This point matters because the Trinity doctrine is not simply the belief that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are mentioned together in Scripture. Its claim goes much further. It gives a

particular explanation of their relationship to one another and of how they are understood to constitute the one God.

Personal Response

Key Truth

What does the Trinity doctrine mean by three distinct, coequal and coeternal persons?

Personal Reflection

Have you mistaken the Trinity claim for belief in three Gods? What attitude needs correcting?

Action Step

State the Trinity belief fairly. What assumption or prejudice must you put aside as you examine it in the light of the Bible?

One Divine Being or Essence

Trinitarian theology commonly explains the doctrine by distinguishing between person and being. God is said to be one in being or essence but three in person. The doctrine therefore does not claim that three persons are one person. It claims that three distinct divine persons share the one divine being.

This distinction is intended to preserve belief in one God while also preserving the personal distinctions that Trinitarian theology sees between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Words such as person, being, essence, substance, coequal and coeternal therefore became important in explaining the doctrine.

These words allow Trinitarian theology to say that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are distinct without teaching three Gods. We need to understand this distinction before examining the doctrine from Scripture. Otherwise, we could easily answer a position that Trinitarians themselves do not actually hold.

Why an Accurate Definition Matters

Precision is especially important in a subject as serious as the identity of God. If we say that the Trinity teaches three Gods, a Trinitarian can rightly answer that this is not what the doctrine claims. We would then be arguing against something different from the belief we intend to examine.

Our case must be stronger than that. We should understand the doctrine in its recognised form and then place that definition beside Scripture. If the biblical testimony supports it, we must accept what Scripture teaches. If the biblical testimony gives a different explanation of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, then we must follow Scripture rather than the later theological definition.

The Language of Scripture and the Language of Theology

The Bible speaks plainly of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. It also speaks of one God, one Lord and one Spirit. The issue before us is how these biblical expressions should be understood.

The terms three persons, coequal, coeternal and one God in three persons are not phrases used by Moses, the prophets, Jesus or the apostles to define God. They belong to theological

language that developed as church leaders attempted to explain the relationship between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

That does not by itself prove that the Trinity doctrine is false. A theological term must be judged by whether the idea it expresses agrees with Scripture. The important question is therefore not simply, *"Is this word found in the Bible?"* The deeper question is, *"Does Scripture itself teach the doctrine expressed by that word?"*

That is the test we must apply.

The Question We Must Examine

The Trinity doctrine therefore presents us with a very specific claim. It says there is one God, but that within the one God there are three distinct divine persons who are coequal, coeternal and fully God.

We must now ask whether this definition comes from the direct testimony of Scripture. When God says, *"I am God, and there is none else,"* does Scripture later explain that declaration to mean three distinct divine persons sharing one divine essence? When Jesus repeats, *"The Lord our God is one Lord,"* does He redefine that one God as three persons? When the apostles speak of one God, one Lord and one Spirit, do they explain these as three separate divine persons within one divine being?

These questions cannot be answered by appealing to the age of a doctrine, the number of people who believe it or the authority of a church council. They must be answered from Scripture.

This is why we have first defined the Trinity belief carefully. We are not rejecting a caricature of the doctrine. We are examining its actual central claim.

The next step is therefore to ask how any doctrine concerning God should be tested. Before we consider the historical development of Trinitarian language, we must establish the standard by which both ancient and modern teaching must be judged.

That standard is the Word of God.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why is it important to explain the Trinity belief accurately before testing it against the Bible?

Personal Reflection

When someone disagrees about God, are you seeking truth or trying to win? Why?

Action Step

Examine your attitude towards those who disagree. What pride or impatience must you set aside so you can listen fairly and answer from the Bible?

THE TEST OF TRUE DOCTRINE

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Having defined what the Trinity belief actually teaches, we must now ask a more important question: How should any doctrine concerning God be tested? The answer cannot depend

upon how old the doctrine is, how widely it is accepted, how many churches teach it or how respected its defenders may be. The final authority must be the Word of God.

Religious tradition can preserve truth, but it can also preserve error. A belief may be repeated for centuries and become deeply established without having been plainly taught by Jesus Christ or His apostles. We must therefore be willing to examine every doctrine by Scripture, including doctrines that have become familiar through long use.

We Must Know Whom We Believe

Some people are told that the nature of God is ultimately beyond understanding and that the Trinity must therefore be accepted as a mystery. Certainly, the greatness of God reaches beyond the limits of human understanding. Yet Scripture does not present God as completely unknowable.

Paul expressed this desire in **Philippians 3:9-10**:

> *"And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death;"*

Paul's desire was personal and direct: *"That I may know him."* Biblical faith is not centred upon accepting an explanation of God that remains beyond knowing. God has made Himself known, and the believer is called into a real knowledge of Him.

Paul wrote in **2 Timothy 1:12**:

> *"For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day."*

Paul said, *"I know whom I have believed."* His confidence rested in the One whom he knew. Christianity is not founded upon accepting an unexplained theological formula. God has revealed Himself, and He expects us to receive what He has revealed in His Word.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How do Paul's words about knowing whom he believed describe more than accepting a religious formula?

Personal Reflection

Are you relying on facts about God rather than trusting the One revealed in Jesus? How?

Action Step

Name a concern in which your trust needs strengthening. How will **2 Timothy 1:12** *shape your response in faith?*

Clear Scripture Must Guide Difficult Verses

A true doctrine must bring the testimony of Scripture into harmony. One verse must not be interpreted in a way that overturns the repeated and unmistakable testimony of many other Scriptures.

Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 14:33**:

> *"For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints."*

This does not mean that every verse of Scripture will be immediately easy to understand. Some verses require careful study and comparison with other Scriptures. However, one part of the Word of God cannot ultimately contradict another. Our interpretation must allow the whole testimony of Scripture to remain in agreement.

If Moses declares that God is one, Isaiah declares that there is no God beside Him, Jesus affirms that the Lord is one, and the apostles continue to proclaim one God, then verses mentioning the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit must be understood in harmony with that foundation. This principle is especially important when considering verses such as **Genesis 1:26**.

Moses wrote in **Genesis 1:26**:

> *"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."*

The words *"us"* and *"our"* are plural, but those words cannot by themselves establish three distinct, coequal and coeternal divine persons. Their meaning must be understood in harmony with the whole testimony of Scripture concerning the one true God.

If the Trinity Is Essential, Where Is It Clearly Taught?

This gives us an important test. Many churches regard belief in the Trinity as essential to Christian faith. Some also teach that rejecting the doctrine places a person outside orthodox Christianity.

If the identity of God must be defined as three distinct, coequal and coeternal divine persons, we should expect Scripture to teach that definition clearly. Yet the Bible nowhere states that the one God eternally exists as three distinct divine persons.

The Bible certainly speaks of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. Those expressions must be accepted exactly as Scripture gives them. The question is whether Scripture itself defines them as three distinct divine persons within one God. That question must be answered from the Bible, not assumed beforehand.

The Apostolic Test

Paul gave a serious warning concerning teachings that move believers away from Christ. Paul wrote in **Colossians 2:8-10**:

> *"Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power:"*

Paul contrasts philosophy and the tradition of men with Jesus Christ. Our doctrine must therefore remain centred in the Scriptural revelation of Christ rather than in later theological interpretations used to control how Scripture is read.

Scripture Must Have the Final Word

The decisive question is not whether a doctrine is ancient, sophisticated or widely accepted. The question is whether it agrees with the Word of God.

We are not required to defend inherited tradition. We are required to receive the testimony of Scripture. Every creed, council, theological definition and religious tradition must therefore remain beneath the authority of God's Word.

The test of true doctrine is simple. What does the Scripture actually say?

That question must govern everything that follows. We can now examine how Trinitarian language developed historically and then return to the direct testimony of Scripture concerning the one true God.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why must clear statements about the one God guide our reading of difficult verses?

Personal Reflection

Have you accepted an explanation of God mainly because it is familiar? What makes it difficult to reconsider?

Action Step

Compare one familiar explanation of God with the Bible's clear teaching about His oneness. What must you correct so God's Word comes first?

THE ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE TRINITY BELIEF

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Having established that every doctrine concerning God must be tested by Scripture, we now come to an important historical question: Where did the formal doctrine of God as three distinct, coequal and coeternal divine persons come from? The Bible was completed long before the great church councils of the fourth century. Yet the terminology later used to define the Trinity developed gradually as church leaders attempted to explain the relationship between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Understanding that development helps us distinguish between the language of Scripture and the language of later theology.

From Biblical Language to the Language of Creeds

The apostles used direct biblical expressions when speaking about God. They spoke of one God, one Lord, the Father, the Son of God, the Spirit of God, the Holy Ghost, God was in Christ, and the Lord is that Spirit. These expressions belong to Scripture itself.

As the centuries passed, theological controversies developed over how these expressions should be understood. Church leaders began using increasingly technical terms to explain the relationship between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Words such as person, essence, substance, coequal and coeternal became important in later theological definitions.

The existence of later terminology does not by itself prove that the doctrine expressed by that terminology is false. However, it does mean that we must ask whether the later definition faithfully expresses what Scripture teaches. A theological explanation must remain subject to the Word of God, and we must never allow a creed to become the lens through which Scripture is forced to speak.

Jesus warned concerning religious tradition. He said in **Mark 7:7-8**:

> *"Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do."*

The danger is not simply that people have traditions. The danger arises when tradition gains such authority that it governs how the Word of God must be understood. Every creed and theological definition must therefore be tested by Scripture.

H. M. Riggle, a Church of God minister writing in 1913, expressed the same principle when he wrote:

"Any creed larger than the Bible is too large, just as any creed smaller than the Bible is too small."

Riggle also warned that human tradition can become as authoritative to its followers as Scripture itself. He stated, *"To go outside of this is to resort to man-made rules and traditions. Traditional law once imbibed and fully established in the mind and conscience, becomes as sacred to the one practicing it as divine law, and is no easy thing to shake off."*

His point was that the revealed Word of God is sufficient. A creed may summarise what people believe, but it must never become the final authority by which Scripture is interpreted. The Bible must remain the standard by which every creed and theological definition is tested.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why must a creed be tested by the Bible rather than accepted as the final authority?

Personal Reflection

Are you willing to question a respected creed when the Bible challenges it? What makes this difficult?

Action Step

Compare one statement about God from a creed or teacher with what the Bible says. What will you affirm or change in your own belief?

The Controversy That Led to Nicaea

By the early fourth century, serious disagreement had developed concerning the identity of Jesus Christ and His relationship to God. One prominent figure in that controversy was Arius, a presbyter from Alexandria.

Arius taught that the Son did not possess the same eternal existence as the Father. He regarded the Son as having been brought into existence by the Father and therefore as subordinate to Him. Although the Son was regarded as highly exalted, Arius did not understand Him as possessing the same eternal divine essence as the Father.

This teaching produced strong opposition. The controversy became widespread enough that church leaders gathered at the Council of Nicaea in AD 325. The council was convened during the reign of the Roman Emperor Constantine, who desired unity within an empire in which Christianity had recently received legal protection.

The issue before the council was therefore serious. The church was attempting to answer questions concerning Jesus Christ, His Deity and His relationship to the Father. The resulting decisions became a major stage in the development of later Trinitarian doctrine.

The Council of Nicaea: AD 325

The Council of Nicaea rejected the teaching that the Son was a created being. Its creed declared the Son to be *"begotten, not made"* and *"of one substance with the Father."* The important theological term associated with this definition was the Greek word HOMOOUSIOS, meaning of the same substance or essence.

The purpose of this wording was to defend the Deity of Christ against the teaching of Arius. However, we should notice what Nicaea did and did not establish. The principal controversy concerned the Father and the Son, while the creed produced at Nicaea contained only a brief statement concerning the Holy Ghost.

This is important because the fully developed formulation commonly associated with the Trinity today was not expressed at Nicaea in its later form. Nicaea was a major step in the development of that doctrine, but the theological definition continued to develop afterwards.

This historical fact helps us recognise an important distinction. The apostles had already completed their witness concerning God and Jesus Christ centuries earlier, while the technical language of the later creeds developed as church leaders attempted to organise and explain the biblical material. Our question must therefore remain: Does that later theological explanation accurately represent the apostolic teaching?

The Council of Constantinople: AD 381

More than fifty years after Nicaea, another major council was held at Constantinople in AD 381. By this time, controversy continued not only concerning the Son but also concerning the Holy Spirit.

The creed associated with Constantinople expanded the earlier language concerning the Holy Spirit. The Holy Ghost was described as *"the Lord and Giver of life"* and as One who was to be worshipped and glorified together with the Father and the Son.

The development between AD 325 and AD 381 is significant. At Nicaea, the main concern had been the relationship between the Father and the Son. By Constantinople, the theological description had expanded so that the Holy Spirit was also formally included within the developing understanding of the one divine essence.

The doctrine therefore did not appear in history as one complete statement handed down in the words of an apostle. It developed through controversy, debate, councils and increasingly precise theological terminology. Church leaders were attempting to answer difficult questions, but the resulting definitions must still be compared with the language and testimony of Scripture.

This is not an argument that everything developed later must automatically be false. It is an argument for keeping the proper order of authority.

Scripture came first. The creeds came later. Scripture must therefore judge the creeds, not the creeds judge Scripture.

Constantine, Church Authority and Historical Claims

Emperor Constantine played an important historical role because he convened the Council of Nicaea and desired religious unity within the Roman Empire. His involvement also illustrates the growing connection between imperial government and the institutional church during this period.

However, our rejection of the Trinity belief must not depend upon accusations concerning Constantine's motives or religious character. Constantine did not invent all the theological arguments discussed at Nicaea, and proving something questionable about his personal life would not settle the doctrine of God.

The same caution applies to claims that the Trinity was simply copied from pagan groups of three gods. Ancient religions certainly contained triads and groups of deities, but similarity alone does not prove direct borrowing. We do not need to build our case upon an argument that is difficult to establish conclusively.

Our case is stronger when it rests upon Scripture. The decisive question is not whether pagan religions contained groups of three, nor whether Constantine had political reasons for wanting unity. The decisive question is whether Moses, the prophets, Jesus Christ and the apostles taught that the one God exists as three distinct, coequal and coeternal divine persons.

The Question History Brings Back to Scripture

The historical development of Trinitarian doctrine therefore serves an important purpose in this Study Guide. It shows that the familiar language of three persons, one essence, coequal and coeternal belongs to later theological formulation rather than to the language in which Scripture itself defines God.

That does not allow us simply to dismiss the doctrine because it developed later. We must now do something more important: compare its claims directly with the Word of God.

The apostles did not leave us without a testimony concerning the identity of God. Moses declared that the LORD is one. The prophets repeatedly recorded God's words that there is none beside Him. Jesus affirmed that *"The Lord our God is one Lord,"* and the apostles continued to preach one God.

We therefore return from church history to Scripture with a clear question before us. Does the Bible reveal one God who exists as three distinct divine persons, or does it reveal one God who has made Himself known in Jesus Christ?

The answer must not come from a council, a creed or a theological tradition. It must come from the Word of God. That is the standard by which every later explanation of God must be examined and judged.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why can the history of Nicaea and Constantinople neither prove nor disprove the Trinity by itself?

Personal Reflection

Have you used uncertain historical claims to support your faith? Why did you rely on them?

Action Step

Think again about a claim concerning Constantine, church councils or pagan religion. What unverified claim must you set aside so that the Bible governs your belief?

THE BIBLE DECLARES ONE GOD

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Having considered the historical development of Trinitarian language, we now return to the question that matters most: What does the Bible itself say about God? The answer is not hidden in difficult verses or dependent upon complicated theological reasoning. From Moses, through the prophets, through Jesus Christ and into the writings of the apostles, Scripture repeatedly declares that there is one God.

This testimony provides the foundation for everything that follows. Before we attempt to explain the Father, the Son or the Holy Spirit, we must first allow the Bible to establish how many Gods there are. The answer given throughout Scripture is consistent: there is one God.

The Witness Begins With Moses

One of the clearest declarations concerning God was given to Israel through Moses. Moses wrote in **Deuteronomy 6:4**:

> *"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD:"*

This declaration was not a minor statement hidden within the Law. Israel was commanded to know and confess that the LORD their God was one LORD. The people were surrounded by nations that worshipped many gods, but the God who revealed Himself to Israel was not one deity among many. He alone is God; the gods worshipped by the surrounding nations were not other true Gods beside Him.

Moses expressed the same truth elsewhere. He wrote in **Deuteronomy 4:35**:

> *"Unto thee it was shewed, that thou mightest know that the LORD he is God; there is none else beside him."*

Notice the force of the language. Israel was shown these things so that they might know that the LORD is God. Moses then adds, *"there is none else beside him."* The declaration that God is one therefore means more than saying that Israel worshipped one God while other gods also existed. Scripture declares that beside Him there is none else.

Moses wrote again in **Deuteronomy 4:39**:

> *"Know therefore this day, and consider it in thine heart, that the LORD he is God in heaven above, and upon the earth beneath: there is none else."*

The testimony is direct. The LORD is God in heaven above and upon the earth beneath. There is none else. This establishes the foundation long before the New Testament was written.

The prophets continued this same testimony. They did not introduce additional divine persons alongside the LORD. Again and again, God declared that He alone is God. We will examine those statements more closely in the section that follows.

Personal Response

Key Truth

What do Moses' declarations of one LORD and none beside Him tell us about Israel's God?

Personal Reflection

What in Moses' confession of the one LORD challenges your view of God?

Action Step

Compare your belief about God with **Deuteronomy 6:4** *and 4:35. What must change or become firmer in your trust and worship?*

Jesus Affirmed the Same One God

When Jesus Christ came, He did not announce that the Old Testament understanding of one God was incomplete and must now be replaced by belief in three distinct divine persons. Instead, Jesus deliberately repeated the declaration given through Moses.

A scribe asked Jesus which commandment was the greatest. Mark recorded in **Mark 12:28-29**:

> *"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:"*

Jesus went directly back to **Deuteronomy 6:4**. The first commandment begins with the declaration, *"The Lord our God is one Lord."*

This is extremely important. Jesus knew perfectly the identity and nature of God. If the declaration that God is one required the explanation that God actually exists as three distinct divine persons, Jesus had the opportunity to say so. Instead, He affirmed the same confession that had been given through Moses.

The scribe understood what Jesus had said. Mark continued in **Mark 12:32**:

> *"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:"*

The scribe understood *"one Lord"* to mean *"there is one God; and there is none other but he."* Jesus did not correct him for misunderstanding the nature of God. The conversation remained grounded in the simple biblical confession that there is one God.

Jesus therefore stands in complete agreement with the revelation given through Moses. The coming of Jesus Christ did not change the number of Gods. The question that later Study Guides must answer is how Jesus Christ is to be understood within this unchanging truth.

The Apostles Continued the Same Testimony

After the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the apostles continued to teach that there is one God. They did not announce that the Church must now understand God as three distinct divine persons.

Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 8:4**:

> *"As concerning therefore the eating of those things that are offered in sacrifice unto idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one."*

Paul's statement is unmistakable: *"there is none other God but one."* He is writing to New Testament believers after the coming of Jesus Christ, yet his language agrees completely with Moses and the prophets.

Paul wrote again in **Galatians 3:20**:

> *"Now a mediator is not a mediator of one, but God is one."*

The statement could hardly be simpler: "God is one." Paul also wrote in **1 Timothy 2:5**:

> *"For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus;"*

Again, Paul begins with the established truth: *"there is one God."* He then identifies the mediator as *"the man Christ Jesus."* The meaning and importance of that distinction will be considered more fully later in this module, but the declaration with which Paul begins is unmistakable.

James gives the same testimony. He wrote in **James 2:19**:

> *"Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble."*

James does not treat belief in one God as an outdated Jewish idea. He says plainly, *"Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well."* The apostles therefore continued the same testimony that had been given throughout the Old Testament and affirmed by Jesus Christ.

One God From Beginning to End

When these Scriptures are placed together, a clear pattern emerges. Moses declared that *"the LORD our God is one LORD."* He also said *"there is none else beside him."* Jesus repeated, *"The Lord our God is one Lord."* The scribe responded, *"there is one God; and there is none other but he."* Paul declared, *"there is none other God but one"* and *"God is one."* James confirmed, *"there is one God."*

There is therefore no movement in Scripture from one God in the Old Testament to three divine persons in the New Testament. The testimony remains consistent.

This does not mean that we ignore the biblical language of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Neither does it mean that every verse concerning God is immediately simple to explain. It means that those verses must be understood within the foundation Scripture has already established.

We must not begin with three distinct divine persons and then attempt to explain how they can still be one God. We must begin where Scripture begins:

There is one God.

From that foundation, we can allow the Bible to explain the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit without overturning what God has already declared concerning Himself. The next step is therefore to examine even stronger statements made by God concerning His own identity. He does not simply say that He is one. He declares that there is none else, there is no God beside Him, and He knows no other God.

Those statements must be allowed to speak with their full force.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How do Jesus and the apostles continue Moses' testimony that God is one?

Personal Reflection

Has New Testament language ever weakened your confidence that God is one? Why?

Action Step

Read **Deuteronomy 6:4**, **Mark 12:29** *and* **1 Corinthians 8:4**. *What do you need to affirm or correct in your belief?*

THERE IS NONE ELSE

BACK TO CONTENTS

The Bible does more than say that God is one. Through the prophets, God speaks concerning Himself in language that leaves no room for another God beside Him. Again and again, the LORD declares that He alone is God. These statements are important because they explain what the biblical declaration of one God actually means.

If Scripture had only said that God is *"one,"* someone might attempt to argue that the word could describe several divine persons united together. The prophets remove that uncertainty. God does not simply say that He is one. He says that there is none else and that beside Him there is no God.

God Speaks for Himself

Isaiah recorded the words of God in **Isaiah 45:5**:

> *"I am the LORD, and there is none else, there is no God beside me: I girded thee, though thou hast not known me:"*

This is not a theological explanation written centuries later. It is the LORD speaking concerning His own identity. He says, *"I am the LORD,"* and then explains that declaration with two further statements: *"there is none else"* and *"there is no God beside me."*

These words must be allowed to retain their natural force. God does not say that there is no other divine essence while several divine persons share that essence. He does not say that He is one member within a unity of divine persons. He says that there is none else and that there is no God beside Him.

The language is personal and exclusive. The One speaking identifies Himself as the LORD and declares that no other God exists beside Him. Whatever Scripture later teaches concerning the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit must therefore agree with what God has already said concerning Himself.

We must be careful not to begin with a later theological definition and then weaken these direct statements in order to make them fit that definition. The proper order is the opposite. God has spoken, and every later explanation must agree with His words.

"Beside Me There Is No God"

Isaiah records another declaration that is equally direct. Isaiah wrote in **Isaiah 44:6**:

> *"Thus saith the LORD the King of Israel, and his redeemer the LORD of hosts; I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God."*

Isaiah records an even more direct statement in **Isaiah 44:8**:

> *"Fear ye not, neither be afraid: have not I told thee from that time, and have declared it? ye are even my witnesses. Is there a God beside me? yea, there is no God; I know not any."*

The LORD asks the question Himself: *"Is there a God beside me?"* His answer is equally direct: *"there is no God; I know not any."* God does not speak as one divine person who shares Deity with other divine persons known to Him. He declares that beside Him there is no God and that He knows no other.

Again, the LORD does not simply say that He is one. He says, *"beside me there is no God."* The statement is absolute. If another divine person were standing beside Him as another who is equally and fully God, the natural force of this declaration would be difficult to preserve.

This does not mean that we reject the biblical language of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It means that we must understand those expressions in a way that does not contradict the LORD's own declaration that there is no God beside Him.

This is one of the great strengths of beginning with the clear statements of Scripture. We do not need to begin by deciding what Father, Son and Holy Spirit must mean. We first establish what God says about Himself. Then, when we come to those expressions later, we allow Scripture to explain them within the foundation already laid.

The Trinity belief says that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are distinct divine persons and that each is fully God. Scripture, however, gives us this controlling statement from the LORD Himself: *"beside me there is no God."* That difference must be examined honestly.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why do God's words that there is no God beside Him give meaning to His oneness?

Personal Reflection

What does God's declaration that He knows no other God challenge in your belief?

Action Step

Test an explanation you have heard against **Isaiah 44:8**. *What must you correct or affirm, and how will you honour God's testimony?*

"I Am the First, and I Am the Last"

Isaiah 44:6 also contains another important declaration: *"I am the first, and I am the last."* The One who speaks is not presented as one divine person among several eternal divine persons. He identifies Himself as the first and the last and immediately adds that beside Him there is no God.

The words belong together. The LORD is the first. The LORD is the last. Beside Him there is no God. Scripture therefore presents the God of Israel as the complete and exclusive God, not as one participant within a larger divine relationship.

This is why the doctrine of God cannot be settled by beginning with the assumption of three distinct persons. If we begin there, we may find ourselves explaining away the very statements that should govern our understanding. Instead, we begin with God's own testimony and allow everything else to be interpreted in harmony with it.

The same principle applies when we later come to Jesus Christ. Scripture will not permit us to make Jesus another God beside the LORD because the LORD has already declared that there is no God beside Him. If Scripture also reveals Jesus Christ as truly God, the answer cannot be that there are now two Gods. The later Study Guides must therefore show how Jesus Christ is understood within the unchanging truth that there is only one God.

The Clear Statements Must Govern Our Understanding

The testimony of Scripture is stronger than a simple numerical statement. God does not only say, *"I am one."* He explains His uniqueness with words such as *"there is none else"* and *"beside me there is no God."*

Paul later uses the same kind of language. Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 8:4**:

> *"As concerning therefore the eating of those things that are offered in sacrifice unto idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one."*

The New Testament does not weaken the Old Testament declaration. Paul says, *"there is none other God but one."* His words agree with Isaiah. The testimony remains the same.

Jesus also affirmed the same foundation when He repeated:

"The Lord our God is one Lord."

We are therefore not dealing with an isolated Old Testament idea that later Christianity replaced. The prophets, Jesus and the apostles stand together in the same testimony.

This is why the repeated statements of Scripture must control our understanding. Verses that require more careful explanation must be interpreted in harmony with Scriptures that speak plainly. We cannot use the presence of the words Father, Son and Holy Spirit to overturn declarations such as *"there is none else," "there is no God beside me,"* and *"there is none other God but one."*

The foundation is becoming increasingly clear. There is one God. He is not one God among others. There is no God beside Him, and there is none other.

The next section will strengthen this truth from another direction. Scripture does not only declare that there is one God. The LORD also declares that He alone created all things. His words *"alone"* and *"by myself"* give us another powerful witness concerning the identity of the one true God.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How do the LORD's words 'the first' and 'the last' agree with the declaration that none is beside Him?

Personal Reflection

Have difficult verses made you doubt God's clear declarations? How?

Action Step

Examine one difficult verse alongside **Isaiah 44:6** *and* **1 Corinthians 8:4**. *What should change in how you understand God's identity?*

THE ONE GOD CREATED ALL THINGS

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Scripture gives us another powerful way of identifying the one true God: He is the Creator of all things. The God who declares that there is none beside Him also declares that He alone made the heavens and the earth.

This becomes important because creation is not presented as the work of several independent divine beings. The Bible begins with one God creating, and the prophets later describe that Creator as the LORD who acted *"alone"* and *"by myself."* The identity of the Creator therefore strengthens everything we have already established concerning the oneness of God.

In the Beginning God Created

The opening words of Scripture establish God as the Creator. Moses wrote in **Genesis 1:1-3**:

> *"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light: and there was light."*

The Bible does not begin by introducing several Gods working together. It begins simply: *"God created the heaven and the earth."* The same God speaks, His Spirit moves, and creation responds to His command.

Notice also how creation takes place. God speaks: *"Let there be light."* The light appears because the Word of God carries the authority and power of the God who speaks it. His Word is not introduced here as another Creator standing beside Him. God creates by His own command.

This is an important foundation for later studies. Scripture will eventually say more about the Word of God and about Jesus Christ in relation to creation. When we reach those verses, we must interpret them within the truth already established here: there is one Creator.

We must not allow later Scriptures to produce a second Creator beside the God who created in Genesis. Scripture must remain in harmony with itself.

The LORD Created Alone and by Himself

The prophets make the identity of the Creator even clearer. Isaiah recorded the words of the LORD in **Isaiah 44:24**:

> *"Thus saith the LORD, thy redeemer, and he that formed thee from the womb, I am the LORD that maketh all things; that stretcheth forth the heavens alone; that spreadeth abroad the earth by myself;"*

Every part of this declaration deserves careful attention. God says, *"I am the LORD that maketh all things."* He then explains how He did it: *"that stretcheth forth the heavens alone"* and *"that spreadeth abroad the earth by myself."*

The words *"alone"* and *"by myself"* are extremely important. They tell us that the LORD did not require another God beside Him to accomplish creation. He does not describe Himself as one divine person working beside two other divine persons. He identifies Himself as the LORD who made all things and says that He acted alone and by Himself.

This agrees with the declarations we have already examined. The same God who says *"there is none else"* and *"beside me there is no God"* now says that He created *"alone"* and *"by myself."*

The testimony is consistent. There is one God, and that one God is the Creator.

This gives us another important test for everything that follows. If Scripture later identifies someone as the Creator, we cannot simply conclude that another divine Creator has appeared beside the LORD. Isaiah has already told us that the LORD created alone and by Himself. The later revelation must therefore lead us back to the identity of the one Creator, not away from it.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How do Genesis and Isaiah identify one Creator who acted alone?

Personal Reflection

Does knowing God created you lead to trust and worship, or only agreement? Why?

Action Step

Reflect on **Isaiah 44:24***. What attitude towards your Creator needs correcting, and how will you now express trust or worship?*

Creation Identifies the One True God

Creation is therefore more than a demonstration of God's power. It helps identify who God is.

The God of Scripture is not one divine being within a larger group of divine beings. He is the One who made everything that exists. Heaven and earth do not owe their existence to several separate Gods. They owe their existence to the one LORD.

This makes the language of Isaiah especially significant. If three distinct divine persons are each fully God and each participated in creation as separate divine persons, we must ask how

that explanation fits the LORD's statement that He stretched forth the heavens *"alone"* and spread abroad the earth *"by myself."*

We should not weaken the words of Scripture in order to defend a particular theological interpretation. We should allow Scripture to establish the framework by which all other statements are understood. The foundation is therefore becoming increasingly firm:

- There is one God;
- There is none else;
- There is no God beside Him;
- He is the first and the last;
- He made all things;
- He stretched forth the heavens alone;
- He spread abroad the earth by Himself.

These are not isolated statements. Together they give us a consistent revelation of the identity of God.

As we continue through this module, Scripture will reveal extraordinary truths concerning Jesus Christ. We will see Scriptures that connect Him directly with creation. When we come to them, we must remember what has already been established. The answer cannot be that one Creator existed beside another Creator because the LORD has already declared that He created alone.

The question will instead become: If the LORD alone created all things, and Scripture attributes creation to Jesus Christ, what does that reveal concerning who Jesus Christ truly is? That question will be answered as the module progresses.

For now, the truth before us is clear. The one true God is the Creator of all things, and He created alone and by Himself.

Personal Response

Key Truth

If the LORD created alone, how must later statements about Christ and creation be understood?

Personal Reflection

What does recognising Jesus as the one Creator reveal about your own trust in Him?

Action Step

Compare **Isaiah 44:24** *with* **Colossians 1:16-17**. *How must this truth affect your trust in Jesus Christ as the one Creator?*

WHAT DOES "ONE" MEAN?

BACK TO CONTENTS

We have now established that Scripture repeatedly declares there is one God, that there is none else beside Him, and that He alone created all things. Because the word one is so central to this subject, we should now examine how Scripture uses that word.

Some have argued that the biblical word translated one allows for several divine persons united together as one God. For that reason, it is important to look carefully at the Hebrew and Greek words used in the Scriptures we have already examined. At the same time, we must not allow a word study to carry more weight than the context of Scripture itself. The meaning of one must be understood within everything God has already said concerning Himself.

Echad in the Old Testament

Moses wrote in **Deuteronomy 6:4**:

> *"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD:"*

The Hebrew word translated *"one"* is ECHAD. It is the ordinary Hebrew word for one and is used throughout the Old Testament in many different settings.

Depending upon the context, ECHAD can refer to one individual thing or to something spoken of as one whole. Because of this, some have argued that the word itself supports the idea of a compound unity and therefore allows the one God to consist of several divine persons.

That conclusion goes beyond what the word itself can establish. ECHAD means one. The context determines what is being described as one. The word does not contain within itself the idea of three persons, nor does it define the internal nature of whatever is being called one.

We must therefore look beyond the possible uses of the Hebrew word and ask how Scripture itself explains the oneness of God. Moses wrote in **Deuteronomy 4:35**:

> *"Unto thee it was shewed, that thou mightest know that the LORD he is God; there is none else beside him."*

This statement explains the meaning of God's oneness far more clearly than speculation about what ECHAD might possibly mean in other verses. The LORD is one, and *"there is none else beside him."* The biblical context therefore controls the word.

Heis in the New Testament

Jesus repeated the declaration of **Deuteronomy 6:4** in the New Testament. Jesus said in **Mark 12:29**:

> *"And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord:"*

The Greek word translated *"one"* is HEIS. Jesus did not replace the Old Testament confession with a different understanding of God. He repeated it and affirmed it.

Paul used the same word when writing concerning God. Paul wrote in **Galatians 3:20**:

> *"Now a mediator is not a mediator of one, but God is one."*

Again, the statement is simple: *"God is one."*

In Greek, the word for one changes form according to grammatical gender. The forms are HEIS in the masculine, MIA in the feminine and HEN in the neuter. These are grammatical forms of the same numeral. They should not be treated as though one form means an absolute numerical one while another means a compound or collective unity.

The Greek language does not require such a distinction. Paul gives a useful example in **Ephesians 4:4-6**:

> *"There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all."*

Paul repeatedly uses the language of one. He writes:

- One body;
- One Spirit;
- One hope;
- One Lord;
- One faith;
- One baptism;
- One God and Father of all.

The emphasis is unity and singularity. Nothing in the word HEIS itself teaches that the one God consists of three distinct divine persons.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why can neither ECHAD nor HEIS establish three divine persons by itself?

Personal Reflection

Have you relied on the meaning of a Greek or Hebrew word without reading the verses around it? Why?

Action Step

Review a claim about ECHAD or HEIS in context. What belief must you correct, and how will this change your future study?

The Context Defines the Oneness of God

The strongest way to understand the word one is therefore not to isolate a Hebrew or Greek term from its context. We must allow the whole testimony of Scripture to define what God's oneness means.

God says *"there is none else beside him."* He says *"beside me there is no God."* He says that He stretched forth the heavens *"alone"* and spread abroad the earth *"by myself."*

Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 8:4**:

> *"As concerning therefore the eating of those things that are offered in sacrifice unto idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one."*

These statements explain the biblical meaning of one God. The LORD is not presented as one member of a divine group. He is the only God.

This is why we do not need to force ECHAD or HEIS to prove more than they actually prove. Both words mean one. The surrounding Scriptures tell us what that one is.

The argument therefore does not rest upon one Hebrew word or one Greek word. It rests upon the repeated testimony of Scripture:

- There is one LORD;
- There is none else beside Him;
- There is no God beside Him;
- There is none other God but one;
- He created alone and by Himself.

Neither ECHAD nor HEIS contains within itself the doctrine of three distinct, coequal and coeternal divine persons. That definition must come from somewhere other than the words themselves.

The biblical testimony remains much simpler. God is one.

Having established what Scripture means when it speaks of the one God, we can now ask another essential question: What is the nature of this one God? Jesus gives the answer plainly: God is Spirit.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How do God's declarations that none is beside Him explain the meaning of one God?

Personal Reflection

Where have you focused on one word more than God's wider testimony? Why?

Action Step

Examine one interpretation of 'one' beside **Deuteronomy 4:35** *and* **Isaiah 44:8***. What belief must you reconsider?*

THE ONE GOD IS SPIRIT, INVISIBLE AND ETERNAL

BACK TO CONTENTS

We have established that there is one God, that there is none beside Him, and that He alone created all things. We must now ask another important question: What is the nature of this one God?

Scripture gives a clear answer. God is Spirit. He is invisible, eternal and omnipresent. He is not a physical being who occupies one limited place, nor is He divided into separate divine beings. Understanding the nature of God is essential because it prepares us to understand how the invisible God could later make Himself known to humanity without ceasing to be the one eternal Spirit.

God Is Spirit

Jesus spoke plainly concerning the nature of God. Jesus said in **John 4:24**:

> *"God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."*

Jesus does not say that God has a spirit as one part of His being. He says, *"God is a Spirit."* This describes the nature of the one true God. God is not flesh or matter. He does not depend

upon a physical body in order to exist, and His existence is not limited by the conditions that belong to created physical life.

This truth is important when we later consider the biblical language of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We must not begin by assuming that the Biblical expressions Father, Son and Holy Spirit identify three separate divine persons within the one God. Scripture begins by telling us what God is: God is Spirit.

Because God is Spirit, He cannot be understood as though He were divided into physical portions. One part of God is not located in one place while another part is located somewhere else. The one God is Spirit, and His divine nature is not subject to the limitations of physical distance, size or location.

This also helps us understand why Scripture can speak of God being present in heaven, present upon earth and dwelling within His people without teaching several Gods. The one Spirit is not divided by His presence. God remains one wherever and however He chooses to reveal Himself.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why does God's nature as Spirit mean that His presence does not divide Him?

Personal Reflection

Have you imagined God as limited by a place or body? How has this affected your confidence?

Action Step

Read **John 4:24** *and* **Jeremiah 23:23-24***. What mistaken picture of God will you set aside, and how will it change your prayers?*

The One God Is Invisible and Eternal

Because God is Spirit, He is invisible to natural human sight. Human eyes can see physical objects, but God in His eternal Spirit nature cannot be seen in the same way.

John wrote in **John 1:18**:

> *"No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him."*

The opening statement is direct: *"No man hath seen God at any time."* John is speaking of God in His unseen nature. This does not mean that God cannot make Himself known. It means that the eternal God is not naturally visible as Spirit.

The fact that God is invisible also prevents us from confusing the form in which He reveals Himself with His eternal nature. Scripture may record visible manifestations, signs or appearances associated with God, but these do not mean that the eternal Spirit has become a naturally visible physical being. Revelation does not change the nature of the One being revealed. The same God who makes Himself known remains the invisible Spirit described by Scripture.

Paul gives the same testimony. Paul wrote in **1 Timothy 1:17**:

> *"Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen."*

Notice how Paul describes God. He is eternal, immortal and invisible. These descriptions belong together. The one God does not come into existence, grow old or cease to be. He is not subject to death, and He is not limited to a form that natural human eyes can see.

Moses spoke of the same eternal nature of God. Moses wrote in **Psalm 90:2**:

> *"Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God."*

Before the mountains existed, before the earth was formed and before creation began, God already was. He did not begin with creation because He is the Creator. Everything created has a beginning, but God is *"from everlasting to everlasting."*

Isaiah also spoke of God's knowledge of all time. Isaiah wrote in **Isaiah 46:10**:

> *"Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure:"*

Only an eternal God can declare the end from the beginning. This means God sees all time at once. Nothing is hidden, and nothing is future to Him. He knows all things because He inhabits all of eternity.

Isaiah expressed this truth in another way. Isaiah wrote in **Isaiah 57:15**:

> *"For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones."*

God does not simply exist for a very long time. Scripture says that He *"inhabiteth eternity."* His existence is not measured by the beginning and ending that belong to created life. The one God is eternal.

These truths also strengthen the biblical declaration that there is only one God. The eternal God did not come into being beside another eternal God. Scripture presents one eternal, immortal and invisible God who existed before all creation.

God Fills Heaven and Earth

The one God is also omnipresent. Because He is Spirit, He is not confined to one geographical location or limited to the dimensions of a physical body.

Jeremiah recorded the words of the LORD in **Jeremiah 23:23-24**:

> *"Am I a God at hand, saith the LORD, and not a God afar off? Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the LORD. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the LORD."*

The LORD asks, *"Do not I fill heaven and earth?"* God is not present in only one part of creation, nor is He absent from one place while present in another. The one eternal Spirit fills heaven and earth.

David expressed the same truth. David wrote in **Psalm 139:7-10**:

> *"Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me."*

David asks where he could go from God's Spirit or flee from His presence. His answer is clear: nowhere. Heaven cannot contain God in the sense of restricting Him to one location, and no place on earth lies beyond His presence.

This does not mean that God is divided across creation, as though different portions of God occupy different places. The one God is Spirit and is present without being divided or diminished. His omnipresence belongs to His divine nature.

This truth also guards us against thinking of God as three divine persons occupying separate places or performing separate divine functions. Scripture describes the one LORD as filling heaven and earth. His presence is the presence of the one God.

The Eternal Spirit Cannot Be Confined

These truths become extremely important when we later consider how God revealed Himself in Jesus Christ. If God is Spirit, invisible, eternal and omnipresent, then His revelation in a visible human life cannot mean that He ceased to possess His eternal nature.

God could reveal Himself in a genuine human life without becoming confined to the dimensions of a human body. The body could have location, experience physical limitation and be seen with natural eyes, while the God being revealed remained the eternal Spirit who fills heaven and earth.

We do not need to develop that truth fully here because later Study Guides will examine the manifestation of God in Jesus Christ and the genuine humanity of the Son. What matters at this stage is that we establish the nature of the God who was revealed. Scripture has shown us that:

- He is the one God;
- He is Spirit;
- He is invisible;
- He is eternal;
- He is immortal;
- He fills heaven and earth;
- He cannot be divided, diminished or confined.

This foundation protects us from creating contradictions when we later read that God was revealed in Jesus Christ. We will not be forced to choose between saying that God was truly revealed in Jesus and saying that God still filled heaven and earth. Both can be true because God is Spirit.

We have therefore answered two foundational questions. How many Gods are there? There is one God. What is the nature of that one God? God is Spirit, invisible, eternal and omnipresent.

That leads naturally to the next question. If the one true God is invisible Spirit, how can humanity know Him? How can the God whom no man has seen make Himself known in a way that can be seen, heard and understood?

The answer will lead us directly towards Jesus Christ. But before we examine that revelation in detail, the foundation must remain fixed:

The one true God is the eternal, invisible Spirit who fills heaven and earth.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How can God remain invisible and eternal while filling heaven and earth?

Personal Reflection

Have you felt alone and forgotten that God is present? How did that affect your response?

Action Step

Consider **Psalm 139:7-10** *and a time you felt alone. How should God's presence change your trust and response, without sharing private details?*

THE ONE GOD MUST BE REVEALED

BACK TO CONTENTS

We have established that there is one God and that this one God is Spirit, invisible, eternal and omnipresent. These truths now lead us to another necessary question: If God is invisible Spirit, how can He make Himself known to humanity?

Scripture does not present God as distant, unknowable or permanently hidden. The same God who cannot be seen in His eternal Spirit nature chose to reveal Himself. The question is therefore no longer how many Gods there are. Scripture has answered that. The question is how the one invisible God has made Himself known.

No Man Hath Seen God at Any Time

John gives us a direct statement concerning the invisibility of God and immediately points us towards His revelation. John wrote in **John 1:18**:

> *"No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him."*

The first statement agrees with everything we have already established: *"No man hath seen God at any time."* God is Spirit and therefore cannot be seen with natural human eyes in His eternal nature.

John does not stop with the invisibility of God. He says that the Son *"hath declared him."* The God who cannot be seen has made Himself known. The Son therefore does not introduce another God beside the invisible God. He is the means by which the God who cannot be seen is declared and made known.

This distinction is important. Scripture does not move from one invisible God to a second visible God. It moves from the invisible God to the revelation of that same God.

We do not need to answer every question concerning the Father and the Son in this first Study Guide. Those truths will be developed in the Study Guides that follow. At this stage, we are

simply establishing the direction in which Scripture points us: the invisible God has made Himself known.

The Image of the Invisible God

Paul gives another important statement concerning that revelation. Paul wrote in **Colossians 1:15**:

> *"Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature:"*

Paul calls Jesus Christ *"the image of the invisible God."* The statement brings together two truths. God is invisible, yet Jesus Christ is His image. What cannot be seen in God's eternal Spirit nature is made known through Jesus Christ.

The word image must not be understood as though Scripture were introducing another God who resembles the first God. Paul has already declared that *"there is none other God but one."* His teaching must remain consistent. The image of the invisible God therefore reveals the one God rather than introducing another divine being beside Him.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How does Jesus as the image of the invisible God make God known without introducing another God?

Personal Reflection

Have you tried to know God apart from His revelation in Jesus Christ? Why?

Action Step

Read **John 1:18** *and* **Colossians 1:15***. What mistaken idea about God must you correct, and how will it change your faith in Jesus?*

The Greek Words EIKŌN and CHARAKTĒR

Two Greek words help explain how Scripture speaks of the revelation of the invisible God. EIKŌN in **Colossians 1:15** means image, likeness or representation. CHARAKTĒR in **Hebrews 1:3** refers to an exact imprint or impressed mark.

The writer to the Hebrews described Christ in **Hebrews 1:3**:

> *"Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high;"*

Think of a metal stamp pressing into wax. The wax receives a perfect imprint of the stamp. Nothing is missing. It is not a rough copy; it carries the same shape and full detail.

Imagine a perfect mirror, not a blurry or distorted one, but a flawless mirror that reflects everything exactly. If God is invisible, Jesus is like the mirror that allows us to see God clearly and accurately.

These illustrations show how Jesus makes the invisible God known. They do not describe a separate divine person beside God. In Jesus Christ, the living nature of the one true God is revealed in a real human life.

This is where the argument of this Study Guide begins to open into the Study Guides that follow. We have established from Scripture that there is one God, that there is none beside Him, that He alone created all things, and that He is Spirit, invisible, eternal and omnipresent. We now see that this invisible God has made Himself known in Jesus Christ.

One God Above All, Through All and In You All

Paul joins God's absolute oneness to His authority, His work and His indwelling presence. Paul wrote in **Ephesians 4:6**:

> *"One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all."*

Jesus Christ Is Above All

Paul calls God *"Father"*. The Greek word PATER means a father or originator and presents God as the source and beginning of all things. Paul describes Him as above all, sovereign over creation; through all, present and active in all; and in you all, indwelling His people.

The question then is who Scripture identifies as above all. John the Baptist pointed to Jesus as the One who came from heaven. John wrote in **John 3:30-31**:

> *"He must increase, but I must decrease. He that cometh from above is above all: he that is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth: he that cometh from heaven is above all."*

John identified Jesus as the One who came from heaven and is above all. This means that He holds supreme authority over both heaven and earth. Paul then identifies Jesus Christ as the Creator and Sustainer through whom all things exist.

Paul wrote in **Colossians 1:16-17**:

> *"For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist."*

The identity of the One described in these verses is established by the surrounding Scripture. Paul wrote in **Colossians 1:13**:

> *"Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son:"*

The Young's Literal Translation (YLT) calls Him *"the Son of His love,"* confirming that it is Jesus Christ being described. This comparison helps identify the Creator and Sustainer as the Son. Through these verses Paul shows that Jesus is not only the Redeemer but also the One by whom all things consist.

Christ in You, the Hope of Glory

Paul's third expression is "in you all". When a person is born again, the One whom they receive is Jesus Christ, who dwells within them by His Spirit. Paul wrote in **Colossians 1:27**:

> *"To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory:"*

This indwelling testimony is also given in **Colossians 2:6**, **Galatians 2:20** and **Romans 8:10**. The One who is above all and acts through all is the same Christ who lives in His people. This is the connected Scriptural proof of the one God who is above all, through all and in you all.

Isaiah also called the promised Son "The mighty God" and "The everlasting Father". Isaiah wrote in **Isaiah 9:6**:

> *"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace."*

This prophecy joins the promised Son to the one God and Father whom Paul describes in **Ephesians 4:6**. Jesus Christ is the visible expression of the invisible God, not another being standing beside Him.

From the One God to His Revelation

This is the point at which we must be careful not to move too quickly. The purpose of this first Study Guide is to establish the foundation. Later Study Guides will examine how God was manifested in the flesh, how Scripture speaks of the Father and the Son, who the Holy Spirit is, and how Jesus Christ now dwells within His people by His Spirit. For now, the Scriptural movement is clear:

- There is one God;
- That one God is Spirit;
- That one God is invisible;
- There is no God beside Him;
- He created all things alone and by Himself;
- Yet the invisible God has not remained unknown. He has made Himself known in Jesus Christ.

The next Study Guide will therefore take up the question that naturally follows from everything we have established here. How was the one invisible God manifested and revealed in Jesus Christ?

That question must be answered without abandoning the foundation already laid. Whatever Scripture reveals concerning Jesus Christ must remain in harmony with the truth that there is one God and there is none beside Him.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How do the exact image, the one Creator and Christ in His people describe the same God made known?

Personal Reflection

Does knowing that Christ reveals the one God and dwells in His people strengthen your trust? How?

Action Step

Where have you treated Jesus as insufficient? What needs to change as you rely on His indwelling life?

CONCLUSION: THERE IS ONE GOD

BACK TO CONTENTS

This Study Guide began with a simple but fundamental question: Who is the one true God revealed in Scripture? We have not attempted to answer that question by beginning with a creed, a church council or a later theological definition. We have allowed Scripture itself to establish the foundation.

The testimony is consistent. Moses declared, *"The LORD our God is one LORD."* God said through Isaiah that there is none else and no God beside Him. Jesus repeated the same confession and affirmed that *"The Lord our God is one Lord."* Paul wrote that *"there is none other God but one,"* while James said, *"Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well."*

The Bible therefore does not move from one God in the Old Testament to three distinct divine persons in the New Testament. The same truth continues throughout Scripture: there is one God.

We have also seen that God describes His own identity in language that strengthens this conclusion. He says there is none else beside Him. He declares Himself to be the first and the last. He says that He made all things, stretched forth the heavens *"alone,"* and spread abroad the earth *"by myself."*

These statements must be allowed to speak with their full force.

The traditional Trinity belief teaches that the one God eternally exists as three distinct, coequal and coeternal divine persons. We have seen that this theological definition developed through historical debate and was expressed increasingly through creedal language. Terms such as three persons, essence, substance, coequal and coeternal became important in later Christian theology, but they are not the language used by Moses, the prophets, Jesus or the apostles to define God.

History cannot decide the doctrine. Scripture must.

We have also established what kind of God Scripture reveals. God is Spirit. He is invisible, eternal, immortal and omnipresent. He fills heaven and earth and cannot be divided, diminished or confined to a physical location.

This brings us to the threshold of the next great question. If there is one God, if there is none beside Him, if He alone created all things, and if He is invisible Spirit, then how has this one God made Himself known to humanity?

Scripture has already pointed us towards the answer. John says that although *"No man hath seen God at any time,"* the Son *"hath declared him."* Paul calls Jesus Christ *"the image of the invisible God."*

The next Study Guide will therefore examine how the one invisible God was manifested in Jesus Christ. We will not begin that study with three divine persons and attempt to explain how they are one. We will carry forward the foundation already established:

There is one God. There is none beside Him. That one invisible God has made Himself known in Jesus Christ.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How do the one-God declarations, creation and God's nature as Spirit lead us towards His revelation in Jesus?

Personal Reflection

What belief about God has changed through this study, and how has it affected your faith in Jesus?

Action Step

Identify one belief the Bible has corrected or strengthened in you. How will this truth now shape your worship and daily trust in Jesus Christ?

SUBMISSION TO COGMA FOR APPRAISAL

Instructions

Complete this section after you have finished the Study Guide. It must be completed online.

The link is located at the bottom of the online Study Guide — https://cogma.com.au/study-guides/

Your answers should reflect your understanding, your personal response, and how you intend to live by the truth you have studied. Answer honestly and be specific.

1. Main Truth

Explain how Moses, Jesus, and the apostles testify that God is one. Why must this truth guide every explanation of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?

2. Understanding

How does the claim of three coequal and coeternal divine persons differ from God's statement that none is beside Him? Use a verse to explain how you would test the claim.

3. Personal Reflection

Before reading these declarations of the one God, what did you assume about His identity? Explain what has been corrected or strengthened and why it matters to you.

4. Response to Truth

When a respected creed seems to settle a question about God, how should you respond? Explain how you will give the Bible the final word without misrepresenting the creed.

5. Action Step

Identify one belief about the Father, Son or Holy Spirit that the Bible has corrected or confirmed. What should now change in your trust or worship?

6. Early Response

Look back at the change you identified in Question 5. Have you begun to apply it in your trust, worship or the way you speak about God? If so, explain what has changed and which Bible verses helped you. If not, explain what has held you back and how you intend to respond.

7. Ongoing Practice

What regular practice will help you test teachings about God by reading the Bible rather than relying on isolated words or historical claims? How will it strengthen your trust in Jesus?

8. Doctrinal Clarity

How do God's words that He created alone, the meaning of 'one' in context, and His nature as Spirit fit together? Explain why none of these truths permits another God beside Him.

9. Living the Truth

If someone says the New Testament introduced three Gods, how would you answer from Moses, Jesus, and the apostles? Explain with a verse and speak respectfully.

10. Final Response

How do the one-God declarations, His work as the only Creator, and His nature as invisible Spirit help you understand His revelation in Jesus Christ? Explain why Jesus must be the foundation of your belief and worship, and what this means to you personally.