

WHO IS GOD?

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By the Book™ A Chapter by
Chapter Bible Study Series from
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Let's Begin

The latest research by religious pollster George Barna indicated only 9% of all American adults have a Biblical worldview. With this in mind, exploring basic questions of Christian belief takes on new meaning.

Actually, getting back to basics is the primary reason the Lord placed in my heart years ago a vision to produce a chapter-by-chapter study of the entire Bible. Thus, the basic question we pursue today is, Who is God?

To keep our study focused as we move through chapter 14, we will use the following outline:

- I. The Living God is the God of Dependability (vv. 1-4)**
- II. The Living God is the God of Reality (vv. 5-10)**
- III. The Living God is the God of Creativity (vv. 11-13)**
- IV. The Living God is the God of Fidelity (vv. 14-18)**
- V. The Living God is the God of Victory (vv. 19-28)**

I. The Living God is the God of Dependability (vv. 1-4)

We begin here the final lap of Paul's first missionary journey. Neil Armstrong, the famous astronaut who walked on the moon said, "We came in peace for all mankind." When Barnabas and Paul set foot in Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe, they could well have said, "We came preaching the Gospel of peace for all mankind!" The Gospel they preached revealed the God they served. What do we know about Him?

At Iconium we learn that the living God is the God of *dependability*. A pattern emerges about how God reveals Himself through the preaching of the Gospel (vv. 1-4). First, we see a *decision* takes place. Luke writes, "And it came to pass in Iconium, that they went both together into the synagogue of the Jews, and so spake, that a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed" (v. 1).

As they "spoke" a great multitude "believed." It wasn't their wisdom, cleverness, or talent moving the multitude to believe the Gospel. The reason the people believed was the power of the Holy Spirit (cp. 1 Cor. 1:4-5; 1 Thess. 1:5). God moved in people's hearts. Though He did not force the people's belief, the Holy Spirit *initiated* the people's belief.

Second, we see a *disturbance* (vv. 2-3). Satan is ready and willing to stir up anything he can in order to drain any excitement about how Christ saves when the Gospel is preached, "But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles, and made their minds evil affected against the brethren" (v. 2). The devil worked through unbelieving people to stir up trouble against the faith community.

In fact, stirring people up is his specialty. He creates disturbance and poisons minds to fend off the Gospel of Christ.

Third, we see *division* (v. 4). One non-negotiable attribute of God is holiness. God is holy (Isa. 6:1-6) and His holiness is often used to denote moral purity. More importantly, the term "holy," when applied to God, means "utterly other than." In other words, there is no other being like God. He alone is God.

Jesus openly stated He did not come to "bring peace but a sword" (Matt. 10:34). The Gospel divides humanity. Sometimes the Scripture refers to

Reflection Connection

Recall when you first received Christ as Savior. Do you also recall an unusual tugging in your heart to believe in Jesus? This was the convicting work of the Holy Spirit. Be prepared to discuss this issue with the entire group.



people as the lost or the blind. On the other side are those who believe in Christ. The Scripture identifies believers as found, saved, and forgiven.

II. The Living God Is the God of Reality (vv. 5-10)

God is real, “And saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein” (v. 15). He is the God of reality, He is the only God there is. We often hear about the “Christian God,” the “Muslim God,” or “Hindu gods.” It is precisely this concern the apostle addresses when he says, “ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God.” Only one true God exists.

All people everywhere have some concept of God. Every unreached people group worships some kind of god. Why? Because atheism is unnatural to the human heart. People must be taught atheism.

The most primitive form of worship is *animism*. Animism teaches God exists in sticks, stones, or in other material things. Another belief is *polytheism*. Polytheism teaches there are many gods. Polytheism is what Paul faced in Athens. Polytheism is still common. The people of Japan wake up every morning and worship well over a million gods.

Humanism is the dethroning of God and the enthroning of man. Humanism asserts man is the supreme solution to all of the problems he faces. Another god is *materialism*. More vanities could easily be listed. However, the four we’ve mentioned establish what the Bible calls the religions of men.

Do other religious forms possess reality? The Bible, validated by experience, says no. What is the result of following our own, self-created religious forms? The Prophet Jeremiah reminds us, “Thus saith the Lord, What iniquity have your fathers found in me, that they are gone far from me, and have walked after vanity, and are become vain? (Jer. 2:5). The word “vanity” means empty, nothingness. So people who choose “vanities” to revere, by default choose emptiness to receive.

Only the true God possesses reality (cp. Ps. 115:4-8). What kind of God do you have? Do you have a God who can speak to the deepest needs of your heart, and can hear you when you call? The Apostle Paul said, “Turn from these vanities unto the living God.” There is a God who is alive and Who loves you very much.

We find God as we seek Him in Scripture. The Bible reveals God is *eternal* (Deut. 33:27) and *all-powerful* (Ps. 139:7-10; Isa. 57:15). Nothing is impossible with God. Further, God is *personal*, a Divine supernatural Person. If you do not know this God, you can know Him today. Do you want to know Him today?

Reflection Connection

Most of us have encountered people who say they do not believe in God. What are some of the typical reasons offered by these unbelievers?

Do you have a God who can speak to the deepest needs of your heart, and can hear you when you call?



III. The Living God is the God of Creativity (vv. 11-13)

A third truth revealed about the living God is His creativity. Paul says it's the "living God, who made heaven and earth and the sea and all things that are therein." The living God is the God of creativity—He made all things. One of the first things which comes to mind when we think about creation is the *design* of creation.

We are really just beginning to understand the *miraculous nature* of the cosmos. Previously we thought we could number all the stars. Scientists now know the stars of our universe are more numerous than the grains of sand on all of the seashores of this earth! We wondrously and rightfully sing, "How great Thou art." The *beauty* of God's universe is just as amazing. There are suns, scientists tell us, which have all kinds of colors. When they get those suns in the scope it's just like a collection of jewels on a black canvas.

In addition, one is astounded at the *detail* of God's design. The solar system has a sun with planets around it. Earth is so meticulously positioned, if it were the least bit closer to the sun or the least bit further away, no life could exist. The smallest particle of matter is designed in the very same way. Such evidence demonstrates precision in God's detail.

Seeing the pattern in the universe strengthens our faith, pointing to God as the *Designer*. In addition, God's design refutes atheism, which says there is no God; agnosticism, which says you cannot know God; materialism, which teaches eternal matter; humanism, which says man created God. God is the origin of this universe. God is the origin of you! He is *Creator*.

Reflection Connection

Some people place a lot of value in chance. Do you think the universe including all its galaxies is the result of chance? Why or why not?

IV. The Living God is the God of Fidelity (vv. 14-18)

When we speak of fidelity, we're speaking of the ability to keep one's promise. It is one thing for us to have fidelity as sinful creatures. But when we're talking about the fidelity of God, we're talking about God's absolute promise to us to remain faithful and keep the promises He makes.

Paul insists, "Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness" (v. 17). Even as sinful and wicked as the entire world had become, "God left not himself without witness." Our God is the God of fidelity, expressing His fidelity in two ways.

First, God is faithful to reveal Himself to His creation. In Lystra the common people believed the myth concerning Jupiter and Mercury, who allegedly descended from heaven disguised as men (v. 11). Consequently, they would bring sacrifices to worship the gods (v. 13).

God is revealed in creation, "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork" (Ps. 19:1). It's not that creation "kinda" points to God. Instead creation shouts God! In fact all nature points to God. The highest mountains emanate His unchangeableness, while the oceans indicate His depths. The rocks reveal the Rock of stability, while the heavenly stars reflect His beauty. In a real sense creation is God's spiritual Braille for blind humanity.

Reflection Connection

Suppose a stranger showed up at your church and his abilities to converse with people were much higher than normal. After a while, what if many people in the church seemed to believe him and even want to follow him? What criteria would you use to discern whether or not the man was genuine? How would you go about doing it?



Second, God is faithful to redeem His creation. God is Creator, but He is also Redeemer. Even the sin-saturated cosmos could not defeat the love of God. While God created mankind perfectly, rebellious humanity is perfectly corrupted. Jesus redeems creation. John says, “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). God came as man! Someone rightly said “it’s impossible for man to become God.” The Gospel affirms the fact as reality — *God became man.*

Even more, God was not parading Himself before an awe-struck universe, drumming up excitement about how great He was for coming. God needed no boost for low self-esteem. Rather, God possessed a specific purpose for coming and dwelling among us. God revealed Himself in the person of Jesus Christ in order to save sinful human beings. He had absolutely no other reason to come, “For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many” (10:45). Jesus came to save us by offering His own life in our place.

V. The Living God is the God of Victory (vv. 19-28)

How exciting when Paul and Barnabas sailed back to Antioch after their first missionary expedition was completed. What a story they had to tell! Scores of people were saved, and churches were established. They experienced both trouble and triumph. They personally felt pleasure and pain. With work fulfilled, they brought the report to the church which supported them, commissioned them, prayed for them, and now received them back.

Paul stood before the church with body bruised, but heart filled. He literally had scars on his back. Later he said, “I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus” (Gal. 6:17).

From Paul’s testimony, we learn valuable lessons about missions. *The first lesson about their mission is suffering.* The apostle says, “I was stoned in Lystra” (v. 19). Of course, it wasn’t hard for the people to learn the lesson about suffering. Barnabas and Paul showed signs of fatigue. Yet complaints were rare. Also, Paul was not talking about suffering to solicit pity. Instead he was sharing about suffering to explain discipleship. Being a disciple of Jesus inevitably involves difficulties, opposition, and persecution (cp. Acts 9:16). Believers may be *destined* to suffer, however, God delivers the church through suffering (cp. 2 Tim. 3:11).

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The second lesson about their mission is surrender. Instead of the short route home, Paul and Barnabas chose the long way around. Why? First, it was the *will* of God. The apostle made vows when he surrendered to Christ. He committed himself, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” (9:6). In this case taking the long way home was the will of God. Second, it was the *way* of God. Shortcuts are never effective in finding the will of God.

Reflection Connection

Reflect upon a moment in your life when you believe the will of God required you to take the long way to a goal. Perhaps something pertaining to your job, your school, or your family comes to mind. Be prepared to share this with the entire group. Allow time for others to share their experience.



The third lesson about their mission is strengthening. Paul and Barnabas also took the long way around because the new converts who came to Christ needed spiritual assistance, strength and support. Thus, they were committed to strengthen them by the Word of God (cp. 2 Pet. 3:18; Acts 2-:32).

The fourth lesson about their mission is salvation. Antioch needed this truth, “And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles” (v. 27). God opened the door of faith to the Gentiles! Whatever pain or suffering, bruises or beatings they received, nothing else mattered. People were saved, sins forgiven, disciples made, and the Word of God was preached. What a victory! Mission accomplished!

Golden Greek Nugget

Luke records Paul and Barnabas’ trip to Derbe, their preaching, and the fact they “had taught many” (v. 12). Normally the term translated “taught” is the Greek term, “*didasko*” meaning “to teach.” However, in verse 12 when it says Paul and Barnabas “had taught many,” the term is another Greek word normally translated in the New Testament as “make disciples.” Thus, Luke records the successful accomplishment of the great commission Jesus gave the church (Matt. 28:19-20).

Wrap Up

Our God is real and dependable. He is creative and faithful. And, most of all He is victorious! What He plans He will do, what He promises He will deliver. He is our God. The question is, is He your God? He can be. He wants to be. You need Him to be. Will you let Him be?