

# *The Big Picture* Study Guide

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## Chapter 1: God: Three in One

*"For the LORD is a great God, and a great king above all gods." – Psalm 95:3*

### Summary:

In the beginning was God, the King of kings and Lord of lords. He is the beginning of our story, and also its end; the beginning of all that was and is and will be, and also its end and fulfillment. Yet, in his love, he chose to reveal a great mystery to us: that, though he is one God, he is also three Persons.

### Study Questions:

1. What are the two sources of our knowledge of God? Which is better?
2. Why did God reveal himself to mankind?
3. What are some biblical texts (Old Testament and New Testament) that reveal, or at least hint at, the doctrine of the Trinity?
4. What is a theophany? Where do we find them in the New Testament?
5. How does Fr. Raphael show that it is false to speak of the Trinity as three names for the same one God?
6. What is the difference between a nature and a person? Are they the same thing in us? In God?
7. How can the three divine persons be distinguished if they are all one and the same God?
8. What are some analogies that can help us understand something about the Trinity?

9. Can any creature fully comprehend the mystery of the Trinity?

### Reflection Questions:

1. The doctrine of the Trinity is one of the most difficult dogmas of our Faith and, in fact, can only be known by faith. Furthermore, its misunderstanding has led to great errors and heresies throughout the centuries. So why would God reveal it to us?
2. Can you think of any mysteries that are found in nature which arouse wonder and love of God's goodness and wisdom?



## Chapter 2: The Divine Director

*“Behind and before you encircle me and rest your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, far too lofty for me to reach.” — Psalm 139:5-6*

### Summary:

God is perfectly happy, so it was not from any necessity that God created the universe and all that is in it. From the beginning, God’s wisdom saw all that he would create and all that would come to pass among his creatures, and directed them to their end.

### Study Questions:

1. Did God have to create anything? Why did he?
2. How is God both the beginning *and* the end of Creation?
3. What do we mean when we speak of Divine Providence?
4. What does predestination mean?
5. Does God predestine some souls to go to hell?
6. If someone happens to win a raffle, does this fall outside of God’s Providence?

### Reflection Questions:

1. Can you think of any examples of God’s Providence clearly guiding a person in the lives of the saints?
2. Do you see examples of God’s Providence in your own life?

## Chapter 3: The Birth of the Angels

*“You make the winds your messengers; flaming fire, your ministers.” – Psalm 104:4*

### Summary:

Before the creation of man, God created the angels—pure spirits made in his image. Compared to us, they are titans that surpass the gods of old; compared to God, they are scarcely a pin-point of light, infinitely distant from his perfection. Created in a state of grace, the angels were made for eternal happiness with God.

### Study Questions:

1. How do both angels and humans resemble God? Why do angels resemble him more?
2. What are some examples of angels appearing in the Bible? What are they doing?
3. How does Fr. Raphael show that it is reasonable to believe in the existence of angels?
4. How can an angel be anywhere if he does not have a body?
5. How do angels differ from us in their intellects?
6. List the nine choirs of angels.
7. Looking to outside sources, what does the word “angel” mean? Do we see examples of angels living up to this name in the Bible?

### Reflection Questions:

1. Angels are not imaginary creatures, but a part of God’s Creation and his plan for the universe.

Yet they and their influence are forgotten by most people. Why do you think that is?

2. God gives every human being a guardian angel to help guide him to God and union with him in heaven. How can angels do this? Can you think of some examples of angels helping people know and love God more?
3. Do you know the prayer to your guardian angel? What do we ask for in that prayer?



## Chapter 4: The War in Heaven

*“Sin directs the heart of the wicked man; his eyes are closed to the fear of God.” – Psalm 36:2*

### Summary:

We do not know how God tested the angels, but we do know the result: Lucifer, the greatest and most God-like of the angels rebelled and led others in rebellion against God. However, he was challenged by St. Michael the archangel, who led the faithful angels against him and his angels.

### Study Questions:

1. What do we mean when we speak of God’s grace?
2. Why would God test the angels?
3. What could the fallen angels have hoped to gain by their rebellion?
4. What kind of war did the angels fight?
5. Could the demons ever repent and be saved?  
Could the faithful angels ever sin and fall from grace?
6. How is evil mysterious?
7. Did God show any mercy to the demons?
8. What reason does St. Thomas Aquinas give for God permitting the demons to come to earth?



## Reflection Questions:

1. The demons committed one sin against God and lost him forever. How is it that we, who have committed many sins against him, still have a chance to be saved?
2. Do we find signs of the war that began with the angels still around us?
3. What is the prayer to St. Michael the archangel? Why should we pray it?

## Chapter 5: Scripture and Science

*“Praise the LORD from the earth, you sea monsters and all the deeps of the sea; lightning and hail, snow and thick clouds, storm wind that fulfills his command; Mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars; Animals wild and tame, creatures that crawl and birds that fly . . .” – Psalm 148:7-10*

### Summary:

God created the universe from nothing. In the book of Genesis, we read the inspired account of God forming the sun, the moon, the stars, the earth, and all that is in it. The story of creation ends with the greatest of creatures on earth: man.

### Study Questions:

1. Can one truth ever contradict another? Why or why not?
2. What are the two sources of knowledge for understanding God’s Creation? Which is more reliable?
3. Why did Galileo come into conflict with the Catholic Church?
4. Does the book of Genesis recount real history or mere myths?
5. Can a Catholic believe in evolution? What guidelines does the Church give to protect the Faith?
6. What does Pope Pius XII say about discussing the topic of evolution?

7. What relevance does the question of human origins have to the Catholic Church?

### **Reflection Questions:**

1. Is it “unscientific” to find a great amount of mystery in the origins of the universe?
2. Why should we approach Scripture with reverence and awe, especially when it speaks of things beyond our understanding? What is the danger of not doing this?

## Chapter 6: On Men and Monkeys

*"I praise you, because I am wonderfully made;  
wonderful are your works! My very self you know.  
My bones are not hidden from you, when I was being  
made in secret, fashioned in the depths of the earth."  
– Psalm 139:14-15*

### Summary:

The six days of Creation described in the book of Genesis end with the pinnacle of material Creation: man. God created man above all the animals, to "fill the earth and subdue it" (Gen. 1:28). Male and female were made in God's image and likeness and lived in harmony with God and with one another. However, modern scientific views on the origins of man take a far different approach. Hence a discussion ensues on evolution and the book of Genesis.

### Study Questions:

1. What is the difference between micro and macro evolution?
2. Is Dr. Johnson's assumption that micro evolution proves macro evolution reasonable?
3. What problems exist in understanding the Creation account of Genesis through the theory of evolution?
4. What are the five "proofs" that are given for evolution? What problems do they each have?
5. Is there any way to harmonize the theory of evolution with the article of faith that man was

created free from pain and death before the Fall?

### Reflection Questions:

1. Dr. Hernandez expresses a concern that an evolutionary world view impacts people in a negative way, obscuring their identity and dignity as children of God. Do you see any evidence of this in our world today?
2. Is the theory of evolution built upon scientific facts or an atheistic philosophy that seeks to justify itself? If it is built on facts, then why is there so much disagreement even among evolutionists?



## Chapter 7: The Fall

*"You tested us, O God, tried us as silver tried by fire."*

– Psalm 66:10

### Summary:

Being put to the test, Adam and Eve failed and suffered the consequences. Not only did they lose God's special gifts to them and their future children, but they lost his friendship through their sin. Yet God's great mercy did not abandon them but gave them hope.

### Study Questions:

1. Was there an actual fall of the human race from grace at the beginning of its history, or is this just an outdated myth?
2. Why did God test Adam and Eve?
3. Is it true that God unfairly punished all of Adam and Eve's descendants because of original sin? Why not?
4. Name some of the preternatural gifts that Adam and Eve enjoyed before their fall.
5. What hope did God give Adam and Eve immediately after their fall?

### Reflection Questions:

1. The story of a fall from grace at the beginning of human history appears in most primitive religions. Does this make the account in the book of Genesis more believable or less so?

2. In her Easter liturgy, the Church sings, “*O felix culpa*” (O happy fault), referring to the fall of Adam and Eve. Why would the Church call the fall “happy?”



## Chapter 8: The Long Wait I

*"It shatters my bones, when my adversaries reproach me, when they say to me every day: 'Where is your God?' Why are you downcast, my soul, why do you groan within me? Wait for God, for I shall again praise him, my savior and my God." – Psalm 42:11-12*

### Summary:

After the Fall, God did not leave the human race without hope. No sooner had Adam and Eve received the punishment for their disobedience than God, in his mercy, also comforted them with the first promise of a future redeemer.

### Study Questions:

1. Why did God give the Jews the prophecies of a coming redeemer?
2. Where do we find the first prophecy of the coming of a redeemer?
3. What are some other prophecies that are found in the Old Testament about Christ? What do they reveal about him?
4. Can a prophecy be fulfilled more than once? How?
5. Why were some unable to recognize the Christ when he came, despite knowing the prophecies?



## **Reflection Questions:**

1. Now that the Christ has come, have the prophecies become meaningless, or do they still serve some purpose in our lives as Christians?

## Chapter 9: The Long Wait II

*“Who will bring forth from Zion the salvation of Israel? When God reverses the captivity of his people Jacob will rejoice and Israel will be glad.” – Psalm 53:7*

### Summary:

Shortly after the death of Solomon, the kingdom was divided into Judah and Israel. Both would eventually be led away into exile in foreign lands, with only a remnant returning to Israel much later. Yet, amidst all the years of hardships, God continued to prepare his chosen people for the coming of the Savior.

### Study Questions:

1. Did God choose the Israelites to reveal his plan of salvation because of any of their special qualities?
2. Where does God reveal some of the details of the Messiah's birth in the Old Testament?
3. Should the Messiah have been born in Jerusalem? Does his birth in Bethlehem contradict the prophecy of Micah 4:1?
4. Where do we find the prophecies of the time of the coming of the Messiah? Is there any evidence in the New Testament that the people were aware of these prophecies?
5. What is the event that begins the count to the coming of the Messiah, as revealed by the archangel Gabriel?

## **Reflection Questions:**

1. The Messiah was anticipated by and came from the Jewish people, and so it was natural to look on him as the savior of the Jewish race, not of the whole world. Do we find this mentality in early Christianity (i.e. Acts of the Apostles)? If so, how was it overcome?

## Chapter 10: Jesus the Christ

*"He parted the heavens and came down, a dark cloud under his feet." – Psalm 18:10*

### Summary:

Finally the day came when the long-awaited promise would be fulfilled. In the insignificant town of Nazareth, when Caesar Augustus ruled most of the civilized world, Quirinius was governor of Syria, and Herod was king of Judea, a young virgin would be the first to receive the good news.

### Study Questions:

1. How was Christ's birth made known to all people?
2. Why did God not explicitly reveal to the people of that time that Jesus was the Christ?
3. Do any of the prophecies refer to Christ's divine nature?
4. How can God become man without changing as God?
5. Is it accurate to call Mary the Mother of God?
6. Did God have to become man to redeem us from sin? Was it fitting?

### Reflection Questions:

1. In a pluralistic world where all religions are treated equally, is there anything objective that sets Christ above other founders of religions?

2. Is Mary's role as Mother of the Redeemer, Mother of God, still active in the world today? How?

## Chapter 11: The Price of Love

*"All who see me mock me; they curl their lips and jeer; they shake their heads at me: 'He relied on the LORD—let him deliver him; if he loves him, let him rescue him.'"*  
— Psalm 22:8-9

### Summary:

In Jesus, the long awaited Christ, we find the mercy of God revealed in a new and special way. Both in his life and death, Jesus is the perfect image of the Father's great love for us. Though man had reason to hope in the eventual coming of a savior, none could have imagined that the savior would be God himself!

### Study Questions:

1. If Jesus was like us in all things but sin, does that mean that he was as ignorant as the rest of us? Does it mean that he was as attracted to sin as the rest of us?
2. How should we understand Jesus' words, "But of that day or that hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father" (Mark 13:32)?
3. Since the Blessed Virgin Mary was conceived without sin, does that mean that Christ did not have to redeem her?
4. Give five reasons why, of all possible means of redeeming us, it was fitting that God chose a horrible death on the cross to bring about our salvation from sin.

5. If Christ conquered death by his death, why are people still dying?
6. What “transplants” us from Adam’s family to Christ’s? Why is this important?

### Reflection Questions:

1. Does Christ’s death on the cross make sense if there was never an Adam and Eve, nor a fall from grace, nor original sin?
2. Can you name two or three saints whose bodies are incorrupt?



## Chapter 12: Resurrection and Redemption

*“For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, nor let your devout one see the pit.” – Psalm 16:10*

### Summary:

Having completed his mission of redemption on the cross, Christ descended into hell to bring the good news to the souls of the righteous and just. Then, rising from the dead, he appeared to his disciples and after forty days, ascended into heaven.

### Study Questions:

1. What is the Creed referring to when it says that Christ “descended into hell”?
2. Since Jesus is a divine person, and God is everywhere, how could Jesus “descend” into hell?
3. Why is Brendan mistaken when he thinks that the souls of the righteous and the just should have been freed immediately when Christ died on the cross?
4. Does it make sense to say that Christ spent three days in the tomb, when he was buried on Friday afternoon, and rose by early Sunday morning? How does St. Augustine explain this?
5. Was Jesus’ resurrection the same as that of Lazarus? Why or why not?
6. What are some proofs that Jesus rose with the same body that he had in life?



7. Why was it fitting for Christ to ascend into heaven with his glorified body?
8. How many human bodies are currently in heaven (that we know of beyond any doubt)?

### **Reflection Questions:**

1. Why is the resurrection of Christ so essential to our faith as Christians?
2. Did Jesus abandon us when he ascended into heaven, or can he still be found on earth? Where?

## Chapter 13: You Will Be Like God

*"The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.' Their deeds are loathsome and corrupt; not one does what is good."*

– Psalm 14:1

### Summary:

Erc and Victor's excursion to the lunar surface proves to be more adventurous than they could have imagined. Suddenly they find themselves trapped by a raving madman with ambitions to rule the moon.

### Reflection Questions:

1. Based on his words and deeds, what does Commander Lawless believe? What does he put his faith in?
2. Is it hard to find people who have similar beliefs in our own day? What keeps them from going to the same extremes as Commander Lawless?
3. What is Commander Lawless's chief vice?
4. At the end of the chapter, Erc and Victor are saved. How? Why is this fitting?
5. Does the breastplate that Commander Lawless wear appear somewhere else in the book? Where?

## Chapter 14: Between Heaven and Hell

*“As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him. For he knows how we are formed, remembers that we are dust.” – Psalm 103:13-14*

### Summary:

Having escaped the Black Claw, Erc finds himself face to face with his old friend Tony who teaches him about the afterlife and the importance of preparing for death.

### Study Questions:

1. What two paths does Tony mention to Erc? What distinguishes them?
2. How does Tony “prove” that there is a purgatory? Are there any biblical texts to support this?
3. Why would souls want to go to purgatory before appearing before God?
4. What is the difference between purgatory and hell? Is it only a question of time spent there?
5. Where is our true home?
6. Does the existence of hell contradict God’s goodness?

### Reflection Questions:

1. What would possibly incline anyone to choose hell over heaven?
2. Can we avoid making such a bad decision? How?

## Chapter 15: At the End of Time

*“Who is like the LORD our God, enthroned on high, looking down on heaven and earth? He raises the needy from the dust, lifts the poor from the ash heap, seats them with princes, the princes of the people . . .”*  
– Psalm 113:5-8

### Summary:

At the end of time, Christ will return and the dead shall rise to meet him. Then the good will go forth to enjoy everlasting happiness, and the wicked will go to everlasting punishment.

### Study Questions:

1. At the general resurrection, will everyone—good and bad—rise again from the dead?
2. How can so many bodies scattered in so many places possibly come back to their original forms?
3. What kind of bodies will the saints get? Will infants and the handicapped remain that way forever?
4. Is there a difference between the judgment we all face at death, and the general Judgment that will take place at the end of time?
5. What can we hope for in heaven for all eternity?

## Reflection Questions:

1. What is the connection between our resurrection and Christ's?
2. Does the hope of our future resurrection impact our present lives? How?

