

Christian Education

Theology 101: The One True Living God



*Let all who seek You rejoice
and be glad in You;
let those who love Your salvation
continually say, "God is great!"*

Psalm 70:4, HCSB¹

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Theology³ is the study of religious doctrines, and specifically, the study of God. *God*, by definition, is the Supreme Being, the Almighty. However, the word *god* is also used to refer to any number of beings conceived of as supernatural, immortal, and having special powers over the lives and affairs of people and the course of nature. These *gods* are typically objects of worship and usually fashioned into an image or an idol. When the word *God* is capitalized, the reference is to a singular God, the Almighty, over and above all *gods*.

The belief there is only one true living God is called monotheism. The belief there are many gods is called polytheism. And the belief that all gods are merely the imagination of mankind is atheism. Is there a God who is alive and living? Are there many gods at work among the nations of the world? Or is God an idea of man that has served some well through the ages but is not a real being?

The April 8, 1966 cover of Time magazine asked the question, “Is God dead?”⁴ The article written by John T. Elson is titled *Theology: Toward a Hidden God*. The article opens with these words: “Is God dead? It is a question that tantalizes both believers, who perhaps secretly fear that he is, and atheists, who possibly suspect that the answer is no. Is God dead? The three words represent a summons to reflect on the meaning of existence.” Elson discussed the thoughts of certain scholars who proposed God was a non-factor and were thus declaring God dead.

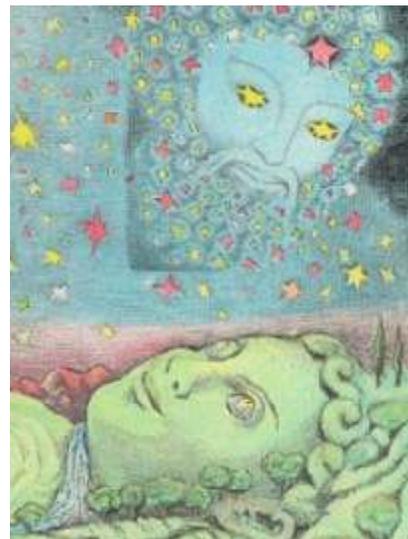


That discourse was entirely related to the God of Christianity and Judaism. No one was questioning the existence of any of the thousands of Hindu gods. With new scientific discoveries, the belief is that Christianity is declining and will

become a non-issue. That means that the God of Christians would ultimately be classified along with the gods of the Greeks and Romans, gods who are now referred to as mythology.

The thought of a God over humans is both beyond our scope and awe-inspiring at the same time. What would this God be like? Would He have a wife and children? Would He remain married or possibly divorce several times? Would He sit around drinking alcohol and get drunk? Would He enjoy a good cigar or peace pipe? Would He love us or despise us? Would He care about us or make sport of us? Would He provide for us or leave us on our own? The idea of a God who enjoys folly, promiscuity, hate, and murder sounds like a God who will destroy Himself and possibly mankind along with Him. But what if God, as the Supreme Being, is everything that is good and right and best? What if God is perfect in every way? If so, knowing Him would be a most awesome privilege!

Do any of the gods exist as real beings rather than mere manmade objects? Out of all the various gods that have been declared throughout human history, might there be at least One True Living God? Man has sought to prove the existence of God for centuries. In the Western world, these discussions began with sincerity back around 600 B.C. with the person Thales, who is “traditionally called the first philosopher.”⁵ Those who followed him in Greek philosophy are Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. With philosophy came the question of reality. That led to theory and various types of reasoning. By the time of Thales, the Greeks already had an elaborate belief in many gods. Their gods had genealogies that traced back to divine parents, and ultimately, to one parent god. Gaea, the earth goddess, was the wife of Uranus, the god of the heavens. But before them was Chaos, a genderless god. But did he or she, they, and all the others really exist?



When the Biblical apostle Paul arrived in Athens, the center of Greek culture, he was troubled by what he saw, "...the city was full of idols" (Acts 17:16, HCSB). Complete the following Scripture verses to learn some of what the apostle Paul believed about God long before he entered Athens.

Genesis 1:1, HCSB: *In the beginning God _____ the heavens and the earth.*

Exodus 20:3-5, HCSB: *Do not have other _____ besides Me. Do not make an _____ for yourself, whether in the shape of anything in the heavens above or on the earth below or in the waters under the earth. You must not bow down to them or worship them...*

Deuteronomy 6:4-5, HCSB: *"Listen, Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is _____. Love the LORD your God with all your _____, with all your _____, and with all your _____."*

Psalms 14:1, HCSB: *The _____ says in his _____, "God does not _____."*

Hebrews 11:6, HCSB: *Now without _____ it is impossible to please God, for the one who draws near to Him must _____ that He _____ and rewards those who _____ Him.*

Paul believed there is One True Living God. He is the Creator of all. For Paul, the belief in just one God means the making and following of other gods and idols is vanity, a waste of time. Man should be devoted to the only God that is. Obviously, Paul had a much different view of God than the Greeks. And that difference is magnified when Paul shares with them about Jesus.

Paul was blessed to get an audience of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers. Paul was sharing with them *the good news about Jesus and the resurrection* (Acts 17:18, HCSB). Having never heard this before, they invited Paul to speak at the Areopagus. The Areopagus was a rocky hill overlooking the market place in Athens. Philosophers as well as city leaders gathered at this open air site. The name is associated with the Greek god of war Ares. The Romans called this god Mars; hence, the site is also known as Mars Hill.



Paul preaching at the Areopagus, by Raphael (1515-16)

□ Stop and read Acts 17:15-34. Check the box after reading the passage. Then complete the following verses.

Acts 17:26-27, HCSB: *“From one man He has made every nation of men to live all over the earth and has determined their appointed times and the*

boundaries of where they live, so that they might _____ God, and perhaps they might _____ out and _____ Him, though He is not far from each one of us.”

Acts 17:30-31, HCSB: *“Therefore, having overlooked the times of _____, God now commands all people everywhere to _____, because He has set a day on which He is going to judge the world in _____ by the Man He has appointed. He has provided _____ of this to everyone by raising Him from the dead.”*

He who has been raised from the dead is Jesus. The angels said to the women who came to the tomb with spices, *“Why are you looking for the living among the dead?... He is not here, but He has been resurrected!”* (Luke 24:5-6, HCSB).

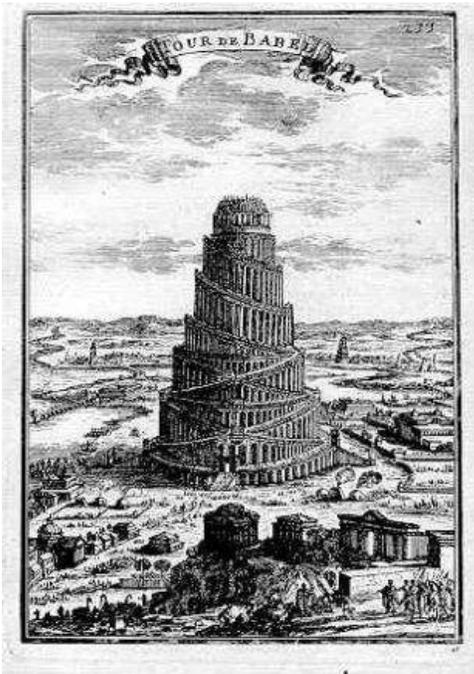
This was not the first time Paul had encountered Greek religious beliefs. He and Barnabus were traveling together when they entered the city of Lystra. And in the fashion that Jesus was able to minister to the needs of the people, healing was spoken through Paul to a man born lame, unable to move his feet and legs. The man responded to the words about Jesus and the challenge by Paul to stand up. *And he jumped up and started to walk around* (Acts 14:10, HCSB).

The people who witnessed this were amazed and in awe. They declared with loud voices, *“The gods have come down to us in the form of men!”* (Acts 14:11, HCSB). They then called Barnabus *Zeus* and Paul *Hermes*. *Hermes* was believed to be the son of *Zeus* and his messenger to mankind. When the people of Lystra believed the gods had come to them, the priest of *Zeus* was notified and he brought garlands to put on them and animals to sacrifice to them.

What Paul said next is indispensable to our understanding about *God* and *gods*.

*“Men! Why are you doing these things? We are men also, with the same nature as you, and we are proclaiming good news to you, that you should turn from these worthless things to the living God, **who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and everything in them.** In past generations He allowed all the nations to go their own way, although He did not leave Himself without a witness, since He did good: giving you rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, and satisfying your hearts with food and happiness”* (Acts 14:15-17, HCSB).

First, when Paul said *“you should turn from...to”* he was calling for repentance. In other words, stop seeking gods that are not alive and start seeking *“the living God.”* Second, the statement, *“In past generations He allowed all the nations to go their own way...”* takes us back as far as the building of a great tower⁶ in the valley of Shinar. The valley of Shinar is where modern man agrees is the beginning of civilization, Mesopotamia, and the Fertile Crescent. This is part of



modern day Iraq located between the Tigris River and the Euphrates River. As mankind was growing in population after the Great Flood, they decided to build a city for themselves so that they would not be scattered over the whole earth (Genesis 11:4). But, God did want them to spread out over the earth (Genesis 9:7). When God saw that mankind was quickly turning to his own sinful way, disregarding God as before the Great Flood, He decided to introduce many languages among the people. Thus, the people from one family could no longer understand what people from another family were saying. The name of that city is called Babel or Babylon, which means confusion. In their confusion, God scattered the people over the whole earth (Genesis 11:5-9).

As the family groups separated, multiplied, and became nations, they took with them their knowledge of the One True Living God as shared with them by Noah and his family and their own eyewitness account of the incident in Babel. As they went, they began formulating their own opinions about God. And while God continued to provide sunshine and rain, crops and harvests, food aplenty and happiness to go around, the peoples of the world started to fashion God according to their own understanding and desires. Complete the following verses from Romans chapter 1:

Romans 1:20-23, HCSB: *From the _____ of the world His invisible _____, that is, His eternal _____ and divine _____, have been clearly seen, being understood through what He has made. As a result, people are without _____. For though they knew God, they did not _____ Him as God or show*

_____. *Instead, their thinking became _____, and their senseless minds were _____. Claiming to be wise, they became _____ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal _____, _____, four-footed _____, and _____.*

Just as the people who moved north and west into Greece and beyond developed a perverse understanding about God, developed many man-made gods, and lost knowledge of the One True Living God, so did the people who settled south in the Middle East, Egypt, and Africa, as well as those who settled in the East or the Orient. In the Middle East, they worshiped Asherah, Baal, Dagon, Marduk, and Molech to name a few. These gods were later united by force under one god called Allah. In the East, the oldest religion is Hinduism with many gods including Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, Rama, and Krishna. Hinduism also suggests the gods have come to earth and to mankind in the form of avatars. Indra is a dragon



god in Hinduism, but in the Far East, the Orient, the dragon is the supreme spiritual power. Parades in those countries feature long dragons which are believed to protect people from evil spirits. Also with a connection to Hinduism is Buddhism. There are many deities in Buddhism, Shaka the historical Buddha, a variety of dragon

gods, Karura a bird-man, Kankiten an elephant headed-man, but there are many more, including the seven lucky gods and the ten kings of hell⁷.

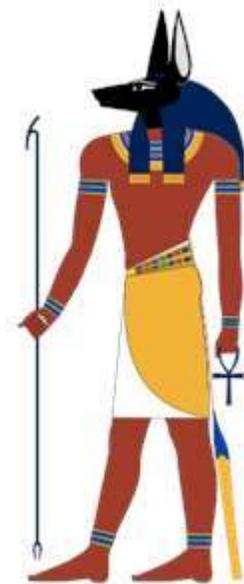
Read the following very carefully.

Then war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon. The dragon and his angels also fought, but he could not prevail, and there was no place for them in heaven any longer. So the

great dragon was thrown out--the ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the one who deceives the whole world. He was thrown to earth, and his angels with him (Revelation 12:7-9, HCSB).

Now the Spirit explicitly says that in the latter times some will depart from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and the teachings of demons (1 Timothy 4:1, HCSB).

What is of particular interest in the revelation of the One True Living God is the manmade gods in Egypt. Ptah was the supreme god from which other gods came. Some of those gods were Maat, Amen-Re, Atum, Ra, Osiris, Isis, and Seth. Atum was the sun god who was also called Ra. The Pharaohs of Egypt were also likened as gods. They were identified with Osiris and later Horus. The familiar jackal-headed god is Anubis. Anubis was an embalming god. Hapi was the god of the Nile River. Hathor was the goddess of music and dance. Heqet was the frog goddess. These and more than 100 other gods of Egypt were no match for the One True Living God.



The descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob once lived in Egypt. Abraham was originally from Ur, a town settled by the descendants of Shem, the son of Noah, after the Tower of Babel incident. Ur was a short distance to the south from Babel, still in the Fertile Crescent of Mesopotamia referenced earlier. Here is where God revealed Himself to Abraham and began the process of revealing Himself to the nations that scattered across the face of the earth. The descendants of Abraham moved to Egypt after Joseph, son of Jacob, became a leader next in power to Pharaoh. Over time, these Hebrew people began to greatly multiply and the Egyptians enslaved them. After some 400 years, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, called a man named Moses, to go into Egypt, deliver Israel, and

lead them to a new homeland. Since the Egyptians would not simply let them leave, God used a series of plagues to get their attention and deliver or birth a new nation called Israel. In so doing, the God of Israel began the process of distinguishing Himself as the One True Living God who is over all. Thus, all other gods in the North and West, South, East, and the Middle East are fakes. Yes, fakes, false gods!



The following Scriptures reveal the rest of the story. Complete by looking up the references and filling in the blanks.

Exodus 3:13-15, HCSB: *Then Moses asked God, “If I go to the Israelites and say to them: The God of your fathers has sent me to you, and they ask me, ‘What is His name?’ what should I tell them?” God replied to Moses, “_____ . This is what you are to say to the Israelites: _____ has sent me to you.” God also said to Moses, “Say this to the Israelites: Yahweh, the God of your fathers, the God of _____, the God of _____, and the God of _____, has sent me to you. This is My name forever; this is how I am to be remembered in every generation.”*

Exodus 9:13-16, HCSB: *Then the LORD said to Moses, “Get up early in the morning and present yourself to Pharaoh. Tell him: This is what the LORD, the God of the Hebrews says: Let My people go, so that they may worship Me. Otherwise, I am going to send all My plagues against you, your officials, and your people. Then you will know there is _____ like Me in all the earth. By now I could have stretched out My hand and struck you and your people with a plague, and you would have been _____ from the earth. However, I have let you live for this _____: to show you My _____ and to make My _____ known in all the _____.”*

Deuteronomy 4:32-35, HCSB: *“Indeed, ask about the earlier days that preceded you, from the day God created man on the earth and from one end of the heavens to the other: Has anything like this great event [ever] happened, or has anything like it been heard of? Has a people ever heard God’s voice speaking from the fire as you have, and lived? Or has a god [ever] attempted to go and take a nation as his own out of [another] nation, by trials, signs, wonders, and war, by a strong hand and an outstretched arm, by great terrors, as the LORD your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes? You were shown [these things] so that you would _____ that the LORD is God; there is _____ besides _____.”*

Psalm 115:4-7, HCSB: *Their _____ are silver and gold, made by _____ hands. They have mouths, but _____ speak, eyes, but _____ see. They have ears, but _____ hear, noses, but _____ smell. They have hands, but _____ feel, feet, but _____ walk. They _____ make a sound with their throats.*

Psalm 135:5, HCSB: *For I know that the LORD is _____; our Lord is greater than all _____.*

Isaiah 42:8, HCSB: *“I am Yahweh, that is My name; I will not give My _____ to another, or my _____ to _____.”*

Isaiah 45:21-22, HCSB: *“....There is no other God but Me, a _____ God and _____; there is no one except Me. Turn to Me and be _____, all the ends of the earth. For I am God, and there is no other.”*

1 Timothy 4:7, HCSB: *But have nothing to do with _____ and _____ myths.*

2 Peter 1:16, HCSB: *For we did not follow cleverly contrived myths when we made known to you the _____ and coming of our Lord _____ Christ; instead, we were eyewitnesses of His _____.*

John 1:1-3,14, HCSB: *In the beginning was the _____, and the _____ was with God, and the _____ was _____. He was with God in the beginning. All things were created through Him, and apart from Him not one thing was created that has been created....The _____ became _____ and took up residence among us.*

Matthew 1:22-23, HCSB: *Now all this took place to _____ what was spoken by the _____ through the prophet: **See, the virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and they will name Him Immanuel, which is translated “_____ is with _____.”***

Hebrews 1:1-3, HCSB: *Long ago _____ spoke to the fathers by the prophets at different times and in different ways. In these last days, He has spoken to us by [His] _____, whom He has appointed heir of all things and through whom He made the universe. He is the _____ of His glory, the exact _____ of His nature, and He sustains all things by His powerful word. After making purification for _____, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.*

John 8:56-58, HCSB: *“Your father _____ was overjoyed that he would see My day; he saw it and rejoiced.” The Jews replied, “You aren’t 50 years old yet, and You’ve seen Abraham?” Jesus said to them, “I assure you: Before Abraham was, _____.”*

On this occasion and others, some of the people, including religious leaders, wanted to stone and kill Jesus. The reason, He was *making Himself equal with God* (John 5:18, HCSB). Indeed, as we have already read, Jesus is God revealed in the

flesh. Those with no understanding of God's plan, would succeed in killing Jesus by crucifixion. But He arose on the third day! And as we read earlier in Acts 17:30-31, this is proof positive that there is One True Living God!

2 Corinthians 5:18-20, HCSB: *Now everything is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that is, in Christ, God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed the message of reconciliation to us. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ; certain that God is appealing through us, we plead on Christ's behalf, "Be reconciled to God."*

John 17:3, HCSB: *"This is eternal life: that they may know You, the only true God, and the One You have sent--Jesus Christ."*

Right now you can acknowledge God exists through faith in His Son Jesus. ***For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved*** (Romans 10:13, HCSB). Pray asking God and Jesus to forgive you and receive you into His kingdom.

To finish this study, read the following passages and check the box when done:

- Exodus 34:5-9 Psalm 115 Isaiah 6:1-8
 Jeremiah 18:1-10 Habakkuk 2:18-20 1 John 4

End Notes

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³ All English word definitions and etymologies in this work come from *Webster's New World College Dictionary*. Fourth Edition. Cleveland, Ohio: Wiley Publishing, 2004.

⁴ See <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,835309,00.html>

⁵ Miller, Ed. L. *Questions That Matter: An Invitation to Philosophy*. Second Edition. New York, New York: McGraw-Hill Publishing Company, 1984, page 56.

⁶ Depiction of the Tower of Babel on the following page is by Alain Manesson Mallet, published in 1683. See www.logoi.com/pastimages/tower_of_babel.html

⁷ Information on Buddhism comes from www.onmarkproductions.com

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