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# **UNDERSTANDING THE WHOLE BIBLE**

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**THE KING, THE KINGDOM, AND THE NEW COVENANT**



**DR. JONATHAN WELTON**





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Interior Design © Renee Evans ISBN: 978-0-9905752-1-4  
ISBN: 9781483553269

Printed in the United States of America 1st printing, 1000 copies,  
January 2015

**2nd printing, 1000 copies,  
April 2015**

# UNDERSTANDING THE WHOLE BIBLE

THIS TEXTBOOK IS THE DISTILLATION OF A NINETEEN-WEEK CLASS *UNDERSTANDING THE WHOLE BIBLE, FROM GENESIS TO REVELATION* TAUGHT BY AUTHOR AND THEOLOGIAN DR. JONATHAN WELTON.

IF YOU WANT TO DEVOUR THE WORD, THIS BOOK WILL GIVE YOU THE KNIFE, FORK AND EVEN TUCK IN YOUR NAPKIN AND TEACH YOU HOW TO EAT!

## TOPICS INCLUDE:

LEARN THE DIFFERENCE  
BETWEEN SYSTEMATIC AND  
BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

HOW DID WE GET OUR BIBLE?

TRANSLATIONS AND STUDY  
TOOLS

FREEWILL VERSUS  
PREDESTINATION

DISPENSATIONALISM AND  
COVENANT THEOLOGY

THE COVENANT PROMISES  
FULFILLED

GOD IS NOT AN OLD  
COVENANT MONSTER

UNDERSTANDING THE AT-  
ONE-MENT

BETTER COVENANT  
THEOLOGY

THE GREAT COVENANT  
TRANSITION

CESSATIONISM  
SUPERNATURALISM

AND

THE END OF AGE

THE UNVEILING OF JESUS

THE FIVE MAJOR COVENANTS:  
NOAH, ABRAHAM, MOSES,  
DAVID, AND THE NEW  
COVENANT

THE ONE LAW OF THE  
NEW COVENANT WORLD

DR. JONATHAN WELTON (D.MIN, VISION INTERNATIONAL) IS THE FOUNDING PROFESSOR OF THE WELTON ACADEMY SUPERNATURAL BIBLE SCHOOL. HE IS A PROLIFIC AUTHOR WHOSE WORK INCLUDES TWO BEST-SELLERS, THE SCHOOL OF THE SEERS AND RAPTURELESS. DR. WELTON IS THE PROGENITOR OF THE INTERPRETIVE SYSTEM KNOW AS BETTER COVENANT THEOLOGY. HE HAS MINISTERED ALL OVER THE GLOBE AND IS VERY ACTIVE IN CREATING VALUE ON SOCIAL MEDIA.

This textbook has been peer reviewed and  
approved by  
Dr. Martin Trench  
Dr. Stan DeKoven  
Dr. Stan Newton

# DEDICATION

I dedicate this work in great love to my parents, Jim and Carolyn Welton. You gave me a passionate love for God's Word that is rare in my generation, and it has been the honor of my life to be your son. I know you are proud of me, but I am just as proud of you. Our Father will have a grand celebration of your faithfulness on the day you arrive on His lap. I will be sad when that day comes, but your legacy will live forever because your love for the Lord has infected my heart, and I have the honor of spreading that throughout the world in writing.

I thank my wife, Karen Hannah Welton, for being my pillar through the storms. I love sharing all of my life with you. You have brought me great courage, confidence, and acceptance. You have loved and valued me and encouraged my countless hours of study, my book purchases, and my nerdy Bible conversations. I wouldn't be close to the man I am today if it wasn't for you constantly challenging me and teaching me to open my heart. I love you!

To my first child, my daughter, Hannah Elizabeth Welton, you made me a father, and in so doing, you have shown me how the Father feels about me. The joy your life has brought into mine is indescribable. You are one of the major motivators for everything I write. I write with the desire that your generation will clearly see Jesus' heart and in turn see



themselves correctly. You are my sunshine, my lovely sunshine.



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## PART ONE

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# FOUNDATIONS AND FILTERS



one



# UNDERSTANDING THEOLOGY

Many people sit in church year after year, every Sunday hearing a brief message, yet they feel dissatisfied. They have an ongoing desire to learn and understand the Bible, but a half-hour topical sermon every Sunday doesn't really enable them to "learn the book." They may learn about certain topics, depending on the church they attend, but that good desire for a deep understanding of the Scripture is left unmet. Some people address this desire by deciding to go to school to learn more. They may go to a **ministry school**, where they learn how



to minister to people—things like street outreach, prophecy, praying for healing, and so forth. Or they may choose to attend a **seminary** or a **theological school**, where they will learn about **systematic theology**. A third option for biblical instruction is a **Bible school**, where people learn a different theological approach to the Bible called **biblical theology**. This textbook presents biblical theology, or a biblical studies understanding of the Bible.

The following chart provides a simple explanation of the differences between systematic theology and biblical theology:

<b>Systematic Theology</b>	<b>Biblical Theology</b>
Soteriology	Old Testament Survey
Pneumatology	New Testament Survey
Atonement Theory	Hermeneutics
Angelology/ Demonology	
Eschatology	
Ecclesiology	
Canonicity	

## SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

Students of systematic theology learn about at least these seven areas of study. **Soteriology** is the study or the doctrine

of salvation; **Pneumatology** is the study of the Holy Spirit. **Atonement Theory** refers to the various theories and understandings of the atonement that theologians study and debate. **Angelology** and **Demonology** are the study of angels and demons. **Eschatology** is the study of the endtimes. **Ecclesiology** is the study of the understanding of the Church. And finally, **Canonicity** is the study of the formation of the Bible. The way these subjects are taught varies greatly, depending on the seminary, but all of these subjects will be covered at a school teaching systematic theology.

We will use atonement theory as an example of how systematic theology works. One of the most well-known books on systematic theology is Wayne Grudem's *Systematic Theology*. It is about 1,290 pages long and has over 400,000 copies in print. Grudem is very open to the Holy Spirit, so he covers all the above subjects from that perspective. By comparison, Thomas F. Torrence, a well-known theologian, has written a 500-page book titled *Atonement* on just one of the systematic theology topics—atonement theory. This is just one view of the atonement, among many. What this shows us is that theologians can take Grudem's *Systematic Theology* and literally multiply it into fifteen or more 500-page books from a variety of viewpoints. The end result is many very large books and a lot of passionate disagreements in the study of systematic theology. In this way, systematic theology is a seemingly endless study.

Students of systematic theology learn a lot of terminology. Like in the medical field, theologians have a specific jargon regarding the Bible that the average Christian will not

understand. This can be helpful, because of the precision involved, but it can also lead to more and more rabbit trails with no real conclusion about what a particular passage actually means. Systematic theology creates a net that has a strong ability to capture certain ideas, but it also has holes. One of the biggest holes is a lack of knowledge about specific Bible verses and stories and the overall historical context of the Bible. To address some of these holes, many seminaries have added **Old Testament survey** and **New Testament survey** courses, which provide an overview of the Old and New Testaments. The purpose of these classes is to help students understand, generally, the history, main characters, lands, and geography of the Bible. This is usually a small part of the study of systematic theology.

Because of this emphasis on theological ideas, systematic theologians tend to approach Scripture with the purpose of debate. They see the Bible according to these theological categories of study, and they use the Bible to prove their position in each of these categories. This is a biblical understanding most people can't relate to, and it often leaves those who are hungry for more knowledge of the Bible still unsatisfied. When Christians hungry for more Bible knowledge attend seminary, they will learn the above topics, and they will learn where the verses are to prove their particular view of each topic. They will also learn how to debate with others on these topics using theological jargon. When they return to normal church life, however, they will still feel the same frustration that drove them to school in the first place. They still don't feel like they really know the Bible. Or perhaps they go to seminary hoping to become a pastor but eventually realize that most of

what they learned in seminary is not helpful to the average person in the pew, who wants practical teaching on how to live the Christian life well and thrive in business and family. The missing piece in systematic theology is that it does not prepare pastors to give their people helpful instruction from the Bible.

## BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

By contrast, the second approach to theology, biblical theology, is a combination of Old and New Testament surveys, as well as **hermeneutics**, which is simply the application of methods for interpreting the Bible. In systematic theology, people approach the Bible with a filter, using one of the topics listed above. For example, when people study the Bible using the filter of soteriology, they start by outlining the various views and the scriptures used to support those views. This is why it is called a filter, because they are not simply reading the Bible. They are starting with presuppositions that determine how they read the Bible. By contrast, biblical theology starts with nothing but the Bible. Students of biblical theology simply read the Bible step-by-step, endeavoring to understand the text from the writer's perspective and the original reader's perspective. By doing so, they often come to very different conclusions than those who use the systematic approach.

## EXEGESIS AND EISEGESIS

Two more terms important to understanding how we study the Bible are **exegesis** and **eisegesis**. Exegesis means approaching the Bible by pulling from what it says. We are

trying to learn what it says and what it means, and we are trying to draw something out of the Bible that is actually there. By contrast, eisegesis is when we approach the Bible and insert what we think is there, what we think it means.

For example, exegesis of Matthew 24 involves reading the preceding chapters. In these chapters we find Jesus declaring unfolding judgment against Jerusalem. With this backdrop, it is easy to understand what the disciples meant when they asked Him, in Matthew 24, when these things will happen. It is clear they were referencing the judgments Jesus talked about in the preceding chapters. This is what it means to draw meaning out of Scripture based on the actual content and context of the Scripture, not on our preconceived ideas.

By contrast, many modern views of Revelation are a good example of eisegesis. For example, when people read about the eagle in Revelation that is flying and declaring woe (see Rev. 8:13), they assume the eagle must refer to the United States of America, because the eagle is the national symbol. This is eisegesis, because it clearly is not what John meant. The United States did not exist in John's day, so he could not have been referring to it.

The root issue here is how we interpret Scripture. The problem with claims like, "The Holy Spirit told me that's what John meant," is that First Peter 1:20–21 says Scripture is not of private interpretation. Thinking we can figure out Scripture all on our own leads to dangerous places. It can eventually lead us to interpret Scripture without properly testing what we think against what the rest of the Bible says. This is a fast track

toward full-blown eisegesis. This happens frequently, especially related to cultural understandings. If a church is in a country or culture where it is acceptable to oppress women, typically that church will do everything it can to read oppression of women into the Bible. The American church culture prior to and during the Civil War is another example of the power of eisegesis. At that time, many churches in America were preaching in support of slavery. They could draw out of certain passages and say, "See, it's scriptural." We can make almost any scripture say what we want it to say if we start with certain preconceptions instead of reading the Bible with an understanding that draws out what the Lord is trying to express in Scripture. This realization can cause people to wonder, "How do I know whether I'm drawing it out, whether my preferences are drawing it out, or whether that is actually what I am supposed to get out of it?" That is where the word *hermeneutics* comes in.

## HERMENEUTICS

*Hermeneutics* comes from a Greek root word meaning "to interpret." So, *hermeneutics* is not related just to theology but to any study of literature or history that requires interpretation, such as the writings of Plato or Aristotle. It is the art or science of interpretation. When we read something from Aristotle, we need a *hermeneutic* to be able to interpret what he meant. The *hermeneutic* many scholars consider to be the most reliable is called a **historical contextual hermeneutic**. In historical contextual hermeneutics, the first question asked is, "What would this have meant to the author?" The second question is,

“What would this have meant to the original reader?”

These questions employ the concept of **reader relevance**. When people read the Book of Revelation in the first century AD, they were not thinking about America when they read about an eagle. That interpretation has no *reader relevance*, so it cannot be what the text means. It is critically important, when we read, to put ourselves in the place of the author and the original reader. That is the historical contextual hermeneutic. This is quite a challenge for many of us, because we come from very different cultures than the cultures of the biblical writers. We also have a significant time gap. The time gap affects language and understanding, because the usage of words evolves over time. Words actually change meaning because of the influence of culture. A common example of this is the word *gay*, which only fifty years ago meant “happy.” Now it has been recast by culture to mean “homosexual.” That is how quickly the meaning of words can change—and how drastically. This means we are not only dealing with our own language changing but also with the changes within the original languages of the Bible—Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic. This can create quite a challenge when it comes to interpretation.

For example, in Second Peter 3:7, the phrase *heaven and earth* is commonly understood to mean literal heaven and literal earth. The average Christian reads this verse and believes it to mean the literal heaven and earth are reserved for a judgment of fire. However, if we look at the passage according to a historical contextual hermeneutic, we will discover that the original phrase translated “heaven and earth”

is actually an idiom referring to the temple. Inside the temple was the Holy of Holies, where the ark of the covenant was housed and where cherubim were sewn into the walls. That room represented heaven to the Jewish people. The secondary area of the temple had a dirt floor, the candlesticks, and the table of showbread; it represented earth. In the outer court, the large bronze container represented the sea. Thus, the temple was divided into the heavens, the earth, and the sea.

However, over 2,000 years later, because of the time gap and the culture gap, it is easy to misunderstand what Peter and Jesus meant when they spoke about the *heaven and earth*. Because of our literal interpretation, we think they were saying the heavens and the earth would literally pass away. Instead, Peter and Jesus were talking in the vernacular of their culture, and their original hearers understood they were describing the temple. In fact, Peter was writing about the destruction of the temple by fire just a few years before the temple was actually burned with fire. In other words, his prophecy has already been fulfilled. But if we do not know that, we think heaven and earth will be burned with fire in some sort of nuclear explosion. And just like that, we have strayed very far from the original meaning of the text and created room for all kinds of false teachings.

A healthy biblical theology starts with two presuppositions. The first is a historical contextual hermeneutic. The second is that God is revealed progressively throughout the Bible. This second item is often forgotten, especially in systematic theology. The Bible was literally written over the course of 1,500 years by over forty authors.



Now we have it compiled in one volume, and the systematic approach tends to pluck verses out here and there rather than understanding that we need to start at the beginning and read chronologically. In this way, we can read Scripture according to the revelation of God the people had when it was written. For example, Noah didn't know anything about the Law or the Ten Commandments. He didn't know about worshipping God in a tabernacle or about the nation of Israel. He predated all of that, and we need to understand that if we want to understand Noah's story properly.

Job is another example of this. Most scholars believe Job is the earliest book in the Bible, yet it is found well into our current version. As a result, people read it assuming Job had a greater revelation of God than he actually did. Part of the problem is that our Bibles have been organized by categories—history books, poetry, prophetic books, and so forth—which means everything is out of order. Our Scripture has no chronology, which creates a lot of confusion. Job really should be inserted after Genesis 1–3, but instead it follows the Book of Esther, which tells the story of the Israelites in exile. Clearly, our chronology is a mess.

The books of Ezra and Nehemiah are also completely misplaced, which makes understanding the historical flow of the story of the Bible very challenging and confusing. Ezra and Nehemiah should actually be near the very end of the Old Testament, but instead they follow Second Chronicles, which tells the story of Solomon and the kings of Judah until the nation goes into captivity.

Here is the basic chronology of the Old Testament: the Garden of Eden; Noah and the flood; Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; the twelve sons of Jacob (Israel), including Joseph; Israel's sojourn in Egypt for 430 years; Israel's escape from slavery in Egypt under Moses; the giving of the Law to Israel; the forty years in the wilderness; Joshua's leadership of Israel into the Promised Land; the rule of the judges in Israel; King Saul; King David; King Solomon. Christians who are familiar with the Bible know these Old Testament stories, but after Solomon, the storyline is muddled and confusing, and most Christians don't know it very well.

In the time following King Solomon, the nation divided into two nations, and many different kings—some good but most evil—took the throne of either Israel or Judah. This was the period of Ahab and Jezebel and Elijah and Elisha. Eventually, Babylon and Assyria came and took possession of the two nations. Most of the surviving Israelites went into captivity, including Daniel. Daniel prayed what Jeremiah had prophesied. Jeremiah prophesied ahead of the captivity, telling the people they would be in captivity for seventy years. When Daniel read the book of Jeremiah, he prayed, "Lord, what's going to happen?" (See Daniel 9:2.) The prophetic dreams and visions in his book were an answer to that question. Finally, the people returned to the land; Nehemiah rebuilt the city wall, and Ezra rebuilt the temple system. That is why Ezra and Nehemiah should appear at the end of the Old Testament, not prior to the poetry books.

This organization of the Bible by topics has created a lot of confusion for the average Christian who is trying to read the

Bible. In many ways, the result of topical categories in the Bible has the same effect as systematic theology. Instead of being presented progressively, the material is lumped together. Thus, the poetry books (Psalms, Proverbs, Song of Songs, and Lamentations) are placed and read together even though they may be completely unrelated and were written in different time periods. Even within Psalms there are psalms by Moses and by David, who came from very different time periods. This type of organization simply does not make sense. When we read like this, we miss the fact that God was revealed progressively throughout the Bible.

We see this progressive revelation clearly in the names of God in the Bible, which were one of the primary ways in which He revealed Himself and His nature to the Israelites. In fact, one of the meanings of God's personal name, Jehovah (YHWH) is "self-revealing." In other words, He revealed Himself through adding an attribute to His name. So Jehovah Jirah means "God will provide." Because we do not read the Bible chronologically, we can easily miss how significant these revelations of God's names were. Each time God revealed a new name, He revealed a new aspect of who He was as their God. Before God called Himself Jehovah Jirah, no one knew He would provide for them.

Through these examples we can see the importance of reading the Bible with the historical contextual hermeneutic and with an understanding of the progressive nature of Scripture. When we study the Bible this way, we will not read into stories in ways the characters never would have understood. We will not insert ideas or meanings that were not there. Instead, we

will be able to stand back and observe, knowing that we understand what God was doing, but Abraham and Noah did not understand what God was doing. Because of our perspective, we are able to see certain things they could not. We know how history after them would unfold, but they did not know that. So, we can see more than they could, but we cannot inject what we know into their thinking.

Now that we have examined the differences between systematic theology and biblical theology, and the two keys to reading the Bible with biblical theology, we will look at ways we can study the Bible—or study forms.

## STUDYFORMS

The natural question arising from the previous material in this chapter is, “How am I supposed to approach this book?” Because a good chronological Bible does not yet exist,<sup>1</sup> how do we read the Bible with a historical contextual hermeneutic and an understanding of the progressive revelation of God through Scripture? To answer this question, we must look at how people have studied the Bible, or common study forms. This chart gives a simple list of the most common forms of Bible study.

<b>Bible Study Forms</b>	
Devotions	Study based on a short daily reading of Scripture (i.e. 1

	Timothy 1)
Topical	Study based on a topic (i.e. dying to self) and the related passages
Expository	Study of a passage in its textual and historical context

# 1. Devotions

The term **devotions** has arisen from the recent belief among Christians that we must read at least one chapter of the Bible each day to be good Christians. Many people are raised with this idea and wrestle with a lot of guilt if they do not read their Bibles daily, but this idea actually has some significant problems, which we will look at here. The idea of daily devotions is, itself, flawed when we consider that most of the New Testament is made up of epistles (also known as letters). In life, we would not read a friend's email in small portions over a series of days. That would make it unnecessarily difficult to follow the flow of the message and to understand it all in context. Yet this is what many attempt to do with the letters of the New Testament.

The Book of First Timothy is a great example of this, especially because the places where chapter breaks are inserted in the text are sometimes horribly misleading or confusing. The letter of First Timothy is broken up into six

chapters, but the chapter breaks should be in different places. In First Timothy 1:15, it says, *“Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance....”* Then, in First Timothy 3:1, it says, *“Here is a trustworthy saying....”* Then, in First Timothy 4:9, it says, *“This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance.”* In these three verses, Paul highlighted the three topics he was writing to Timothy about in his letter.

If we were to write First Timothy as a blog, the beginning (1 Tim. 1:1–14) would be the introduction. It lays the foundation for the topic. Then we would insert a subheading, maybe in bold print, that reads: Trustworthy Saying #1. After the text of that point (1 Tim. 1:15–2:15), we’d insert Trustworthy Saying #2 (1 Tim. 3:1–4:8) and Trustworthy Saying #3 (1 Tim. 4:9–6:11). The remaining text would be the conclusion, the final charge to Timothy (1 Tim. 6:12–21). This is a sensible way to divide First Timothy; it actually flows with the author’s intent and topical understanding. Instead, the chapter breaks do not follow the actual content of the letter.

This, of course, is not a problem if we read the entire letter in one sitting, but if we read only one chapter per day, this can create quite a problem in our ability to understand the content. When we stop reading at the end of a chapter, we actually stop in the middle of Paul’s point, and when we pick up reading the next day, we have most likely forgotten what we read the day before. We view the chapters as separate and, therefore, do not really understand what Paul was saying. We must read letters as a whole to understand their flow.

We need to read straight through, following what the

author was saying as an over-arching theme and allowing the natural breaks to come to the surface. Otherwise we will end up with a devotional approach that is very disjointed. We will read our one chapter, but we will not understand the context or what was being said in the larger picture. As a result, we do not receive the value we need from it.

## 2. Topical Bible Study

Second, **topical Bible study** is what many Christians experience on Sunday mornings around the world. If Pastor Bob picks “Dying to Self” as the topic for his Sunday message, he will choose several key passages to teach from. Most likely he will start with First Corinthians 15:31, which says in the King James, “...*I die daily.*” Pastor Bob, according to his systematic theological training background, will briefly highlight this verse in isolation, without reading it in context, and then he will preach for thirty minutes on why we all need to die to ourselves—to our desires, passions, dreams, and visions. He will pull in other isolated verses that may seem to support his point, like Luke 14:27, where Jesus told His disciples, “*Whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple*” (NKJV). Because of the way Pastor Bob strings these verses together, it seems natural for them to be connected. It seems logical that Jesus and Paul were talking about the same thing. But this approach to Scripture contains massive problems.

First, topical Bible study does not give us a historical

contextual understanding. The passages used are read apart from the context they were originally written in, not to mention the historical realities of that day. If Pastor Bob would read the verses before and after First Corinthians 15:31, his entire sermon would fall apart. Verse 30 says, *“And as for us, why do we endanger ourselves every hour?”* This clearly shows that the dying mentioned refers to literal physical death. This becomes even clearer if we read First Corinthians 15:31 in any translation other than the King James, which has not accurately translated the meaning of this verse. The NIV reads:

*I face death every day—yes, just as surely as I boast about you in Christ Jesus our Lord. If I fought wild beasts in Ephesus with no more than human hopes, what have I gained? If the dead are not raised, “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die” (1 Corinthians 15:31–32).*

Clearly Paul was talking about physical persecution and the literal threat of death the early Christians faced on a daily basis. That is not everyone’s reality, but it was his reality when he wrote this letter to the Corinthians. Paul could say he had faced wild beasts at Ephesus, because that was part of his story, but it’s not part of most people’s stories. In other words, it is not a universally true statement. This means it is not permissible to apply it universally. So often we quote Scripture as our personal experience when it is not our personal experience. This is not an acceptable or accurate use of Scripture. In this we can see the danger of plucking a verse or phrase out of its context and using it to prove a point that isn’t actually being proven in that Bible passage.



This same principle applies to the passage surrounding Jesus' command to bear our cross (see Luke 14:27). Looking at several verses prior to it, this is what we find:

*Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: "If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple. And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:25–27).*

To understand this passage properly, we need to remember the second key to biblical theology—reading progressively. When Jesus said these words, He hadn't been crucified yet. Our understanding of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ cannot be injected into the understanding of those who were listening to Jesus in Luke 14. It would be wrong to do that. They did not understand what we understand about Jesus' death on the cross. Therefore, we have to think about what Jesus' words would have meant to those listening to Him at that time, people who had no idea Jesus would eventually die on a cross. Another important fact to remember is that Jesus was not talking to Christians, to the Church, or to people who had been walking with Him for fifty years. He was talking to large crowds of non-believers. This is why He said, *"If you want to be my disciple...."* He was saying, "If you are going to make a choice to become a follower, you have to know the cost involves picking up your cross, and then you follow Me." He was not saying this to believers but to non-believers. This means, we cannot apply it with broad strokes to the Church the way so many have.

If we keep reading in this passage, we will get a fuller picture of what this cross, or cost, was that Jesus was talking about:

*Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won't you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it? For if you lay the foundation and are not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule you, saying, "This person began to build and wasn't able to finish." Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Won't he first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples. Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out. Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear (Luke 14:28–35).*

Here Jesus gave two different pictures to explain what He meant: a king going to war and a contractor building a tower. He said, "Don't get halfway down this road and have half a building built and then be laughed at and mocked by everyone around. Don't be the king who goes to war without enough people, or you'll be slaughtered." Simply put, His point was: If you are going to be a disciple, don't be a half-disciple. He was telling potential followers not to start following Him and then turn back to be mocked by friends and family. When we

understand this, we see that when Jesus talked of hating mother, father, wife, children, brothers, and sisters, and even one's own life, He was *not* saying Christians should hate everyone around them. What He was saying was that those who wanted to follow Him should not be half-followers.

This begins to make even more sense when we realize, in the larger context of history, at that time the cross was a terrible punishment reserved only for rebels and the worst kind of outlaws. The Romans would crucify insurrectionists, using this specific form of death as a sign to warn others that if they rose up and rebelled they would be crucified. This linking of crucifixion with making a public example of someone remains in our language today, in statements like, "That politician made a mistake, and the media crucified him." In other words, they were making an example of that person. People don't say, "The media gave him a lethal injection," because they are not just talking about death; they're talking about a public humiliation. Crucifixion has always meant making a public show of someone to show that those who do the same will be destroyed in the same way. Thus, in Jesus' statement we can see that He used crucifixion as a metaphor indicating the public humiliation the Jews of His day would experience if they chose to follow Him. They had to count the cost in a very holistic way, because they risked rejections from family and friends and persecution from religious and political leaders. The decision to follow Him literally meant turning their backs on everything they'd previously looked to as a source of identity and reputation. If we want to actually have a hermeneutically correct interpretation of this passage, we can't say Jesus was talking to Christians about how to defeat temptation in their lives. Yet

many pastors do just that. They twist scriptures out of context to create topical sermons.

Of course, it is important to clarify here that topical sermons are not necessarily bad. The problem happens when people pull scripture verses out of context to create a topical message without considering what those verses actually mean in their context. When people do that, they do violence to multiple texts that have nothing to do with their sermon topic (as we saw with the example on dying to self). As a result, they teach unbiblical sermons in a way that makes them seem absolutely biblical to the unstudied and causes a lot of confusion about what the Bible really says. That is what we do not want. However, one can create an excellent and biblically accurate sermon on a particular topic by using the historical contextual hermeneutic to examine all the verses on a particular topic, such as the wrath of God. (We will look at how to do this in more depth in Chapter 3.) Topical messages can be wonderful if we are careful to respect the context of each verse we use. And if we use a verse apart from its original context, it is important to clarify that to our audience, to say something like, “I know this verse in context refers to this, but the Holy Spirit has been speaking to me about this through it, so I want to share that with you without ignoring the original context and meaning.” This kind of clarification is crucial, and it allows room for fresh words from the Spirit while still honoring (and not contradicting) the original meaning of the text.

### **3. Expository Bible Study**

Because much of modern Western Christianity has been based on topical sermons once a week and daily devotions on our own, many people have ended up with skewed understandings of Scripture. The question is, what can we do? How can we read Scripture and approach our walk in a way that is truly accurate and life-giving? One word that describes the answer to this dilemma is *expository*. Expository Bible study and expository preaching simply expose what the Bible is actually saying in context. This is exactly what we did with the verses above; we exposed what the text truly means in context. Expository study looks at the passage in context, in its historical place, considering who was being addressed and the context of the author. In this way, expository study can lift a passage out to help us understand that topic in its proper place.

At times it can sound a lot like topical study, but the difference is that expository study respects the context, the flow, the place in history, the progression, the original audience within the passage, and the relevance to the modern reader. In expository study, we take the passage and study its context by asking: Why is it being written; who is it being written to; and what are the purpose, value, and intentions of the passage? Only when we ask these questions are we really able to arrive at an accurate conclusion.

## REVIEW TEST QUESTIONS

1. What is the difference between exegesis and eisegesis?
2. The most reliable hermeneutic to work with is called

\_\_\_\_\_. The question that is always asked is, “\_\_\_\_\_?” A secondary \_\_\_\_\_ question \_\_\_\_\_ would \_\_\_\_\_ be, “\_\_\_\_\_?”

3. In First Timothy, the letter is broken up into \_\_\_\_\_ chapters. The verse locations of the three topics or trustworthy sayings laid out by Paul to Timothy are found in \_\_\_\_\_.
4. Systematic theology creates a \_\_\_\_\_, which has a strong ability to capture certain things, but also has some \_\_\_\_\_, where you end up not knowing how to answer certain questions.

## KEYTERMS

ministry school	canonicity
seminary	Old Testament survey
theological school	New Testament survey
systematic theology	hermeneutics
Bible school	exegesis
biblical theology	eisegesis
soteriology	historical contextual hermeneutics
pneumatology	reader relevance

atonement theory	devotions
angelology/ demonology	topical Bible study
eschatology	expository Bible study
ecclesiology	

## RELATED MATERIALS

Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*.

Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*.

Peter J. Leithart, *A House for My Name: A Survey of the Old Testament*.

Peter J. Leithart, *Deep Exegesis: the Mystery of Reading Scripture*.

James Stuart Russell, *The Parousia*.

Milton Spenser Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*.

<sup>1</sup> *Good* is a relative term, and in this author's opinion a good chronological Bible does not exist yet. Welton Academy is in the process of creating such a work.

two



## **UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE**

In our modern culture, people generally know the Bible is a book that many people believe is the Word of God. We agree with this assessment. We believe the Bible is God's Word and it needs to be understood. It needs to be studied and taught as absolute truth. Until the advent of the postmodern movement, these truths were generally accepted by all Christians. However, many today are saying, "There is no such thing as truth," or, "Truth is debatable." As this cultural shift has happened, one of the main attacks of postmodernism against



biblical Christianity has been against the Scripture itself. People say, “The Bible was just written by men, and if it was written by men, it can be manipulated by certain political systems. It can be used to oppress people.” They ask, “How do we understand the value and integrity of Scripture if we don’t know its origin?” That is really the question. How did we get the Bible?

What is its source, how did it come to be in this form, and how do we know we have the right books of the Bible? The Bible is made up of sixty-six books that were chosen from a larger canon of writings, including books like the Gospel of Thomas and other Gnostic Gospels, as well as the books in the Apocrypha and the Pseudepigrapha. If we are going to treat the Bible as the Word of God and source of absolute truth, it is important for us to understand why these particular sixty-six books were chosen above the others and valued as uniquely inspired. Once we understand this, we will also be able to have a proper perspective on the books that didn’t make the biblical canon.

## THE HISTORY OF THE CANON

The **Bible Canon** is the sixty-six books agreed upon, throughout Church history, as the Word of God. This includes all branches of Christianity—the Greek Orthodox, the Roman Catholic, and the Protestant. All have agreed on this exact list since it was first formed in the fourth century. The Roman Catholic Bible does contain extra books, called the **Apocrypha**, but Catholics do not consider these books canonized Scripture.

They are important historical books that complement the Scripture but are not on the same level with it.

One of the Church fathers, Eusebius, wrote a book titled *The Church History*, which is the earliest history of the Church other than the Book of Acts. Eusebius lived in AD 263–339 and essentially wrote what is considered the Book of Acts continued, picking up the story where Acts ends. In it, he recounts how the books of the Bible were accepted, which ones were debated, and which ones were rejected. Eusebius tells us that in the fourth century Church leaders put the books of Scripture into four categories—accepted books, disputed books, rejected books, and heretical books. The first category included most of our present New Testament books. The disputed category included the books of Jude, Second Peter, Second John, Third John, and James. The only New Testament book included on the rejected list was Revelation, with a note that many also considered it an accepted book (as Eusebius himself did). Finally, the heretical category included pseudepigraphal books, which will be explained in more detail later.

The disputed books were all questioned for a reason. Jude was disputed because it quotes from the book of Enoch, which is not accepted as part of the Old Testament canon. Second Peter was debated because the manner of writing in the Greek is very different from that in First Peter. There is scholarly debate regarding whether Second Peter was written by the same Peter who wrote First Peter.<sup>2</sup> Second and Third John were also disputed (and still are) because they are introduced as written by “the elder.” Who is the elder? A lot of people have

assumed it was John, but it also has been the source of a lot of debate.

The Book of James was also disputed. Technically speaking, the Book of James was actually written *first* and is probably the earliest New Testament book. Despite this, it is debated because James talks about proving our faith by our works. Some people have difficulty understanding how that can stand alongside what the apostle Paul wrote in Romans—that faith is its own evidence, that our faith establishes and completes everything. Even Martin Luther, more than a thousand years after the biblical canon was formed, questioned whether James belonged in the Bible. The debate continues among some today. However, when properly understood, James and Romans actually complement each other very well.

The Book of Revelation still is highly debated, and some people say it should not be in the Bible because of its late writing. These people believe the book of Revelation was written around AD 96, which is much later than the rest of the New Testament. Some people also say the books of Matthew, Mark, and Luke must have been written in the AD 90s because their parallel passages on the destruction of Jerusalem (see Matt. 24; Mark 13; Luke 21) are too perfect to be actual prophecies. If these books were written before AD 70, they claim, it means Jesus was prophesying *too* perfectly, which validates the gift of prophecy. Because some scholars, professors, and colleges do not believe in the supernatural, they re-date these books and claim the authors wrote them after AD 70 to make Jesus look like an incredible prophet.

When deciding upon the accepted books of the Bible, the early Christians used two main criteria. The first sprang from the Roman Emperor Diocletian's (AD 284–305) edict saying Christians must sacrifice to the gods or be put to death. Christians were also commanded to burn all their books. For this reason, the early Church had to decide what books they were willing to die for. What books would they hide and protect even at the cost of their lives? Those were the books that were later put together into the Holy Canon we have today. The sixty-six books of the Bible are the books early Christians were literally willing to lay down their lives to protect.

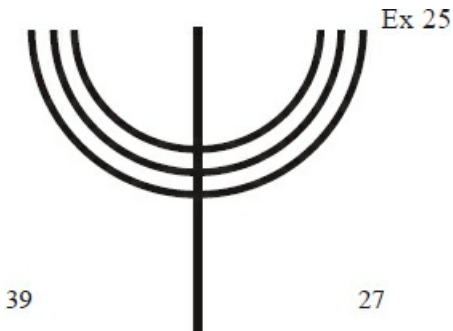
The second criteria was the issue of authorship. Here we find the issue of the **pseudepigrapha**, or works that were not actually written by the person they claim to be written by. This is why some people question the validity of Second Peter. They think someone other than Peter actually wrote the book, that it just has his name on it but was not actually authored by him. This matters because if it wasn't actually written by him, then it was written by an imposter and does not hold the same value. All of the books of the New Testament are written by first century apostles (Mark and Luke were not Apostles but wrote their accounts on behalf of Apostles, Mark essentially wrote for Peter and Luke wrote for Paul). If a book claimed to be written by an apostle but actually was not, it is considered pseudepigrapha. It was not valuable enough to include in the canon of the Bible. These are the two main standards the early Christians used to decide what books to include—was it written by an apostle, and was it a book worth dying for?

The first official list of the accepted books of the Bible was put together at the Council of Carthage in AD 397. Since the formation of the Bible in AD 397, it has maintained the same basic form of those sixty-six books. It has, of course, been changed through translation. We received the sixty-six books in AD 397, but they have been understood through many different translations through the years.

## WHY SIXTY-SIX BOOKS?

So far, we have seen some of the criteria used to categorize and ultimately accept or reject possible books of the Bible. Now we are going to look specifically at the final number—sixty-six. While we could accept that number as divine providence, apart from human understanding, it is quite possible the early Church leaders used a pattern from the Old Testament to help them arrive at sixty-six books. This is simply a theory, not something we can prove, since none of us knows what the early Church leaders were thinking.

Below is a picture of a candelabra, which originated in Exodus 25, where Moses received the description of what to build for the tabernacle and the articles to place in it.



Starting in verse 31, it says:

*Make a lampstand of pure gold. Hammer out its base and shaft, and make its flowerlike cups, buds and blossoms of one piece with them. Six branches are to extend from the sides of the lampstand—three on one side and three on the other. Three cups shaped like almond flowers with buds and blossoms are to be on one branch, three on the next branch, and the same for all six branches extending from the lampstand. And on the lampstand there are to be four cups shaped like almond flowers with buds and blossoms. One bud shall be under the first pair of branches extending from the lampstand, a second bud under the second pair, and a third bud under the third pair—six branches in all. The buds and branches shall all be of one piece with the*

*lampstand, hammered out of pure gold.*

As the verses explain, the branches of the lampstand (candelabra) have cups, buds, and blossoms. This pattern repeats on each of the branches, so every branch on the left side of the diagram has nine of these items—three cups, three buds, and three blossoms. This equals nine cups, nine buds, and nine blossoms on one side of the candelabra. The same is true of the other side. As well, going down the middle stem, or the lampstand, are four cups, four buds, and four blossoms.

So, totaling up the items on the candelabra, from the left side to the right, we have nine, nine, nine (items on the left branches); twelve (items on the lampstand itself); and nine, nine, nine (items on the right branches). We find the significance of the lampstand in Psalm 119:105, which connects it to the Word of God, which is likewise a source of illumination and guidance. *“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.”* This was the Hebrew mindset and perception of the lampstand. Therefore, it is not surprising that when we add up the numbers, we find the exact numbers of the books of the Old Testament and New Testament. The left side and middle stem of the candelabra ( $9 + 9 + 9 + 12$ ) totals thirty-nine, while the right side ( $9 + 9 + 9$ ) totals twenty-seven. Therefore, the decorations on the left branches of the lampstand and the decorations on the lampstand itself represent the thirty-nine Old Testament books. And the decorations on the right branches represent the twenty-seven New Testament books.

This next picture shows the lampstand as the Word of God, with thirty-nine in the Old Testament and twenty-seven in the

New Testament.



It is also important to note that the candelabra was made of pure gold, which speaks of its integrity and purity. Psalm 12:6 says, *“And the words of the LORD are flawless, like silver purified in a crucible, like gold refined seven times.”* In other words, it is pure. Also, it is hammered out of one piece of gold. It is not two pieces hammered together. It is not an “old” lampstand and a “new” lampstand; it is one lampstand. In the same way, we have one Bible. Although it has two sides, it is together as a whole unit. Lastly, the middle staff on the lampstand is understood by symbol interpreters to symbolize Christ. Because, as Galatians 4:4 says, Jesus was a man born *“under the law,”* the middle staff is included under the Old Testament. Jesus showed up as a man under the Law and still operated within the Old Testament, fulfilling it in order to take



us into the new. The parallels between the lampstand and the Word of God are striking, and it is quite possible the early Christians used the lampstand as a model to determine the number of New Testament books included in the Bible (Interestingly, if one were to count the 6 branches plus the main stem, the lampstand would add up to 73, which is the number of books accepted in the Roman Catholic Bible).

Here is another possibility. The early Church may have also considered the structure of the Book of Isaiah in their decisions about the New Testament canon. In our Bibles, Isaiah is one book, but in the Hebrew Scriptures, it is divided into First Isaiah (chapters 1–39) and Second Isaiah (chapters 40–66) (It is important to remember that the numbering of chapters and verses didn't occur until hundreds of years later). This corresponds exactly to the division of the books of the Bible into the Old Testament and the New Testament.

This may seem simply coincidental until we look at the actual text. Isaiah 40, which is the beginning of the second book, says, *“A voice of one calling: ‘In the wilderness prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God’”* (Isa. 40:3). This was a prophecy about John the Baptist, and it is quoted in the first book of the New Testament: Matthew, where it says, *“This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah: ‘A voice of one calling in the wilderness, prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him’”* (Matt. 3:3). So Isaiah 40, or the first chapter of the second book of Isaiah, corresponds closely with Matthew.

Isaiah 66, the final chapter, reinforces this parallel as well. In

Isaiah 66:22, we read, “*‘As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me,’ declares the Lord, ‘so will your name and descendants endure.’*” The last book of Isaiah talks about the new heavens and new earth, just like the last chapter of the New Testament—Revelation. John, the writer of Revelation, was quoting Isaiah when he used that imagery. “*Then I saw ‘a new heaven and a new earth,’ for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea*” (Rev. 21:1). The phrase “a new heaven and a new earth” is in quotation marks because it is a quote from Isaiah 65 and 66. Thus, we see these parallels between Isaiah and the New Testament:

1 Isaiah (Book One) – Chapters 1–39

2 Isaiah (Book Two) – Chapters 40–66

## **2 Isaiah 40 corresponds to Matthew 3**

2 Isaiah 65–66 corresponds to Revelation 21.

The parallels are too strong to be accidental. Amazingly, both the image of the lampstand and the Book of Isaiah are workable patterns the early Church leaders could have used in determining the number of books in the New Testament. Not only do both patterns give the same numbers for the division between halves (thirty-nine and twenty-seven), but the Isaiah

pattern also provides a sense of ordering. The effect would not be the same if Matthew was not the first book and Revelation was not the last. These parallels are a stunning picture of God's use of patterns and symbols throughout history—whether the humans involved realized it or not. Because many of the early Christians were Jews who had a strong awareness of their religious history, it is entirely possible they intentionally partnered with God in creating these parallels. It is also just as likely they were oblivious to what God was doing. Either way, the parallels provide interesting pictures for us.

Hebrews 8:5 talks about the power of the symbols in the Bible:

*They serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven. This is why Moses was warned when he was about to build the tabernacle: "See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain."*

Colossians 2:16–17 also shows that the purpose of much of the Old Testament Law and religious practice was to symbolize the coming reality in Christ:

*Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.*

When we look at Jesus' life on earth, we see He fulfilled many types and shadows from the Old Testament. For example,

Jesus received water baptism, which First Corinthians 10:2 tells us was a picture of Israel going through the Red Sea. Like Israel, Jesus went through the Red Sea, came up on the other side, was baptized by the Holy Spirit, and then entered the wilderness for forty days. There He encountered an enemy, the devil, and rather than being intimidated, He stood in His identity and His relationship with God, resisted the devil, and walked out of the wilderness as the victor. By contrast, the Israelites walked forty days in the wilderness, became intimidated, doubted God, pulled away from God, and gave a bad report. As a result, they had to spend forty years in the wilderness. Very often Jesus' actions in the Gospels fulfilled or mimicked a shadow from the Old Testament that actually pointed to Him.

Clearly, the Old Testament contains many shadows of the reality we now have in Christ. This is exactly what we see in the patterns in the lampstand and the Book of Isaiah. They are two very clear shadows of the Bible before the Bible became what we understand it to be today in our modern hands. They are the shadows that led to the reality we now possess. This reality of God's intimate involvement in the formation of the Bible shows us the level of authority it carries.

## THE AUTHORITY OF THE BIBLE

When people talk about the Bible as a book and its formation, they often use words like *authoritative* or *inspired* or *inerrant* to describe their view of the Bible. Before we end this chapter, we will cover several of these terms and the

positions they reflect. When people say the Bible is **authoritative**, they mean it carries authority as God's Word, and they submit to the commands in it. The idea that the Bible is **inspired** simply indicates that God actually spoke to certain men and inspired them to write the Scripture, which means we should elevate it above our human understanding. It is not humanly inspired but divinely inspired. When people claim the Bible is **inerrant**, they mean it is without error. Similarly, some people also use the term **infallible** to say the Bible is without error because it is incapable of error.

First, when we talk about the *authoritative Word*, we mean it is intended for teaching, rebuking, growth, righteousness, and training—all of what is listed in Second Timothy 3:16–17 regarding the Bible's authority. This is also referred to in Second Peter 1:19, where it tells us the Bible is “*something completely reliable*” or the “*more sure word of prophecy*” (KJV). What this means is, if people believe they are hearing something from God, but it contradicts the Bible, they are hearing wrong. The Scriptures are the more sure word of prophecy. They have the ultimate authority in determining what God is saying, and we must always test what we think we hear from God against the Scriptures.

Second, to understand what it means that the Bible is the *inspired Word of God*, we can look at Second Peter 1:20–21, which tells us how humans received the Scripture:

*Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things. For prophecy never had its*

*origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.*

In other words, though the authors were human, they were not writing their private interpretation; they were writing as the Holy Spirit inspired them. It is a mystical reality that the Holy Spirit wrote through those who wrote the Scriptures. Yes, it was written by people, but it was inspired by the Holy Spirit in a way other documents are not. To this idea Second Timothy 3:16–17 adds:

*All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

This clearly says the Bible is God-breathed, or inspired, as well as authoritative. Of course, we must keep in mind that when Peter and Paul wrote these passages, they did not know they were writing part of the Bible. The Scriptures they were referring to were the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament, what was called the Septuagint, or the Greek version of the Old Testament. This was written around 300 BC, when seventy Hebrew scholars worked together to translate the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek. The **Septuagint**, which is at places different from the Hebrew Old Testament, was the Scripture of the early Church. This explains why in our English translations we sometimes see differences between passages in the Old Testament (which have been translated from the Hebrew) and quotations of the Old Testament in the New Testament (which

have been translated from the Septuagint). Despite the slight differences between the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek Old Testament, it was the Greek Old Testament that the early Church read and quoted from.

However, we do find in the New Testament signs that even during the first century of Christianity people were beginning to recognize the writings that now form the New Testament as scripture. One of the earliest of these signs is found in Second Peter 3:15–16, where Peter wrote about the letters of Paul:

*Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable men distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.*

In this passage, Peter eluded to something stunning. By writing that ignorant and unstable men distort Paul's letters "*as they do the other Scriptures*," he put Paul's letters on par with the Old Testament. It is so subtle it is easy to miss, but he was clearly saying the same people who distorted the Old Testament Scriptures were also distorting the New—which would be Paul's letters. Though the New Testament would not be formalized for several hundred years, even then they had a sense that what they were writing was as inspired and authoritative as the Old Testament.

Third, some people use the terms *inerrant* and *infallible* to describe the Bible. However, the ideas behind these terms are problematic. For example, if we claim the Bible is the inerrant Word of God, we have to go all the way back to the original inspired documents in Hebrew and Greek. When it comes to the New Testament, we have five thousand Greek manuscripts that are all nearly identical, but some of them do contain small differences. These are what translators use to give us our modern English Bibles. However, humans were not inspired to translate the Bible in the same way the original writers were inspired. The translators do their best, according to their understanding, but they are operating with human understanding, not divine. They are brilliant scholars, yet they sometimes miss things. This is why, from a scholarly perspective, we cannot claim the Bible is inerrant, because even the copies of the originals have some differences, and the modern translations we read are at times widely different. A good example of this is Romans 8:1. The English translation of the Greek reads, *"Therefore now there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."* However, a different translation adds an entire sentence: *"...who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit"* (NKJV). The variation among English translations makes it difficult for us to claim the Bible is inerrant or infallible. Not only that, but such claims often result in a very rigid view of Scripture that prevents people from digging deeper to gain a better understanding of what the Bible really means. They are so stuck on the literal words of their English translation that they end up cutting themselves off from the depth of meaning in the Word of God. Describing the Bible as authoritative and inspired is sufficient. It was divinely inspired, and it is the



authority for our lives.

## ACADEMIC VS. POPULAR CHRISTIANITY

Connected to the idea of the origin and formation of the Bible is the way Christians think about and discuss belief systems. Before we look at specific belief systems and teachings about the Bible, we must consider the difference between the two most prominent subcultures within the larger Christian culture—academic Christianity and popular Christianity.

From an anthropological standpoint, all cultures contain two main divisions—high culture and popular culture. High culture is typically made up of the wealthiest and most educated segment of the population. These people appreciate the finer things in life—things like expensive wine, fine dining, classical music, formal attire, and so forth. The high culture is a minority among the culture, yet it carries a majority of the power and influence. Alongside the high culture exists the popular culture (or pop-culture), which contains a majority of the population and describes in general ways what is popular among the majority. So those who are immersed in pop-culture tend to listen to the music on the radio and pay attention to the biggest new movies. They eat at chain restaurants and shop at chain stores. A third group, called folk culture, often emerges as a reaction to the popular culture. But instead of joining the high culture, they separate from the norm in their own fashion. They pride themselves on making counter-cultural decisions. For example, they may be vegan, birth their babies at home,

decide not to vaccinate their children, and follow independent music and movies that rarely show up in the mainstream. The differences between these three groups are significant, yet they are all part of the overarching culture.

The culture inside the Church also contains these three elements. **Popular Christianity** is the culture of the majority of Christians. In the United States, it includes things like Veggie Tales, WWJD bracelets, and pop-Christian music. The folk element within popular Christianity prefers less mainstream music and makes small attempts to pull away from the Christian pop-culture, but for our purposes here, it is essentially a subcategory of popular Christianity. When it comes to theology and the Bible, popular Christianity takes a very rigid view of truth.

By contrast, **Academic Christianity**, which is comprised primarily of theologians and intellectuals, has a high value for theological conversation and debate. Some well-known modern theologians like N.T. Wright and Gordon Fee have crossed-over into the pop-culture circle and are being read by non-academics. Hundreds of other theologians in the academic circle are speaking and writing in the language of academia, and their material never crosses over into the pop-culture. Not surprisingly, members of these two groups often have distain toward members of the other group. But it is important for us to understand and value both cultures.

One of the potential downfalls of academic Christianity is described in Paul's statement in First Corinthians 8:1 — "*knowledge puffs up.*" Knowledge is good, but it must

always be tempered with love, which is not necessarily something academia teaches. If we understand all the theology and know all the Greek words, but are terrible Christians in our practical lives with our families and friends, we have a big problem.

However, one of academic Christianity's strengths is found in the difference between these two words: *disagree* and *disrespect*. The popular Christian culture does not handle disagreement well. When leaders disagree, they tend to treat each other with a high level of disrespect, using labels like *heretic*, *false teacher*, *blasphemer*, or even *antichrist*. Generally such leaders are not willing to calmly and openly discuss their differences but instead make defamatory statements and point fingers. They fear their followers will be captivated by some evil teaching, so they actively try to persuade those under their influence against said evil doctrine. As a result, they influence their followers to also have disrespect toward a given person or movement. In other words, this disrespect has a filter-down system to everyone under a leader's influence.

By contrast, academic Christianity has a strong appreciation for debate and discussion of ideas without disrespect. This is important for all who want to study theology, because we need to be able to examine the ways other people believe and disagree with some of them while still respecting them as people and fellow Christians. Academics value standing on their own opinion, based on their own study, so they say, "I believe such-and-such for this reason." This is simply a personal statement and does not have a negative influence. Academic Christianity is okay with disagreement and

does not see it as a hindrance to respect. It is okay for people to hold differing views and remain friends.

People in academic Christian culture make personal statements of disagreement that are not intended to influence others. By contrast, leaders in popular Christian culture make defamatory statements against other leaders and movements that are presented as fact and cause an umbrella of disrespect.

The best way to approach theology is with a willingness to disagree and an openness to learning from others. Academic Christianity has modeled this well, and we would be wise to imitate them. Thinking like an academic means believing we need to hear all the different views on an issue in order to rationally decide our own position. In this culture, we are free to hear all the different understandings and arrive at our own conclusions, even if those conclusions are different from those of our friends or leaders. This is why, in academic Christianity, we find many books that present varying views on a particular subject. These books are not written by one author who has an opinion and writes with a slant. Instead, they are a compilation of writings from theologians who are explaining their own personal beliefs.<sup>3</sup> Another type of book common in academic Christianity is a response book, where one theologian writes a book in response to another theologian's writings.<sup>4</sup>

Part of what it means to disagree respectfully is to quote those you disagree with in a way that accurately presents what they said in context. Academics are very careful to do this, but unfortunately, many leaders in popular Christianity misrepresent those they disagree with. They take their words

out of context and make assumptions about what others mean by what they have said. This sort of misrepresenting, misunderstanding, and attacking of others has been happening for a long time, but it is not honoring or helpful to approach disagreement this way. Instead, we need to learn how to disagree without disrespecting and without exaggerating. Throughout this course, our goal will be to understand the beliefs of others clearly and fairly so we can draw our own conclusions.

## REVIEW TEST QUESTIONS

1. We got our sixty-six books of the Bible because the early Church decided that the specific ones comprising our canon were worth doing what for?
2. This first official list was established during a council in which year?
3. The lampstand in Exodus 25 is decorated from the left to the middle in a pattern of nine, nine, nine, twelve, which is thirty-nine decorations. From the middle to the right is nine, nine, nine, which is twenty-seven decorations. What do the thirty-nine on the left and the twenty-seven on the right represent?
4. Terms such as *authoritative* and *inspired* are accurate descriptions of the Bible, but what other terms should be removed from one's vocabulary?
5. What is the difference between academic

understanding and popular understanding?

6. Both Hebrews 8:5 and Colossians 2:16–17 speak about the Old Testament containing \_\_\_\_\_, but now in Christ, we have the \_\_\_\_\_.

## KEYTERMS

Septuagint	Bible Canon
liberal theologians	Apocrypha
authoritative	Pseudepigrapha
inspired	academic Christianity
inerrant	popular Christianity
infallible	

## RELATED MATERIALS

James Beilby and Paul R. Eddy, Eds., *The Nature of the Atonement: Four Views*, with contributions by Gregory A. Boyd, Joel B. Green, Bruce R. Reichenbach, and Thomas R. Schreiner.

Eusebius, *The Church History*.

Gregory E. Ganssle, Ed., *God and Time: Four Views*, with contributions by Paul Helm, Alan G. Padgett, William Lane

Craig, and Nicholas Wolterstorff.

Stanley N. Gundry and C. Marvin Pate, Eds., *Four Views of the Book of Revelation*, with contributions by Kenneth L. Gentry Jr., Sam Hamstra Jr., C. Marvin Pate, and Robert L. Thomas.

Peter J. Leithart, *The Promise of His Appearing*.

<sup>2</sup> The well-respected scholar Peter J. Leithart has written the book, *The Promise of His Appearing*, to demonstrate that Second Peter was, in fact, written by the same Peter who wrote First Peter.

<sup>3</sup> For example, *The Nature of the Atonement: Four Views* contains contributions from four leading theologians with differing opinions on the atonement. In similar fashion, *Four Views on the Book of Revelation and God and Time: Four Different Views* present differing views on these subjects.

<sup>4</sup> A great example of this is Kenneth Gentry's *The Charismatic Gift of Prophecy: A Reformed Response to Wayne Grudem*. In it, Gentry strongly but respectfully counters Grudem's beliefs about the Holy Spirit from an academic standpoint.

## three



# BIBLE TRANSLATIONS AND STUDY TOOLS

Before one studies the Bible, one must understand the various Bible translations and study tools available. In this chapter we will take a brief look at some of the most prominent Bible translations and study tools, and then we will use these tools to examine several controversial issues in Scripture.

## BIBLE TRANSLATIONS

The oldest version of the Bible in common usage today is the **King James Version (KJV)**. Some Christians—the King James Only movement—adamantly defend the KJV as the only true Bible translation and believe other more recent translations



were written to incorporate New Age practices and teachings. This is particularly true in the South Eastern states of the United States. The KJV goes back to 1611, and the language reflects the gap in time between then and now. Many people find the KJV difficult to read. But others believe its oldness makes it more reliable, especially since many copies say, “Translated from the original tongues and languages.” This is not actually true. The KJV is actually predated by two other Bibles—the **Geneva Bible** and the **Bishops’ Bible**. The decision to create this new translation was a political power move inspired by some transitions in the Church of England’s history. Because of this, the political and religious leaders gave the translators eleven guidelines that actually changed the way the Bible was translated. In addition, about 75 percent of the KJV was taken directly from the Bishops’ Bible. It was copied right over into the new translation without going back to the original manuscripts.

This is why the KJV’s claim to be translated from the original languages is false. For some passages, the translators did refer back to the original languages, but not the majority. This means the KJV is not the most accurate translation, because it was not translated from the original manuscripts in the way some of the more modern translations were.<sup>5</sup>

More recently, the KJV was updated and modernized in the **New King James Version (NKJV)**. The translators of the NKJV also did not consult original manuscripts, changing only about forty thousand words in the updating from KJV to NKJV. Primarily, it serves as an updated version of the KJV. It smoothed out the older language of the KJV and made it a lot

easier for the modern reader to understand.

After the KJV and the NKJV, the most widely used version is **the New International Version (NIV)**, which originated in the 1980s. Many people prefer this version simply because it is easy to read. The NIV and another similar version, the **English Standard Version (ESV)**, translated in the early 2000s, went back to the original languages and translated the text *thought-for-thought*. In other words, as the translators translated a Greek sentence into an English sentence, they put priority on making it read smoothly and be user-friendly.

By comparison, a literal Bible, such as **Young's Literal Translation (YLT)** or the **Weymouth Literal Translation (WYT)**, has translated the Greek to English *word-for-word*, following the original word order at the expense of easy readability. People rarely read aloud from a literal translation, because they are very choppy and at times difficult to follow. The way the Greek and English languages structure sentences is very different; therefore, the sentence order of literal translations often feels very chaotic. However, literal translations are valuable study tools.

Another type of Bible is called a paraphrase. The most prominent example of this is the **Message Bible**, which was written by Eugene Peterson in the 1990s. Paraphrases generally do not go back to the original languages but simply look back to the KJV and paraphrase in modern language what it would mean. These can be helpful for new believers who might not yet be comfortable with even the NIV. Sometimes paraphrases can also give us a fresh look at Bible passages that have

become overly familiar to us. However, paraphrases are not helpful as study tools, as they are the author's own rewording of the text that is not based on actual translation.

Finally, we have two translations—the **New American Standard Bible (NASB)** and the **Wuest translation** of the New Testament—that give a lot of attention to making sure the verb forms are correct. A lot of Bible translations have incorrect verb tenses, which can make a huge difference in the meaning of the text. Consider the difference between saying one is being corrupted daily and one was being corrupted. In this way, these translations can be very useful in helping us to determine the proper verb tense for various Bible verses. Many other translations of the Bible exist, but these are the most prominent ones.<sup>6</sup>

<b>Bible Version</b>	<b>Translation Approach</b>
KJV	Primarily copied from the Bishops' Bible with minimal referencing of original languages
NKJV	Primarily a modernization of the KJV with minimal referencing of original languages
NIV, ESV	Translated thought-by-thought from the original languages
YLT, WLT (literal Bibles)	Translated word-for-word from the original languages

Message Bible (paraphrases)	Paraphrase (not translation) of an older Bible, like the KJV, into modern language based on the author's interpretation
NASB, Wuest Translated	from the original languages with special attention to translating verb tenses properly

## STUDYTOOLS

Now let's consider some important Bible study tools. The first two of these are actually types of Bibles. A **parallel Bible** contains multiple translations of the Bible in side-by-side columns to make it easy for the reader to compare translations. An **interlinear Bible** contains the original Hebrew or Greek text with a word-by-word English translation below it. It will often also include the word's corresponding number in the Strong's Concordance, the transliteration (the conversion of the text into the English alphabet), and the parts of speech. For example, here is the word Jesus from Matthew 1 of the interlinear Bible on Biblehub.com:

2424 [e]	Strong's number
Iēsou	transliteration
Ἰησοῦ	original Greek word
of Jesus	English translation
N-GMS	part of speech (Noun-Genitive Masculine Singular)

This can be useful for researching the original meaning of particular words as they appear in the Bible. The important companion to an interlinear Bible is the **Strong's Exhaustive Concordance**, which contains a very long list of all the occurrences of all of the different Greek and Hebrew words used in the Bible. The *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* is essential to Bible study. Alongside the concordance we need a Bible dictionary. The two most well-known are the **Vine's Bible Dictionary** and the **Mounce's Bible Dictionary**. For many years, *Vine's* has been the standard; the more recent *Mounce's* claims to be more accurate and detailed.

Another handy book is the **Compact Bible Handbook**, which reviews all the books of the Bible and gives a simple summary, including the author, date of writing, and history surrounding the writing of the book. This book is more reliable than many of the summaries available on the internet because the publisher, Thomas Nelson, has researched and edited this information to make sure it is as accurate as possible.

## HOW TO USE THEM

Now we will look at several examples that show us how to use these study tools.

### **Example: The Wrath of God**

For our first example, the wrath of God, we will start with the *Strong's Concordance*. To look up *wrath*, we turn to the w's and look down the column until we come to the word

*wrath*. Under it will be various sentences like “My *w* shall wax hot, and I will,” followed by a Scripture reference, Ex 22:24. Here it lists the part of the verse containing the word we are looking for. The *w* in the sentence stands for *wrath*, and the reference tells where we can find this particular verse. The original *Strong's* was based on the KJV, but it is now available based on other translations as well. When looking up words, it is important to know exactly what we are looking for. A verse that says “God is angry” is not the same as a verse that talks about God’s *wrath*, because they are not translated from the same word.

At the very end of the *Strong's* listing, after the verse and the Scripture reference, is a number that refers to the dictionary section of the *Strong's*. For the verse above, that number is 639. To follow that number, we flip to the Hebrew section (the Old Testament is Hebrew and the New Testament is Greek), where we discover the particular Hebrew word translated as *wrath* in Exodus 22:24 is *aph*. Now we can look up this word in a Bible dictionary and get a thorough definition of what this word actually meant in Hebrew.

### **Example: The End of the Age**

Now consider Matthew 24:3, where the disciples ask three questions of Jesus that have often been read as referring to the end of the world or the endtimes. In the KJV it says, “*When shall these things be? What shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?*” According to the KJV, these questions seem to refer to the end of the world. But the NIV

translates it differently: “*When will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?*” This begs the question: Is the end of the age the same as the end of the world? Here we need to figure out who translated this correctly. To do so, we could look up the words *world* (KJV) or *age* (NIV) to find the original Greek word, which is *aion*. To discover the meaning of *aion*, we turn to a Bible dictionary. When we look up the word *age*, the first word listed under it is *aion*, meaning “a period of time, age.” In other words, this is talking about a specific time period, not the end of the planet.

When we look back to the context of this verse, we see that in Matthew 21–24 Jesus had been declaring destruction about to come. In Matthew 24, He specifically said the temple was about to be destroyed. This is what He was talking about right before the disciples asked Him these three questions. Thus, logically, we can see they were asking Him about when these events He had just foretold would take place. They were not asking about His return, because at that point they did not even know He would be leaving. To read this passage as referring to the end of the world simply does not make sense according to the context and the definition of the word *aion*. Whether or not we understand this has a drastic impact on how we interpret this passage.

This is the importance of Bible study. Too many Christians are content to simply accept what their pastors or other teachers say without studying it for themselves. Instead, we need to be believers who know how to use Bible study tools and to research the meaning of words on our own. Then we will be better equipped to understand the Bible on our own and

also to know how to respond to the teachings we hear from others.

### **Example: Women in Ministry**

Now we will consider another example in much greater detail—the issue of women in ministry. Most of the teaching against women in ministry is based on three verses that are troubling because they seem to contradict what the rest of the Bible teaches. Whenever we encounter verses that seem to contradict the overarching messages of the Bible, it is a good time to pull out our Bible study tools and dig deeper. Here, we will do just that with these trouble verses related to women in the Church.

First, to set the proper background, we will consider the role of women in the Bible from the beginning. In the Garden of Eden, God created Eve as Adam's *helpmeet*. Quite a bit of study has been done on this word; simply put, it refers to an equal position. Adam and Eve were created equal, but then the Fall happened. As a result of the Fall, part of the curse on Eve says: "*Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you*" (Gen. 3:16). In other words, her desire would be to be equal with her husband, but he would rule over her. It is important to note that this curse was in the relationship between men and women, not between women and God. The curse did not change her standing before Him. He did not view her as lower than men, but as a result of the curse, men viewed her in that way. This is a subtle difference, but it is important to realize that the curse affected human relationships between



men and women—not human relationships with God.

We see the outworking on this reality in God's treatment of women throughout the Old Testament. For example, Miriam, the sister of Moses was a prophetess (see Exod. 15:20); Huldah was named as a prophetess (see 2 Kings 22:14); and Deborah was both a judge (senior political leader in the nation) and a prophetess (see Judg. 4:4). Even in the Old Testament system, God appointed women as high level spiritual and political leaders. That says something about how He sees women and whether or not He is okay with women in ministry.

We find a small example of the difference between God's ideal and men's in the story of Noah. When Noah and his family entered the ark, they entered in a specific manner that reflected the ideals of the culture they grew up in. They entered single file, first Noah, then his three sons, then his wife, and then his sons' wives (see Gen. 7:13). The men preceded the women. However, while they were on the ark, God specifically talked to Noah about how they should walk out of the ark: *"Go out of the ark, you and your wife, and your sons and your sons' wives with you"* (Gen. 8:16). In other words, He told them to go out as couples together, not separated by gender. This was how God wanted them to restart the planet, with equality between men and women. However, Noah disobeyed the order, and he and his family exited the ark in the same way they entered it—men first, women second.

The New Testament also gives us examples of women who held significant positions of leadership. The widow Anna is named as a prophetess (see Luke 2:36), which is significant,

because the prophet is the second highest tier of authority in the Church. *“God has placed in the church first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers...”* (1 Cor. 12:28). In the Church, apostles hold the highest level of authority, followed by prophets and then by teachers. The other five-fold gifts, pastor and evangelist, are not even on this list (see Eph. 4:11). It’s important to note, here, that biblical authority does not mean control. Simply put, having authority means having a responsibility to serve. The more authority one has, the more feet one is responsible to wash. According to this system, apostles and prophets have more authority than pastors. And though some people are very concerned about the idea of women as pastors, the Bible tells us about women who were prophets, and it even lists a woman who was an apostle—Junia.

Romans 16:7 says, *“Greet Andronicus and Junia, my fellow Jews who have been in prison with me. They are outstanding among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was.”* One of these two outstanding apostles was a woman. The name Junia came from the name of the Greek goddess Juno, who was sought to dilate the cervix during pregnancy. In other words, it was a very clearly female name. Some translations have changed it to a masculine form because the theology of the translators did not allow for a female apostle, but the original text makes it clear. Junia was a woman, and she was outstanding among the apostles. Because we have an example of a female apostle, and apostle is the highest position of authority in the Church, the logical conclusion is that women can also fill any of the other positions.

Throughout the Bible we find stories of women in authority, holding very high leadership positions, and God seems to have no problem relating to women in leadership or putting women into leadership. All of this sounds great until we get to the three trouble passages—First Corinthians 14, First Timothy 2, and First Peter 3.

First Corinthians 14:34–35 says:

*Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.*

Many scholarly articles and books have been written to explain these verses, which seem so different from the view of women throughout most of the Bible (as we have just observed). In brief, the simplest explanation of these verses is that they are actually a quote from a letter from the Corinthians to Paul.<sup>7</sup> In other words, this was not Paul's opinion. He was quoting what the Corinthians had said to him. The proof for this argument is as follows. The first step to understanding the New Testament letters properly, as we discussed in Chapter 1, is to read them from start to finish, not in small segments. So, to understand what Paul meant in chapter 14, we need to start reading in chapter 1. This gives us the whole context.

Reading this way, when we reach First Corinthians 7:1—which says, “*Now for the matters you wrote about...*”—we recognize that the chapters that follow are Paul's response to a

letter the Corinthians had sent him. As we continue reading, we come to chapter 11. There Paul talked about the head covering, and as part of that discussion, he said women can prophesy in church as long as they have their heads covered. Apart from the question of the head covering, which most scholars agree was a cultural mandate that does not apply to us today, the point here is *that women can speak in the Church*. Yet just a few chapters later, it says, “...it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.” If we have been reading from chapter 1, we recognize that this is a contradictory message to what Paul just said three chapters earlier. Because we know it is a response letter, and we recognize the significant inconsistency between a large part of chapter 11 and two verses in chapter 14, we start to ask questions. We start to dig for an explanation instead of accepting these verses at face value, because we recognize that something does not add up.

At the end of chapter 14 we find another clue, if we are familiar with the New Testament and the general message of the apostle Paul. Verse 34 says, “*Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says.*” Anyone who is familiar with the writings of Paul will realize this does not sound like him. Paul was the champion of grace, not the Law. He wrote the entire Book of Galatians reprimanding believers for returning to the Law, and in most of his writings Paul is anti-Law because the Law was associated with the old covenant. In fact, Paul referred to the Law as “*the ministry that brought death*” (2 Cor. 3:7). Therefore, the heavy-handed phrase “*as the law says*” should raise big warning flags. It is a clear indicator that these two verses are not Paul’s voice. Further, if we refer back

to the Law, we will find that it does not actually say anything about women being silent. It simply does not make sense. Because we know this is a response letter, it is easy to see these verses must have been a quote from the Corinthians' letter to Paul.

This becomes even clearer when we read the verses following this passage, in which Paul actually rebuked the ideas just expressed in verses 34–35:

*Or did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached? If anyone thinks they are a prophet or otherwise gifted by the Spirit, let them acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord's command. But if anyone ignores this, they will themselves be ignored. Therefore, my brothers **and sisters**, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way (1 Corinthians 14:36–40).*

Here, in contrast to the statement “*as the law says,*” Paul said, “*let them acknowledge what I am writing to you is the Lord's command.*” He also included women in his injunction to prophesy and speak in tongues. He ended with the appeal to order, which actually referred back to the verse just prior to this quotation from the Corinthians: “*For God is not a God of disorder but of peace—as in all the congregations of the Lord's people*” (1 Cor. 14:33). These two statements, verses 33 and 40, are bookends to Paul's rebuke. The essence of that rebuke, in modern language, could go something like this. “Here is what you are saying: ‘Let's oppress the women so our

services are good.’ No! Do not do that. Who do you think you are? Did you create the Word of God? No. You are off-track. Instead, you need to do what I am telling you, which is the Lord’s command. Let everyone prophesy—men and women—and do not forbid speaking in tongues, making sure everything is done in a fitting and orderly way.”

All of this is clear just through reading the passage in context, without any in-depth study. When we look at the Greek, it only confirms these conclusions. In the Greek, we find a mark right at the beginning of verse 34. This mark, called an *eta* in Greek, indicates a rhetorical question or quotation of someone else. Clearly, verses 34–35 are a quote from the Corinthians’ letter to Paul and, as such, should not be taken as a mandate for us. Instead, we should learn from the Corinthians’ error in these statements, which Paul so strongly rebuked.

The second trouble passage is First Timothy 2:11–15:

*A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.*

This passage is very strange, especially the statement, “*women will be saved through childbearing.*” This should

raise some questions, as it clearly contradicts the message of the gospel. To find our answers, we must start with reading the letter from start to finish. This is especially important in First Timothy, because the chapters are divided arbitrarily and do not follow the logical breaks in the text. First Timothy is comprised of an introduction, three trustworthy sayings, and a conclusion. However, the chapter divisions are not aligned with these parts. Here is the basic outline:

Introduction	1:1–1:14
Saying 1	1:14–2:15
Saying 2	3:1–4:8
Saying 3	4:9–6:10
Conclusion	6:11–21

The passage we are looking at is the final part of the section on trustworthy saying #1, which says:

*Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life. Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen (1 Timothy 1:15–17).*

This is the context for the statement above. After making this trustworthy statement, Paul then specifically addressed Timothy (see 1 Tim. 1:18–20). Then he gave instructions for the entire church (see 1 Tim. 2:1–7). Afterward, he addressed the men specifically (see 1 Tim. 2:8) and the women specifically (see 1 Tim. 2:9–10). Then, in the last five verses of this section, Paul changed his address from the plural (everyone, all men, all women) to the singular—a woman. In other words, in verses 11–15, he was not addressing all women but one woman in particular. Only in verse 15 did he switch back to the plural when he said *women* will be saved through childbearing.

Commentators who have looked at this passage closely say Timothy received this letter while the leader of the church at Ephesus, where Paul had previously been for two years teaching every day in the school of Tyrannus (see Acts 19:9). Now Timothy was the lead apostle there, and he was running into some issues because Ephesus was the home of the cult of Diana (or Artemis). One of the teachings of the Diana cult was that Eve, as the pinnacle of creation, was formed first and that Adam was actually the one who was deceived in the Garden, not Eve. Therefore, they pointed fingers of blame at men. The problem was, when these female idol worshipers got saved, they had this wrong theology about the creation story that gave them a negative attitude toward men. Many scholars believe there may have been an individual woman who was causing Timothy problems.<sup>8</sup> That is why Paul said, *“I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man.”* That is the historical context.

If we look up the Greek word translated as *authority*, we



discover even greater clarity. The Greek word used here, *authentian*, is not the usual word for authority. *Authentian* means violent usurping of authority. Whereas authority is a good thing, *authentian* is never good. And Paul was not implying that he would allow men, but not women, to violently usurp authority. In other words, gender is not the issue being addressed here. Instead, he was saying, in essence, “I would not allow *that woman* to keep usurping your authority by disrupting what is happening in your services.” Paul was pointing out this woman’s inappropriate behavior; the problem was not with her gender but with her actions. People were literally jumping up in the middle of services and trying to take over with their own bizarre teachings. This is what Paul was talking about. And this is why he clarified the order of the creation story, to correct the wrong teaching this woman was perpetuating, not to put women down.

All this is helpful, but it does not explain verse 15: “*But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.*” For insight on this, we need to turn to an interlinear Bible. Here is how the interlinear looks for the first part of the verse:

4982 [e]	1161 [e]	1223 [e]	3588 [e]	5042 [e]
sōthēsetai	de	dia	tēs	teknogonias
σωθήσεται	ὅτι	διὰ	τῆς	τεκνογονίας
she will be saved	moreover	through	----	childbearing
V-FIP-3S	Conj	Prep	Art-GFS	N-GFS

The literal translation here is “She will be saved moreover

through [blank] childbearing.” The NIV smoothes it out this way: “She will be saved through childbearing.” But what the translators left out is the word *tēs*, which is the article *the*. They left it out because it did not seem to make sense. What does *the childbearing* mean? English sometimes omits articles, and the translators thought that made the most sense here. The YLT actually includes *the*, but most other translations omit it. That is very unfortunate, because this little word clarifies the meaning of the sentence significantly. *The childbearing* refers to the salvation that came through the child who was born—Jesus. Women (and all of us) are saved through the childbearing, which brought about the offspring who fulfilled the Genesis 3:15 prophecy to the devil: “*And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.*” When Jesus came, He forever crushed the head of the enemy. This is the real meaning of this passage.

The third troubling passage is First Peter 3:7:

*Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.*

Many people use this verse to relegate women to a weaker or lower position. This is one of the few places where the KJV actually has a more accurate translation: “*weaker vessel.*” If we look up the Greek word translated as “partner” or “vessel,” we will discover it refers to earthenware—to cups, bowls, and plates. So when Peter talked about a weaker vessel, he was

comparing women to fragile earthenware, like fine china. It completely changes the way we read this if we insert the literal meaning in the verse:

*Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the [fine china] and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.*

Peter was actually making a statement about the quality of women, that because of their great quality they needed to be treated with consideration and respect—not that they have less value as the weaker partner. The idea of being considerate and respectful because the woman is the weaker partner does not even make sense. In modern terms, he was saying to treat them like fine china. Fine china doesn't go in the dishwasher or the microwave. We need to handle it in a particular way. We need to wash it by hand carefully and put it in a glass-fronted china closet so everyone can see how lovely it is. If women are fine china, men might be compared to Corelleware dishes, which do not break very easily. The way women need to be treated is different from how men need to be treated, and Peter was simply reminding them to treat their wives respectfully as co-heirs in Christ.

In these examples, we see how simple it is to use Bible study tools and dig deeper into the Scripture. A wealth of information and illumination is awaiting our discovery.

## REVIEW TEST QUESTIONS

1. Some Bibles translate “thought-for-thought,” whereas the Young’s Literal Bible translates \_\_\_\_\_.
2. “My w\_\_\_\_\_ shall wax hot, and I will...” What would the w stand for here if it was italicized and in a *Strong’s Concordance*?
3. If men are Corelleware, women are like what?  
\_\_\_\_\_

## KEY TERMS

King James Version	Weymouth Literal Translation
New King James Version	paraphrase
Geneva Bible	Message Bible
Bishop’s Bible	New American Standard Bible
New International Version	Weust translation
English Standard Version	parallel Bibles
literal Bible	Interlinear Bibles
Young’s Literal Translation	Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance
Vine’s Bible Dictionary	Mounce’s Bible Dictionary

## RELATED MATERIALS

Harold L. Eberle, *Living and Dying with the King James Bible*.

George Knight and James Edwards, Eds., *Compact Bible Handbook*.

William D. Mounce, *Mounce's Complete Expository Bible Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*.

James Strong, *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*.

W. E. Vine, *Vine's Complete Expository Bible Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*.

<sup>5</sup> A small book by Harold Eberle, *Living and Dying with the King James Bible*, explains the history behind the KJV and some of the significant issues with it.

<sup>6</sup> The best tool for exploring a variety of Bible translations and study tools is [www.Biblehub.com](http://www.Biblehub.com). It is updated regularly and is free.

<sup>7</sup> Grady, *10 Lies the Church Tells Women*, 57.

<sup>8</sup> Cunningham and Hamilton, *Why Not Women?*, 205–216.

## four



# **FILTERS: CALVINISM**

As people living so many years after the beginning of the Church, we culturally inherit certain perceptions and beliefs about God and the Bible. These form a subconscious filter or lens through which we then read the Bible. This is a reality for all of us, no matter our background; our experiences and what we have heard from others have shaped us in particular ways that affect the way we read and understand the Bible. These filters cause us to see everything from a particular perspective. The question for serious students of the Bible is: How can we study this book, knowing the history and context, without all our filters interfering with our understanding? While it is

impossible to completely avoid filters, if we examine some of the most common filters, we will be more able to step outside the filters as we read and understand Scripture. That is what we will attempt to do in this and the following two chapters.

Part of this involves releasing our desire to have a complete understanding of God and the Bible that will never change and that never needs to be challenged. Because Christianity is about relationship with the living God, we need to understand our relationship with God and our understanding of Him through the Bible in the same way we understand a marriage relationship. It is always growing and deepening. A husband should never reach a point where he says, “This is what I understand of my wife. That’s all I need to know, so please don’t challenge any of my perceptions of her.” Instead, a husband and wife are constantly evolving in their relationship with each other. In the same way, the more we study the Bible, the more we should realize it may contain something more than we’ve heard or understood thus far in our lives. We discover truths we never saw before, and we discover that some of what we have believed might be wrong. Examining our filters helps us do this. It helps us step outside of our assumptions and look at Scripture in a new way.

## THE HISTORY OF CALVINISM

One of the oldest and most prominent filters in Christianity is **Calvinism**. Naturally, when we hear the word *Calvinism*, we think of John Calvin in the 1500s, but though he formalized the system known as Calvinism, it originated long before him.

Calvinism as we observe it has been around for most of Church history. It did not specifically come out of the Reformation, and it is not specifically protestant. In fact, the Roman Catholic Church also has been very deeply influenced by Calvinism because the originator of it was a Catholic. Calvin gleaned his ideas from St. Augustine, who lived in AD 354–430, in the same time period as Eusebius, in the early years of Church history. Augustine was a major philosopher of his day, even before he became a Christian, and he was heavily influenced by Greek philosophy. Augustine's mentor in his early years, Plotinus, was a follower of Plato, and before Augustine became a Christian, he espoused Plotinus' revisions of Plato's works. So in a very real sense, what we now know as Calvinism actually originated with Plato.

Because of the longevity of this belief system, it has influenced almost every branch of Christianity, even those who do not claim to be Calvinist. The difficulty with this is that in our modern day very few Christians understand Greek philosophy and do not recognize when its ideas are being placed on top of Scripture to interpret it in a certain way. These ideas are subconscious filters in our minds, causing us to believe and interpret in a certain way without even understanding why. For this reason, it is important for all Christians to understand the beliefs and presuppositions of Calvinism in order to recognize how that filter has influenced their perception of the Bible.

IMMUTABLE, IMPASSABLE, AND TIMELESS



Calvinism rests upon the foundation of three ideas about the nature of God—**immutable** (unchanging), **impassable** (without emotion), and **timeless**. The Greek philosophers Plato, Aristotle, and Socrates, who lived between 500 and 300 BC, asked the question, “If there is a creator god who has created everything, what would he be like?” Approaching it with only a philosopher’s understanding, they came up with three different attributes of this creator god: immutable, impassable, and timeless. This is the origin of the foundation of Calvinism.

Calvinism is a systematic theology, a brilliantly thought out philosophy and system of interpretation. It is not based on a straight reading of the Bible but on philosophical ideas about God that are then used to interpret Scripture. It can boast of some of the greatest intellectual minds in Christian history, and even today some respectable and brilliant leaders, such as R.C. Sproul, espouse it. However, the fact that it is brilliant and well thought out does not mean it always makes sense of Scripture. When people approach Scripture with the lens of Calvinism, approximately 80 percent of the Bible fits nicely with Calvinism, but they then need to figure out how to make the other 20 percent fit their system. We see this clearly in the three foundational concepts of Calvinism.

Calvinism
Immutable
Impassable
Timeless

# Immutable

The belief that God is unchanging is prominent throughout Church history. After all, Hebrews 13:8 says, “*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.*” The idea that God doesn’t change is very comforting. He will always be loving and kind and righteous. The Bible makes this clear. However, it is important to note the difference between saying God cannot change and saying God cannot change His mind. The Bible does tell us God is unchanging in His character and integrity, but it does not tell us God does not change His mind. However, many people, including many prominent teachers and theologians throughout history, believe God does not change in any way, not even His mind. This is the Calvinist position. For example, the classic by A.W. Tozer, *The Attributes of God*, Vol 2, contains a chapter on the immutability of God. The problem with the idea of immutability is that the Old Testament says in many different places that God changed His mind (see Exod. 32:14; 33:1–3, 14; Num. 16:20–35; 41–48; Deut. 9:13–29, 1 Kings 21:21–29; 2 Chron. 12:5–8; Jer. 26:2–3, 19; Amos 7:1–6; Jonah 3:10).

How does one understand such verses in the light of immutability? Those who approach them with the filter of Calvinism will assume these verses cannot possibly mean God actually changed His mind, because they believe He does not change. Thus, when they read the story of God deciding to obliterate Israel until Moses argued with God and convinced Him to relent, they say it cannot possibly mean God changed

His mind, even though the text clearly says, “*Then the LORD relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened*” (Exod. 32:14). When this is read according to the Calvinist mindset, the only logical conclusion is that God was playing a game with Moses. He did not actually change His mind but had orchestrated all along that Moses would have this conversation with Him and the end result would be the sparing of Israel. Likewise, when they read Genesis 6:6, where it says, “*The LORD regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled,*” they say it cannot possibly mean He actually regretted something, because a God who never changes cannot experience regret.

This sort of rationalizing of a scripture to make it fit with one’s filter is called an **anthropomorphism**, a human explanation of the divine. In this way, people say, the Bible can’t really mean what it seems to mean, because that would violate their rational beliefs about the nature of God. This is very common among Calvinists, because they are working with a system based on human philosophy, not on the Bible. It is philosophy that has told them God is immutable and cannot change His mind, not the Word of God.

## Impassable

The same happens with *impassable*, the concept that God doesn’t experience emotion. The Greek philosophers valued stoicism and considered emotion part of one’s lower nature—something to be suppressed and overcome. They tried to live

their lives with complete emotional detachment. Therefore, they believed a perfect god could not possibly have emotion. However, when we look at the Bible we realize just how much of it one needs to change in order to believe God is without emotion. The Bible is full of statements about God's emotions—anger, pleasure, love, joy, and so forth. For example, according to the original language, Jesus jumped and spun with joy when the disciples returned from their ministry trip and reported that all the demons had been cast out and the sick healed (see Luke 10:21). Jesus is the exact representation of the Father (see Heb. 1:3), and He displayed a lot of emotion during His life on earth. Clearly, the idea of an impassable God is not present in Scripture.

Thus, in order to believe God is impassable, people have to make up all sorts of explanations (anthropomorphisms) for why the Bible cannot actually be describing an emotional God. Because this concept is so illogical, many Calvinists are inconsistent on this point. They believe God is impassable, but they also talk about His anger. It is as though they believe God is capable of having certain (negative) emotions but not other more positive ones. It is easy to see how a belief like this can inhibit our ability to understand God as our Father. If He has no emotion or only angry emotion, that gives us a cold and negative relationship with our Father.

## Timeless

The ideas of immutability and impassability are closely

connected to the third foundation of Calvinist thought—timelessness. Plato taught that if a god of the universe exists, he must be emotionless *because* of the concept of timelessness.<sup>9</sup> If God is outside of time in this manner, then logically He would never change and He would never have emotion. God would never be angry or surprised about events on earth because He has always known about them. This concept is very popular among Christians. It sounds really spiritual and seems logical to say God lives in a realm where there is no time. Starting with this idea, we can extrapolate using Scriptures that seem to support it, such as the promise that He sees the end from the beginning (see Isa. 46:10), every detail and outcome of our lives. From this we conclude He knows every little detail of everything that is going to happen all the time. The famous Christian writer C.S. Lewis wrote about the timelessness of God, saying that if we were to see all of human history as a timeline that was literally only an inch long, then God is outside of it looking at the whole inch all at the same moment.<sup>10</sup>

Yet once again the Bible gives us a different picture. For example, in the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, angels, including the Angel of the Lord, came to visit Abraham. The Lord told Abraham He had heard the prayers coming up from Sodom and Gomorrah, and He had come to investigate what was happening, to see if it was really as horrible as it had been reported:

*Then the LORD said, “The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous that I will go down and see if what they have done is as bad*

*as the outcry that has reached me. If not, I will know”*  
(Genesis 18:20–21).

If we think of God as timeless, we have to ask: Why would God come down in the form of the Angel of the Lord, along with two angels, to investigate? Shouldn't He already know? It doesn't fit with the idea of Him being outside of time. Once the Angel of the Lord assessed Sodom and Gomorrah and decided the cities needed to be destroyed, He then returned to tell Abraham, and Abraham bargained with God about how many righteous people would be sufficient to save the cities. If we read this story through the lens of a timeless God, the only logical conclusion is that God was playing a game with Abraham, not engaging him in a legitimate way. In other words, according to this view, God knew Abraham would stop at ten, and He knew ten righteous people didn't exist in the city, but He allowed Abraham to barter with Him so Abraham would feel better about God's decision to destroy the cities. In this way, people explain away what the Bible says in order to protect their doctrine. The end result of this idea of timelessness is a God who is much less relational, because He already has everything figured out and we are essentially pawns in His plan. But when examined at face value, this story clearly shows us God is not outside of time and knowledgeable of all that will ever happen.

We see this also in another story. When the Israelites were burning their infant children as sacrifices to the idol Molech, God said through the prophet Jeremiah how shocked He was that they would do such a thing:

*They built high places for Baal in the Valley of Ben Hinnom to sacrifice their sons and daughters to Molek, though I never commanded—nor did it enter my mind—that they should do such a detestable thing and so make Judah sin (Jeremiah 32:35).*

Here He actually said He never imagined they would do it. In other words, He did not know it in advance.

Along with the idea that God is outside of time is the idea that heaven is outside of time. But the Bible clearly shows otherwise. The apostle John, when recounting his vision in the Book of Revelation, said it was silent in heaven for half an hour (see Rev. 8:1). Likewise, an angel told Daniel he fought the Prince of Persia in the spirit realm for twenty-one days (see Dan. 10:12–13). Both of these stories indicate some sort of time in the spirit realm. Not only that, but the Bible tells us the cross changed reality, both in the natural and the spiritual. That means the spirit realm experienced change. If the spiritual realm was truly timeless, nothing could ever change, because change indicates progression, which requires time. Further, the Bible tells us at some point in the future the devil will be taken out of the pit and thrown into the lake of fire (see Rev. 20:1–3, 7–10). This is a spiritual event that happens in a spiritual place (the lake of fire); it is not a reality yet but will happen in the future. In other words, the spiritual realm has a timeline. It may look different from time as we understand it, but that does not mean time does not exist at all in the spiritual realm.

ARMINIANISM

Calvinism	Arminianism
Immutable	
Impassable	
Timeless	Timeless

No discussion of Calvinism is complete without considering Arminianism, a reaction to Calvinism developed by Jacobus Arminius. Arminianism is not the opposite of Calvinism; it is a response and a challenge to it. Arminianism actually holds to some of the same foundations as Calvinism. It also says God is timeless, but it is more flexible regarding whether or not God can change His mind and whether or not He has emotion. In response to the Calvinist emphasis upon the sovereignty of God, Arminians emphasize the free will God has given to humanity. Arminianism is not a well-thought-out system like Calvinism is, but it has the ability to poke holes in the doctrines of Calvinism.<sup>11</sup>

## OPEN THEISM

Another position is called **Open Theism**, also sometimes known as the *Open View of God*, the *Open View of the Future*, the *Open View*, or *Openness*. One of the most well-known leaders in Open Theism is Gregory Boyd, a highly respected pastor and theologian. Before Boyd was a man named Clark Pinnock (1937–2010), who was a pioneer of Open Theism.<sup>12</sup>



Open Theism is the far end of the spectrum, opposite to Calvinism. Arminianism is a response to Calvinism, yet it does not completely challenge the foundations of the system. By contrast, Open Theism is actually another system like Calvinism, but it is completely opposite in its conclusions. Calvinists say the primary trait of God is His *sovereignty*, that He is in control of everything. Arminians say His primary trait is the *free will* He has given to humanity, enabling us to make choices. In contrast to both of these emphases, Open Theists say the primary trait of God is that He is *relational*.

As a result, Open Theists say God has emotion; God cannot change His nature, but He can change His mind; and God walks in time. Open Theism does not have the same longevity as Calvinism. It is a newer concept that is not a response or a philosophy. Open Theism attempts to read the Bible without a filter. This is very far from the way Calvinists approach Scripture, and many Calvinists and Arminians have called Open Theism heresy because it comes to such contradictory conclusions on these three points. However, in the last few years, Open Theism has gained much more credibility, and a growing number of leaders are beginning to teach it.

Calvinism	Arminianism	Open Theism
Immutable		Changes His Mind
Impassable		Emotion
Timeless	Timeless	Walks in Time

Not only does Open Theism challenge the Calvinist belief in a God without emotion, but it also questions the validity of the immutability of God. Simply put, what the Open Theist is saying is, “I can’t write everything off as an anthropomorphism. God might actually have emotions, and He might sometimes make a different decision. A husband’s character does not change if he makes a different decision. We are the Bride of Christ, and if our groom, Jesus, makes a different decision, it will not change the nature of His character.” This directly challenges the idea of immutability.

Lastly, Open Theists contradict the Calvinist belief that God is outside time, believing instead that He walks inside time. This is a very different view. If God is walking inside time, we get a strikingly different understanding of His nature. *Outside of time* implies a distance; it does not have the same relational closeness as is implied by the idea of God *walking in time*. Instead of thinking of God as out there, knowing everything while we stumble around and work it out with Him, the Open Theist thinks of God as walking alongside us in a very relational way. Open Theism points out the problems with the idea of timelessness through passages like Genesis 22, where God tests Abraham by commanding him to sacrifice Isaac. To the Calvinist mindset, the need to test someone does not make sense, because God already knows all. He has seen every little bit of everything. If He knows what people will do, He should not need to test them. We see the same thing in Deuteronomy 8:2, where Moses said to the Israelites,

*Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years, to humble and test*

*you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands.*

Here it clearly says God needed to test them in order to know what was in their hearts, which is really hard to understand through the Calvinistic system.

By contrast, Open Theism sees God's knowledge of the end from the beginning in a directional sense, in the same way a GPS knows the way from the beginning of a road trip to the end. And if we get off track, headed in the wrong direction, the GPS recalculates to get us going back toward the designated end. In other words, according to Open Theists, God does know the end from the beginning. He knows the process of getting from the beginning to the end, and He walks it with us. He is in the car with us on our road trip. When held up against Scripture, this view of God inside time actually fits very well. Over and over we have the sense of God walking inside time with people while, at the same time, certain things are also predetermined. The Bible clearly shows us some events are predetermined, like the second coming of Christ. As well, Jesus' death on the cross was predetermined before it happened, as we see in the very accurate prophecies in the Bible about when and how it would happen. At the same time, things can change, and God can change His mind about how to approach something or what path to take.

For someone coming from a Calvinist perspective, such a drastic shift can be difficult to accept. Many people feel leery of new ideas. They believe we need to stick to the way the early Church fathers taught. But this fear is based on a

misconception about how much people in the past really understood. Consider some of the facts:

- The New Testament was not canonized until nearly AD 400, meaning the early Christians for several centuries only had access to the Old Testament.
- The Bible was not translated into the common languages until the late 1300s; prior to that, Scripture was only written and read in Latin, meaning most people did not understand it or have access to it.
- The Bible existed only in handwritten copies and was, therefore, very rare until the 1500s, when the Gutenberg Press was invented, enabling the printing and distributing of Bibles in multiple languages.
- In the 1500s, Martin Luther also brought back the *basic* understanding of salvation by grace through faith to the Church. Prior to that, in large part, it had been lost for hundreds of years.
- Until the early 1900s, the Church had, for the most part, lost the revelation of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. That is only a little more than one hundred years ago.

Considering that the majority of Christians prior to the 1500s did not have access to a Bible or even understand the basic salvation message, we cannot fairly say they understood the Bible or the gospel message better than we do. Certainly some of the early Church leaders had great revelation about the Scripture, and we should glean from them. The point is, the

Church as a whole is growing in its understanding of the gospel and the Bible. We learn from those who came before us, and collectively our revelation of God continues to progress. This means new ideas and new understandings are not bad as long as they fit with the Scripture.

Let us not forget that a typical eighth grade student nowadays knows more about geography, politics, economics, and science than John Calvin did at his smartest moment. At this time in history, we have a significantly greater access to knowledge than any other generation prior. Those who lived in previous eras did the best they could in the time they were living in, but they did not have the same degree of access to information that we do. We can take what they had and learn from it, either to agree or disagree, but we can still learn from it. It is our responsibility to decide for ourselves whether to move on or stay with exactly what they said. Differing beliefs will always exist; even John Calvin had Jacobus Arminius as a contemporary to argue with him and sharpen iron with iron (see Prov. 27:17). In other words, this kind of dialogue and examination of ideas helps us grow. Blindly accepting what others say without examining it against the Bible helps no one.

## MOLINISM

Of course, many different views exist on these three foundational ideas about the nature of God. Here we will mention only one more, Molinism.

Calvinism	Arminianism	Open View	Molinism
Immutable		Changes His Mind	
Impassable		Emotion	
Timeless	Timeless	Walks In Time	Knows Every Potential Path

One of Molinism's best teachers is the philosopher and theologian William Lane Craig. In some ways, Molinism is similar to Open Theism; it depicts God as walking with us (like Open Theism), but it also says God knows every possibility of what could happen. Using the previous analogy of a GPS, the molinistic view is that God knows every road that exists. He knows every possible way to get from here to there. This seems like a good possibility. By contrast, Open Theism says God is aware of every possibility but at the same time chooses to limit Himself to living in the present with us—as well as knowing certain things that will absolutely happen in the future.

## TULIP

Now that we've looked at the foundational ideas of Calvinism, as well as several different views on those ideas, we will examine the five main points of Calvinism, which are summed up in the acronym TULIP:

<h3>Calvinism's Five Points</h3>
----------------------------------

Total Depravity
Unconditional Election
Limited Atonement
Irresistible Grace
Perseverance of the Saints

If people believe God is immutable, impassable, and timeless, they will end up being Calvinists. That is the foundation. Built upon that foundation are these five principles, which we will examine briefly.<sup>13</sup>

## 1. Total Depravity

The concept of **total depravity** tells us everyone is born with what is called **original sin**, or sin that is passed through the bloodline from Adam to every human. According to this view, sin is in the human heart inherently, and humans have no ability to master it. This concept originated with Saint Augustine, who struggled a great deal with sexual sin, which he taught about in his work *The City of God*.<sup>14</sup> He explained his belief in total depravity by arguing that original sin is passed down through the generations through sexual contact, which Augustine believed was sinful and evil. Thus, the creation of a child for another generation, to Augustine, required an act of sin that imparted sin into the child, causing

the child to also grow up with original sin. Clearly, Augustine did not have a very high view of sexual intimacy or understand it as a gift from God within marriage. He took his understanding, based on his immoral lifestyle before he became a Christian and his struggle to overcome it afterward, and he derived the doctrine now known as total depravity. This concept has been passed down and, in large part, has made sex a taboo subject in many churches and negatively influenced the prevailing Christian perception of sex. Thus, some people view it as a sort of “necessary evil” and many have difficulty talking about it or being free to enjoy it within marriage.

Those who disagree with total depravity point to Genesis 4, where God spoke with Cain after Abel’s sacrifice had been accepted but Cain’s rejected. Cain became angry, and God said to him, “...*Sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it*” (Gen. 4:7). The concepts of original sin and total depravity teach that sin is in our hearts inherently, and we have no ability to master it. Yet in this passage God referred to sin as an outside force seeking to master Cain, and He told Cain he had the ability to rule over it. It was Cain’s choice whether he let the sin into his heart or kept it out. This is the opposite view, that humans are born innocent. But because humans live in a fallen world and have a fallen nature, at some point all people will chose to open the door to sin. Some people refer to this as the **age of accountability**.

Because Calvinists believe humans are inherently sinful from birth, many Calvinistic churches practice infant baptism. They are concerned infants will die before they are old enough



to confess faith in Jesus and, as a result, will go to hell. By contrast, those who believe we are born innocent and later chose to allow sin into our lives usually do not baptize people until they are old enough to make the conscious decision for Christ. According to this view, humans choose to do wrong of their own will rather than choosing to do wrong because they are inherently wrong and sin naturally flows out of them.

## 2. Unconditional Election

The second point, **unconditional election**, which is also sometimes called *double predestination*, teaches that God has absolutely chosen who goes to heaven and who goes to hell. None of us know who will and who will not, but God already knows, and He will work all things out according to that plan. According to this view, because God knows the end from the beginning and is outside of time, our responsibility is simply to come into alignment with what He already knows and walk it out. God has already picked His people, and He has already rejected the rest. This idea undermines the impetus for evangelism, yet Calvinists still evangelize because they don't know who the elect are and we are commanded evangelize. In other words, they do it in obedience in order to step into their predestination.

## 3. Limited Atonement

**Limited atonement** is the third point of Calvinism. It teaches that Jesus' blood was shed only for those who are unconditionally elected. In other words, when Jesus died on the cross and shed His blood, not a drop of His blood was wasted. He died and shed His blood only for the elect, not for those who are predestined to go to hell. Many Calvinists have decided to break away from this point of Calvinism, saying they believe in unlimited atonement—that Jesus died for everyone but not everyone is elect. Such Calvinists often refer to themselves as four-point Calvinists.

## 4. Irresistible Grace

Forth, the principle of **irresistible grace** teaches that the elect, whom Jesus died for, cannot resist salvation. They will not be able to get away from it, no matter how badly they sin or how hard-hearted they may be. No matter their situation, they will become Christians because Jesus shed His blood for them and they are unconditionally elected. They cannot possibly die in their sins.

## 5. Perseverance of the Saints

Lastly, the principle of **perseverance of the saints** can be summed up by the phrase, *once saved, always saved*. The verse commonly quoted to support this position is First John 2:19:

*They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us.*

Practically speaking, this means if an individual has been in the Church for years and seemed a sincere believer, but then decides to walk away from God, that person was never really saved. Because Calvinists believe Christians are unconditionally elected to receive of the limited atonement of Christ and are under the influence of irresistible grace, they believe it is impossible for a true Christian to fall away from God. In John, Jesus said He has His people in His hands, and God has Jesus and His people in His hands (see John 3:35–36; 10:29). This is used to reassure believers that they do not need to be concerned about falling away.

Opposing views point out that God's intention for His Son is a Bride (the Church) who is equally yoked with Him in the way we read about in Second Corinthians 6:14. In order for Christ to be equally yoked with His Bride, each needs to have a level of freedom in relationship, to the point that the Bride could pull away or have a hard heart. She needs to have a free will. Inside Calvinism, however, people cannot possibly choose to leave, because that choice would indicate they were never real Christians to begin with!

## THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD

The implications of what we've just covered come down to a question of sovereignty—Is God in control, or is He in

charge? Calvinists, Arminians, and Open Theists all agree that God is sovereign. However, Calvinists hold to a position called **absolute sovereignty**, which says God is in control; He holds absolute control over the events of the world. On the positive side, this means believers can lean on God's sovereignty and believe everything will work out for their good. God has a purpose behind everything, and He will take care of the issues in their lives. Calvinists put a strong emphasis on leaning on God because they believe God is absolutely in control.

However, this line of thinking means that when a tragedy happens, God is in control. People explain it by saying things like, "God works in mysterious ways," or "Everything happens for a reason." The logical conclusion of statements like these is that tragedy is God's judgment. The problem with the doctrine of absolute sovereignty is that if God is in control of everything, then when evil happens He is in control of that, too. This creates a very dark and confusing picture of a God who blesses, provides, protects, heals, and so forth; yet who is also behind abortion, rape, murder, incest, genocide, war, and every other evil. Calvinism justifies this by saying that because God is absolutely sovereign and lives in a timeless zone, even tragedy and evil are part of His foreordained plan. Even the devil, the father of evil, is seen as a puppet of God's sovereign will. This means resisting the devil is essentially the same as resisting God. In other words, Calvinists logically cannot wrestle with principalities, powers, wickedness, and rulers in high places (like Ephesians 6:5 says) if they believe God is the one orchestrating evil events.

Apart from the confusion it creates about the character of

God, the problem with the doctrine of absolute sovereignty is that it is difficult to find in Scripture. Instead of the sense that God is in *control* of everything and behind every event, we get the sense that God is in *charge*. These words are similar, but the difference carries huge implications. When we say God is in charge, we mean He is all-powerful and has authority over the entire universe and everything in it. However, it does not mean He controls every situation. In other words, if God is in charge (but not in control) then people are able to act against God's will. People can be influenced by the devil to do evil, and God has no part of it. If God is in charge, it means He is like a king sitting on His throne while many things, both good and bad, happen in the land. The land is filled with ambassadors, with people who have relationship with Him, and also with rebels, demons, and Satan. He sits on the throne as the ultimate authority, and He is all-powerful, but He is not the one causing all that happens in the land. This is the difference between being in control and being in charge.

If God controls everything, it means humans are not free to make choices. Freedom implies the ability to make a choice, to make the right or wrong choice out of personal will—not because it was predestined. The logical implications of the idea that God controls everything are a solid argument against the doctrine. For example, if a person is predestined to sin, that means God is the one who caused that sin. If that is true, that person can hardly be held responsible for that sin. Yet according to Calvinism, that person will be sent to hell for the sins that person was predestined by God to commit. Boiled down, the problem with absolute sovereignty is that it just does not logically make sense, and it has caused many thinking

people to become atheists because they cannot accept that sort of God.

Those who believe God is in charge but not in control come to a completely different conclusion regarding evil—one that is often termed the **warfare worldview**. When they see evil in the world, they believe it is the result of people who are influenced by the devil to make bad choices against God's will. But because they believe God is in charge and they are His ambassadors, they believe they have authority to do something about the evil. They can heal people, command storms to stop, raise people from the dead, and so forth. This line of thinking changes the question from, "Why did God let this happen?" to "Why did we let this happen?" It creates real ownership and personal responsibility based on the belief that heaven is the Lord's, and He has given the earth to humanity (see Ps. 115:16). He has given it to His people to have dominion and ownership and to be ambassadors to bring His heaven into the earth.

In this scenario, the devil is actually a free-agent rebel who is acting against God's will, and we get to resist him and make him submit to God's will. This aligns with the scriptural pattern, where Jesus trained His apostles to train the Church to heal the sick and cast out demons. In a very real way, humans are involved in this process; they are not simply puppets waiting upon God's sovereign will. They have been given authority to act. The implication of this authority is that God has actually given His people a measure of control, which means He cannot be in control of everything. According to the warfare worldview, we are ambassadors, our enemies are still here, and

we are in a war until every knee bows before Christ at some point in the future.<sup>15</sup>

Another implication of this debate between *in control* and *in charge* is the issue of God's will for our lives. If we think of God as a controlling God, we will continually ask ourselves whether what we're doing is God's will for us. If Jesus is the gate and the pasture is His Kingdom, when we enter His pasture as His sheep, we will expect Him to pluck each predestined blade of grass for us to eat one by one. By contrast, those who see God as in charge view themselves as having personal freedom and authority to make decisions as long as those decisions align with the nature and purpose of God's Kingdom. They believe, as sheep in the pasture of God's Kingdom, He's telling them they can eat any of the grass inside the pasture. In other words, people legitimately have choices, and there may not be only one right answer. According to this view, the will of God is not a rigid play-by-play plan for one's life but a way of living and being with God. We see this reality in the way the Bible talks about the will of God. For example, in First Thessalonians 5:16–18, Paul wrote: "*Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.*" Here, God's will is explained in general principles that can be applied in all scenarios in one's life. It is not about where to move or whom to marry but about the attitudes and practices that should be part of every season of life. In these verses, God is saying He wants us to be happy, to be in communication with Him, and to be content. These are the same three things that any good groom would want for his bride.

Similarly, First Peter 2:15, says, *“For it is God’s will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people.”* In other words, God’s will is for us to live with such integrity and character that we will silence ignorant and foolish people. In Philippians 2:13, which says, *“...for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose,”* we learn that God is actually in us, working out this state of being in His will. It is not just about actions and choices but about the state of being He is creating inside us. Likewise, Romans 12:2 says:

*Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

Here again, God’s will for us is in the big picture, not the details. His will for us is to have our minds renewed. This perspective on the will of God is supported by James 1:5, which says, *“If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.”* This isn’t talking about not knowing the will of God but about needing wisdom to make our own decisions. When we live inside the will of God as a state of being, we can find wisdom to make our day-to-day decisions. The disciples and early believers certainly modeled this way of living. They did not worry about making the right decision but operated on the principle of the green light. In other words, using the picture of a traffic stoplight, the light is green unless it turns red.



We see this in Acts 16:6:

*Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas.*

Their mission trip was blocked by the Spirit of Jesus. They did not start out their trip by asking God where they should go. They just decided to go somewhere, and if He intervened, then they went somewhere else. God had told them to preach the gospel, and they were doing that. They lived from the perspective of that larger will, without concern for the details of where. In the midst of that lifestyle, God sometimes gave them specific direction, as with the story above and this story later in the chapter:

*During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them (Acts 16:9–10).*

They were confident that if they made a wrong turn, God could block or redirect them. We can live with the same confidence. This knowledge enables us to live according to the principle of the green light and go for it, trusting God to stop

us if we are headed the wrong way.

## REVIEW TEST QUESTIONS

1. What does the term *anthropomorphism* mean?
2. Armenian theology is not the opposite of Calvinism; it is a \_\_\_\_\_ to Calvinism.
3. Calvinism didn't originate with John Calvin; it actually came from an earlier Church father named \_\_\_\_\_, and he adapted it from his mentor Plotinus, who was a student of the teachings of the philosopher \_\_\_\_\_.
4. What three words form the foundation of Calvinism?  
\_\_\_\_\_ means God is without emotion;  
\_\_\_\_\_ means He's unchangeable; and  
assuming that He is \_\_\_\_\_ makes Him  
come across as much less relational.
5. Open Theism says: (Yes or No)  
  
God has emotion \_\_\_\_\_  
  
He cannot change His mind \_\_\_\_\_  
  
He walks inside time with us \_\_\_\_\_
6. What are the five points of Calvinism? Write them out as the TULIP acronym:

T \_\_\_\_\_

U \_\_\_\_\_

L \_\_\_\_\_

I \_\_\_\_\_

P \_\_\_\_\_

7. Instead of expecting Jesus to pluck each individual predestined perfect blade of grass and feed it to us as His sheep, one blade at a time, what should our mindset be upon entering the pasture and His Kingdom?
8. God's will for us is a state of being, which can be summed up by what three things that mirror what a husband wants for his wife in a good marriage?

## KEYTERMS

Calvinism	original sin
immutable	age of accountability
impassable	unconditional election
timeless	limited atonement
anthropomorphism	irresistible grace
Arminianism	perseverance of the saints

Open Theism	absolute sovereignty
Molinism	warfare worldview
total depravity	

## RELATED MATERIALS

Gregory Boyd, *God at War: The Bible and Spiritual Conflict*.

Gregory Boyd, *God of the Possible*.

Gregory Boyd, *Is God to Blame?: Beyond Pat Answers to the Problem of Suffering*.

Gregory Boyd, *Satan and the Problem of Evil*.

Harold Eberle, *Who Is God?*

Dave Hunt, *What Love Is This?: Calvinism's Misrepresentation of God*.

David Steele, Curtis Thompson, and Lance Quinn, *The Five Points of Calvinism: Defined, Defended and Documented*.

<sup>9</sup> Plato, *Timaeus*, 7.38.

<sup>10</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 168.

<sup>11</sup> A good example of this can be found in Dave Hunt's book, *What Love Is This?: Calvinism's Misrepresentation of God*. In some of his other

books, Dave Hunt attacks the supernatural, victorious eschatology, and a lot of other biblical ideas in ways that are not helpful, but in this book he presents a useful critique of Calvinism.

<sup>12</sup> Two excellent books that explain the position of open theists are *God of the Possible*, by Gregory Boyd, and *Who Is God?* by Harold Eberle.

<sup>13</sup> A more thorough explanation of TULIP from a Calvinist perspective can be found in a recent book by three Calvinists, *The Five Points of Calvinism: Defined, Defended and Documented*, by David Steele, Curtis Thompson, and Lance Quinn.

<sup>14</sup> Augustine, *The City of God*, 14:16–26

<sup>15</sup> Gregory Boyd has written several compelling books on the issues related to absolute sovereignty: *Satan and the Problem of Evil*; *God at War: The Bible and Spiritual Conflict*; and *Is God to Blame?: Beyond Pat Answers to the Problem of Suffering*.

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**FILTERS:  
DISPENSATIONALISM,  
COVENANT THEOLOGY,  
AND NEW COVENANT  
THEOLOGY**

Now that we've examined Calvinism, the second major filter we need to understand is **dispensationalism**, along with the counter views of covenant theology and new covenant

theology. Each of these filters presents a view on human history and how God deals with humanity throughout history.

## DISPENSATIONALISM

Dispensationalism originated much more recently than Calvinism did, yet its impact has been far-reaching. Primarily, it was created and systematized by John Darby in the 1830s and spread through the popular Scofield Study Bible.<sup>16</sup> In this chapter, we will attempt to look at dispensationalism from an academic perspective in order to understand how dispensationalists see the world and how this view has influenced our perceptions of the Bible.

The main premise of dispensationalism is that the Bible can be understood by dividing it into time periods, called **dispensations**, starting with the Garden in Eden and continuing to the millennium in Revelation. In this way, human history is divided into seven major dispensations: the Garden; the Fall; the Flood; Abraham; Moses; the Church; and the Millennium.

The Seven Dispensations
The Garden
The Fall
The Flood
Abraham
Moses

The Church
The Millennium

These dispensations are based on a perceived pattern in human history: God creates a plan, humankind begins walking it out but eventually completely fails, and as a result God must start over with a new dispensation. In this way, dispensationalism is in part a fatalistic system, because it paints a filter over Scripture that always ends in utter failure.

In brief, the dispensational understanding of history goes something like this. God created an amazing Garden filled with innocence, but humans fell into sin. After the Fall, He restored them, gave them skins to cover themselves, and instituted a system of sacrifice. To dispensationalists, this is known as the **age of the conscience**. Now humans lived with an awareness of good and evil, which ultimately led to even more evil. Eventually, the planet became so evil God had to wipe out most of humanity with the Flood. Afterward, He reset the system again, this time turning to an **age of civil government**. Under this system, God told Noah not to allow murderers to go free. Blood cried from the ground, and justice was required. Eventually, into this dark world, Abraham was born, and God used him to introduce a new **age of faith** that spanned the period of the patriarchs. This dispensation failed when the Israelites ended up in bondage in Egypt for four hundred years and lost much of their revelation of the God of their forefathers. To remedy this problem, God raised up Moses, who delivered Israel from Egypt and introduced the **age of the Law**, which



lasted for 1,300 years. However, because Israel was terrible at following the Law, they were eventually exiled to Babylon and Assyria.

After a four hundred year period of silence (between the Old and New Testaments), God sent Jesus to institute the Church Age or the **age of grace**. This age, which began with Jesus' first coming, will culminate in His second coming. According to this system, in human history, we are in the midst of the Church Age. Since we are not yet at the end of this age, we have not yet completely failed in this system, but as with every other previous dispensation, failure is inevitable. This perspective sees failure and decline in the Church as a sign that we are nearing the end of this age (and therefore, the world). Many dispensationalists have divided the Church Age into a subcategory of seven periods according to the seven letters to the churches in Revelation 2–3. So the first letter describes the early Church, and so on until we get to the letter to the Laodicean church, which is said to describe the final part of the Church Age, or the **Laodicean age**. Because the Laodicean church was lukewarm and backslidden, this fits with the dispensational expectation that the Church at the end of the age will be declining, not rising up in victory.

At the very end of the Church Age, dispensationalists look forward to a brief period known as the endtimes, which includes the rapture, the seven-year tribulation, and the antichrist. Dispensationalists do not all agree on the specifics of how these endtime events will play out, but they all agree on their timing at the very end of the Church Age. As history is in its darkest hour, the Church Age will come to an end, and Jesus

will return to establish His millennial Kingdom, or the Kingdom Age. Because of this division between the Church and the Kingdom, all parts of the New Testament that speak of the Kingdom of God are assigned to the Kingdom Age, not our modern times. As a result, dispensationalists typically do not expect to see miraculous or supernatural events, because such things are reserved for the Kingdom. Certainly, they do not expect the Church to grow like a mustard seed into a large tree or like leaven working its way through the entire loaf (see Luke 13:18–21; Matt. 13:31–33). They only expect deceiving signs from false endtime prophets and widespread decline.

In those who have not fully studied the belief system but have been influenced by it, dispensationalism leads to a negative eschatology and causes people to struggle with the idea of advancing the Kingdom. Many charismatic believers have adopted portions of dispensational thinking without realizing it is actually theologically inconsistent to be a spirit-filled Kingdom believer and a dispensationalist, because dispensationalists believe the Church is declining, which is not the same as believing the Kingdom is advancing. Amazingly, some charismatic groups try to marry these two ideas of the advancing Kingdom and decline in the endtimes, but they are completely incompatible with each other.

While dispensationalists teach the world will get worse until the second coming, those who believe in the advancing Kingdom teach that the Kingdom of God is always increasing. They look to Daniel 2, which prophesied a stone (Christ) that would turn into a mountain (the Kingdom of God) and grow until it filled the whole earth (see Dan. 2:34–35, 45). According

to this image, the Kingdom is advancing and growing continuously. If that is the case, it is really hard to also believe we are in decline and will become the lukewarm Laodicean church. It's also difficult to believe we are in the Church Age and the Kingdom is not available to us—yet we are still going to try to advance this Kingdom that is not available. Dispensationalism is a real challenge, yet for us to grow it is the next filter that must be removed. Only when the lens of dispensationalism is removed will people be able to fully embrace the idea of the rising, advancing, progressive Kingdom in this present day.

## COVENANT THEOLOGY

The opposite view to dispensationalism is **covenant theology**. Instead of dividing history into dispensations, covenant theology sees history as one continuous line, believing that God has interacted with humankind in the same manner all throughout history and that each covenant is built on top of the previous covenant. Thus, a covenant theologian would say the new covenant revealed in the New Testament is a renewal of the old covenant. It is the same covenant, only updated and upgraded.

A covenant theologian also divides the Old Testament Law into three parts: ceremonial, civil, and moral. Ceremonial laws related to the ceremonies of the temple—how to handle atonement, how to kill animals, how to sprinkle the blood, and so forth. Civil laws addressed actions deserving of civil punishment. For example, if a young man cursed his parents,

they had to judge him and stone him to death (see Lev. 20:9). Moral laws related to incest, homosexuality, fornication, and all moral issues. By dividing the laws into three categories, the covenant theologian is able to say the moral laws still apply under the new covenant, but the ceremonial and civil laws do not. Thus, Jesus did not remove the entire Law of Moses but just a segment of it. In other words, the new covenant is simply a new addition to the old covenant, which remains intact.

Because the Bible does not actually indicate a division of the Law into three parts (it does not even show up in Church history until the thirteenth century<sup>17</sup>), this theory can lead to some unconventional understandings of Scripture. Inside covenant theology, the question is always, “What do we keep, and what did Jesus remove?” Because the Bible does not contain any dividing lines within the Law, these lines need to be determined, and where they should be drawn is highly debated. Followers of covenant theology are always asking questions like, “Can we get tattoos?” or “Can we eat shellfish and bacon?”

The key passage that undermines this viewpoint is Hebrews 8:7–10, where the author clearly referred to the new covenant:

*For if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another. But God found fault with the people and said: “The days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. It will not be like the*

*covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they did not remain faithful to my covenant, and I turned away from them, declares the Lord. This is the covenant I will establish with the people of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.”*

Here God clearly said the new covenant would be nothing like the covenant He had made with their ancestors. In other words, He was not *renewing* the old covenant but creating something totally different.

## NEW COVENANT THEOLOGY

A third view is **new covenant theology (NCT)**. Unlike covenant theology, new covenant theology recognizes a clear break between the old covenant and the new covenant. New covenant theologians say the new covenant is a completely new system and is nothing like the old covenant. However, they see it as a law-based covenant, which has caused them to go through the New Testament looking for every command and cataloguing them as the **new covenant laws**. Thus, while the old covenant had only 613 laws, the new covenant has 1,050 laws. New covenant theologians do not believe this is a problem because, as regenerated people with the Holy Spirit inside, we have the extra ability we need to keep this many additional laws.<sup>18</sup>

While we do live under a new covenant that is completely different from the old, nowhere in the Bible do we find support for the idea that it is a law-based covenant. Instead, in the New Testament, Jesus made it clear that the law of the new covenant is the law of love: *“My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you”* (John 15:12). Under the old covenant, people were commanded to love their neighbors as they loved themselves. In other words, they could only love others as much as they loved themselves. The new covenant raised the standard. According to John 15:12, our standard for how we love other people is not our love for ourselves but Jesus’ love for us. The law of the new covenant is simply love. Of course, those who are walking in love will not be filled with anger, bitterness, unforgiveness, malice, or any of the other sins in Scripture. In this way, love fulfills the law, making the list of 1,050 laws completely unnecessary.

Looking at these three perspectives on God’s relationship with humanity throughout different time periods of history, we can see that the Bible does in fact contain different time periods in which spiritual realities changed. However, the way these three systems divide history and explain the difference between the old and new covenants does not fit with Scripture’s explanation of the covenants. This is something we will examine more fully in coming chapters.

## **REVIEW TEST QUESTIONS**

1. John Nelson Darby created a fatalistic system that

divides the Bible into seven major categories by time periods. What is this system called?

## KEY TERMS

dispensationalism	age of grace
dispensations	Laodicean age
age of conscience	covenant theology
age of civil government	new covenant theology
age of faith	new covenant laws
age of the Law	

## RELATED MATERIALS

Steve Lehrer, *New Covenant Theology Questions Answered*.

John Reisinger, *In Defense of Jesus, the New Lawgiver*.

Charles Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*.

Tom Wells and Fred Zaspel, *New Covenant Theology*.

<sup>16</sup> A pro-dispensationalism book that explains this view well is *Dispensationalism* by Charles Ryrie.

<sup>17</sup> Gibson, 82.

<sup>18</sup> Books on new covenant theology from that perspective include *New Covenant Theology* by Tom Wells and Fred Zaspel; *In Defense of Jesus, the New Lawgiver* by John Reisinger; and *New Covenant Theology: Questions Answered* by Steve Lehrer.





## **FILTERS: CESSATIONISM AND LIBERAL THEOLOGY**

The final filter we will examine is **cessationism**, or the belief that the gifts of the Holy Spirit are not for today. This term is short for *cessation of the gifts*. Cessationists believe the spiritual gifts existed during the time when the Bible was being written, but they have since ceased to be in operation. Cessationism crosses many denominational lines, including Presbyterians, Lutherans, Baptists, Wesleyans, Methodists, and so forth. It is also closely connected to Calvinism and dispensationalism. Though Calvinism originated long before, it

became really popular in the 1500s, and dispensationalism followed on its heels in the early 1800s. Not long after, like an addendum to dispensationalism, cessationism arrived on the scene and was popularized by leaders like B.B. Warfield, who wrote a book titled *Counterfeit Miracles*. Since then it has become very wide-spread.

The theological opposite of this belief is sometimes called **continuationism**. This is an academic term. In popular Christianity, those who believe the gifts of the Spirit are still in operation today are called **charismatics**, or we could call them **supernaturalists**. A third group is **liberal theologians**, who do not believe the miraculous has ever happened. Whereas **liberal theology** is primarily confined to academic circles, cessationism is much more common among the average believer.

## CESSATIONISM

Most of the debate surrounding the gifts of the Spirit centers on First Corinthians 13, which is often referred to as the Love Chapter. In chapter 12, Paul gave instructions to the Corinthians about the proper use of the gifts, and he continued this instruction in chapter 14, but right in the middle, he paused to talk about the importance of love. Chapter 12 leads into the discussion of love with this verse: *“Now eagerly desire the greater gifts. And yet I will show you the most excellent way”* (1 Cor. 12:31). This most excellent way is the way of love. Love is greater and more important than the supernatural gifts. That is important to remember, because without love the gifts will not profit anything. But when we act in love, we will be able to

use the gifts in a way that honors God and benefits others. After listing the attributes of love, Paul then said:

*Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love (1 Corinthians 13:8–13).*

Cessationists tend to pick these verses out—especially verse 10, which says, “*when completeness comes, what is in part disappears*”—to prove that the gifts have passed away. They argue that the *completeness* or *perfect* (NKJV) spoken of here refers to the Bible. Thus they say, when the perfect (the Bible) was established, the gifts that were “in part” passed away. Since we now have the Bible, we no longer need prophesy, revelation, dreams, and the like. Everything we need to know about God is already in the book. That is the cessationist view.

However, this line of reasoning completely violates our hermeneutic. The Corinthians who first read this letter would not have inferred that Paul was talking about the Bible. They

had no idea there would even be a Bible apart from the Old Testament. The first list of books of the Bible would not appear until several hundred years later. Instead, this idea was injected into the text more than a thousand years after it was written. Clearly, Paul was not talking about the Bible when he wrote this. He was not prophesying but teaching in a logical manner that was connected to the sections before and after. In the larger context of his discussion of prophecy, he was saying we prophesy “in part” and at some point the partial will become complete. He also compared being partial to being like a child. When maturity comes, the partial things are left behind.

We find a clue to what progression from partial to mature he was talking about in verse 12: *“For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.”* In other words, he was speaking of something he did not presently have—face-to-face interaction with Love Himself. The topic of First Corinthians 13 is love, and the perfect embodiment of love is God. Now we see and experience Him only partially, or incompletely, in our human bodies. But when we see Him face-to-face, we will know fully. We will have perfect love. In other words, when we die and see God face-to-face, then we will know fully as we are fully known. In heaven, personal prophecies are unnecessary. If personal prophecy is about helping us reach our calling or identify our blind spots, we will not need either of those things after we die and are in the presence of the Lord.

Another possible interpretation of this passage offered by commentators is that the “perfect” will happen when Jesus

returns. The same principle is in operation here. If Jesus showed up and we all saw Him face-to-face, our need for prophecy and the other gifts would vanish, because we would be in the presence of Love Himself. This connects with what John wrote:

*Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is (1 John 3:2).*

Here, too, we have the sense of a partial knowing that will be made perfect when we see Christ face-to-face. When we see Him, whether at death or at His second coming, we will become like Him. In a moment, we will be transformed to live in the supernatural realm, and at that point, we will no longer need the gifts of the Spirit. Clearly, First Corinthians 13 does not indicate a cessation of the gifts in our modern day.

Beyond the evidence of First Corinthians 13, one of the main reasons cessationism cannot be true is found in Ephesians 4:11–13:

*So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up **until** we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.*

The word until is a time indicator that clearly shows us the season of our need for the spiritual gifts is not yet over. The apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers are here until *“we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”* David B. Barrett, George T. Kurian, and Todd M. Johnson have written the *World Christian Encyclopedia*, which lists over 33,000 Christian denominations. Clearly, we have not yet reached the unity of the faith!

The unity of the faith can be understood in this way. Every denomination contains strengths and weaknesses, and when we all begin to honor each other's strengths, unity can be achieved. In other words, unity does not mean conformity. It does not mean we all agree on exactly the same doctrine. Most likely, that will not happen until Jesus returns and gives us His perfect theology. Often people refer to Amos 3:3, which says, *“Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?”* (NKJV). They interpret this verse to mean two groups cannot work together unless they agree in doctrine. However, if we consider this at a relational level, we will quickly realize it does not work. If we require all our friends to agree with us in every detail, we will have no friends. A husband and wife do not always agree, yet they are able to walk together. This is because their agreement is not based on ideas but on the decision to walk together in love. The NIV translates this verse, *“Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so?”* In other words, the agreement is about the decision to walk together, not about doctrine. Unity of the faith means choosing to walk together because of love and honor, not because we walk in doctrinal

agreement. However, on a whole, the Church is not anywhere near to walking in this reality. This means the gifts of the Spirit must still be in operation and cessationism cannot be true.

## OTHER INFLUENCES

Cessationism, however, is not based solely on First Corinthians 13 but on the lens of dispensationalism, which we discussed in the last chapter. Many cessationists are also dispensationalists. This is significant because dispensationalism teaches about seven dispensations in history, placing modern history in the sixth dispensation, or the Church Age. Because dispensationalist cessationists expect our current period in time to be the lukewarm Laodicean Age, the only signs they are looking for are lying signs and wonders that point to the end of the world: *“The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders”* (2 Thess. 2:9). Because of this mindset, when they see something miraculous, their immediate response is to believe it is part of the deception. This leaves people with a filter that never expects God to do the miraculous. In this Church Age, all they expect is decline and apostasy until Jesus returns to establish His Kingdom.

This seventh and final age, the Kingdom Age, will not happen until after Christ's return. Only then will we experience the Kingdom realities the Bible mentions (including the gifts of the Spirit). Dispensationalists believe Jesus offered the Kingdom to the Jews during His three and a half years of ministry, but because they rejected Him and His Kingdom, all

the good things of the Kingdom were taken away and reserved for the millennium. However, because Jesus had trained His twelve apostles and imparted His Spirit to them, while they lived, the presence of the Kingdom lingered on earth. Once the original apostles died, the gifts stopped. This time period is often referred to as the **Apostolic Age**.

However, history does not give us any evidence that the miraculous stopped with the death of the apostles! First, the New Testament records a total of twenty-two apostles, not just the original twelve apostles, and it makes it clear these other apostles also performed miracles. The apostle Paul is a good example. Though he was not one of Jesus' disciples during Jesus' life on earth, Paul became a mighty miracle-worker after his conversion. Not only that, but people who were not even apostles also operated in the supernatural. Stephen, the first martyr, saw an open vision of Jesus, and he was only a deacon (see Acts 7:55–56). Philip, who also was not an apostle, instigated a massive revival in Samaria through preaching the gospel and performing many healings and miracles (see Acts 8:5–8). This reality aligns with what Peter said in Acts 2:

*This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: “In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy” (Acts 2:16–18).*

In other words, the Spirit was poured out on everyone, and



all believers in Jesus will perform signs and wonders—not just the apostles.

Second, Eusebius, the earliest Church historian, wrote in AD 367 of the continuation of the supernatural in the early Church. And it did not stop with him, either. Many, many miracles are recorded throughout history, including the raising of the dead. For example, around AD 400, Saint Augustine raised a young child from the dead,<sup>19</sup> and Saint Patrick raised over thirty-three people from the dead.<sup>20</sup> The fact that members of the Church throughout history continued to perform miracles shows that the gifts did not cease with the apostles.

A second influence on cessationism is Calvinism. About the gifts of the Spirit and the supernatural, Calvinists would say, “If God wants to heal someone, He will do it Himself sovereignly. We don’t have to pray for people. We are not warring against the devil. God can do what God wants to do, and if He wants to heal someone, He will.” Thus they remove human involvement from the supernatural and put the onus fully on God. If, in His absolute sovereignty, He wants to perform a miracle, He can and will, but it is pointless for us to believe we can partner with God to make that happen. We’ve already discussed the pitfalls of this mindset in a previous chapter, but in brief, the problem with this view of sovereignty is that it takes all responsibility away from the believer. It makes us into robots who have no actual say in what happens in this world, which prevents us from doing the very things Jesus commanded us to do—preaching the gospel, praying for the sick, casting out demons. The truth is, God is looking for ambassadors who will partner with Him. He is looking for a

bride who can be equally yoked with Him. This means He does not want to control us but to work through us as we stand up into our identity, authority, and dignity as representatives of the King.

When examined against Scripture and historical evidence, the belief system of cessationism quickly falls apart. Now, we will briefly examine another view point that opposes the supernatural.

## LIBERAL THEOLOGY

**Liberal theology** is another theological school of thought that does not believe in the supernatural, but for entirely different reasons than the cessationist. Cessationists believe the gifts existed in biblical times; they read the stories of Moses, Abraham, David, and the New Testament apostles literally, and they believe the miracle accounts are absolutely true. They believe the spiritual gifts were part of the New Testament Church to confirm the truth of the gospel message. They just don't believe such things happen anymore.

By contrast, liberal theologians say the miracles in the Bible didn't actually happen the way they are written down. For example, when they read about the ten plagues in Egypt, they will look for natural reasons why those ten plagues occurred. It is a historical fact that a volcano erupted along the Nile. Liberal theologians might say the eruption from the volcano put a red ash into the water so that by the time the Nile reached Egypt, it was colored red by the volcanic ash. To them, it was not a supernatural event; it was simply red water, not blood. In this

way, liberal theology works to explain away supernatural stories by finding a natural explanation. They approach the Bible with an enlightenment attitude that says, "In ancient history, people wrote things down as supernatural occurrences in an effort to explain something that actually happened naturally. They just did not know better. We now know better because we are scientific."

For example, they try to explain away Israel's crossing of the Red Sea by saying it was not the Red Sea but the Reed Sea, which is only about eight inches deep. The obvious problem with such a change is that it asks us to believe the entire Egyptian army was drowned in just eight inches of water. A group of these liberal scholars has formed something called the Jesus Seminar, in which these very intelligent and educated individuals are trying to decide which of Jesus' miracles were real. For example, they say the story of Jesus multiplying loaves of bread and fish could not have been supernatural, so it must have been an outpouring of charity. If the little boy shared his bread and the disciples started passing that out, other people must have then reached into their bags and found some hidden bread to share. And so it continued, until they ended up with twelve baskets of food left over.

Liberal theology is prominent at some of the Ivy League schools, such as Yale, Harvard, and Princeton, as well as any theological seminary associated with what is sometimes referred to as **higher criticism**. Simply put, the term *higher criticism* refers to the idea that we cannot take the Bible literally. It is true that we don't take it literally, in the sense that we must interpret it. For example, we should not read a poem in

the Bible and turn it into something literal, because it's a poem. And we should not read a prophecy without interpreting it through the symbolism of that day, because we need to understand what it meant to the original audience. That is a part of our hermeneutic. However, that does not mean we rationalize historical facts presented in the Scripture. Yet that is exactly what liberal theology and higher criticism do. Everything is reinterpreted through a modern scientific lens. This is not a reliable hermeneutic, because it means reinterpreting everything to mean what we believe it means for us now rather than what it meant to the original writer and audience. This doesn't mean we should write off everything coming from that arena, but it is helpful to be aware of the lens they are working with.

## THE BURDEN OF PROOF

Considering the significant amount of scriptural support for a belief in the supernatural, the burden of proof lies with the liberals and cessationists to say the supernatural is not for today. Biblically, they lack compelling evidence to make such a claim. Instead, the reality the Bible offers us is of a better covenant with better provisions. Hebrews 7:22 says, "*...Jesus has become the guarantor of a better covenant.*" Compared to the old covenant, we have a better covenant. Since the new covenant is a better covenant based on better promises and a better guarantee, it should include all the good of the old covenant and more. In other words, since the old covenant contained miracles and supernatural events, the new covenant would not be truly better if it did not also contain miracles and

supernatural events.

But because of these filters, many people are blocked from understanding the overarching message of Scripture. These three filters in particular—Calvinism, dispensationalism, and cessationism—can work together in a way that really limits one's ability understand the Bible and walk in the believer's calling as an ambassador of the Kingdom. Ultimately, they can paralyze us from effectively living out what the Bible says. This is why we must understand these faulty filters first before we examine the Bible in context. Removing these lenses will help us read with a fresh understanding.

## REVIEW TEST QUESTIONS

1. If someone says the Red Sea was the Reed Sea in an effort to explain Moses and the people passing through, what is a good question to ask as a rebuttal?
2. Cessationists believe the *perfect* of First Corinthians 13 has already come and the Holy Spirit's gifts have passed away. According to their wrong interpretation, what is the *perfect*?
3. In the New Testament, there are twenty-two *what*?
4. Hebrews 7:22 says we have a *what*, which supports why we have healing available for today?

# KEY TERMS

cessationism	liberal theology
continuationism	higher criticism
charismatics	Apostolic Age
supernaturalists	

# RELATED MATERIALS

David B. Barrett, George T. Kurian, and Todd M. Johnson,  
*World Christian Encyclopedia*.

B. B. Warfield, *Counterfeit Miracles*.

<sup>19</sup> Pychtes, 231–232.

<sup>20</sup> Hebert, 191–192.



## PART TWO

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# THE FIVE COVENANTS



## seven



# **BIBLE CHRONOLOGY AND THE FIVE COVENANTS**

In Chapter 1 we talked briefly about the difficulty of the Bible's chronology. Many of the books in the Old Testament are not organized chronologically, which has caused a great deal of confusion for the average believer, especially when it comes to the second half of the Old Testament. However, chronological Bibles often are not very helpful, either, for a variety of reasons. For example, most scholars say Job



occurred somewhere between Noah and Abraham (in the Book of Genesis). If we place Job before Genesis, we have Job before the creation story, but if we place it after Genesis, it is placed between Israel's slavery in Egypt and the Exodus, which is also awkward placement. The most accurate solution, perhaps, would be to divide Genesis in half and insert Job after the story of Noah. Yet making such significant changes would make that particular Bible difficult to use while following along with a sermon in a church service. Clearly, it is not a simply resolved problem.

The best method for overcoming this problem is being aware of the weaknesses of the Bible's organization and the timeframe each book belongs to.

## THE ORGANIZATION OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

The primary issue with chronology exists in the Old Testament, which is organized according to four major categories: History, Poetry, Major Prophets, and Minor Prophets. The chart below shows what books belong to each category:

History	Poetry	Major	Minor
Genesis–Esther	Job–Song of Songs	Isaiah–Daniel	Hosea–Malachi

In a sense, this organization works, in that it places each book with other books of its type. All the history is together, as

well as the poetry. And the major (large) prophetic books are separated from the smaller prophetic books. But the unfortunate result is the confusion of the timeline of history. Where do the prophetic books fit in the history, and what events are they speaking to? This is especially important to understand when we realize that, as we discussed in Chapter 1, God revealed Himself in increasing measure throughout history. So understanding where a book fits in history is helpful in understanding the degree of revelation a writer had about God.

Briefly, we will look over the organization as it stands and then consider an alternative. The beginning of the Bible, Genesis to First and Second Samuel, is pretty accurate. These are history books, and the timeline is fairly straightforward.

- **Genesis:** The story of creation through Israel's servitude in Egypt.
- **Exodus:** The story of Israel's escape from Egypt and journey to the Promised Land.
- **Leviticus:** Instructions for the priests given during the Exodus.
- **Numbers:** The story of the forty years Israel wandered in the wilderness.
- **Deuteronomy:** The renewal of the covenant as it was handed down from Moses to his successor Joshua.
- **Joshua:** The story of Israel's entrance into the

Promised Land.

- **Judges:** The stories of the rulers (judges) who guided Israel after Joshua.
- **Ruth:** A small book about the story of one woman.
- **First & Second Samuel:** The stories of Samuel, King Saul, and King David.

These books are fairly easy to read without confusion regarding the timeline. The books that follow are another story.

- **First & Second Kings:** The story of King Solomon and the splitting of the nation into two different kingdoms, Judah and Israel. It then follows the stories of the kings of both kingdoms until they are overthrown and exiled into Assyria and Babylon.
- **First & Second Chronicles:** The stories (in brief) of King Saul, King David, King Solomon, and the Kings of Judah (i.e. David's line) until the exile to Babylon.

In these four books we find a lot of repeat stories and parallels. Both Second Kings and Second Chronicles end with the nation of Judah being exiled to Babylon. Then we have Ezra and Nehemiah, two books that tell the story of the rebuilding of Jerusalem. This is a significant jump forward on the timeline without any explanation of what happened in between. After Nehemiah comes Esther, the story of a girl during captivity, and it does not seem to fit. Esther is the end of the historical books. Then comes Job, a story from the days of Noah, which is really

out of place. Job is followed by the Psalms, which were written by a variety of people in different time periods, and Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs, which were all written by Solomon back in the days of First Kings. The poetry books are all over the place, and in the midst, we lose all sense of time. They become isolated from a historical context, which is exactly what we don't want.

After the poetry books are the major prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations (also written by Jeremiah), Ezekiel, and Daniel. The first four books prophesied the coming exile of Israel and Judah during the time period of Second Kings and Second Chronicles. These four prophesied the destruction that Ezra and Nehemiah were rebuilding from, yet they are placed *after* Ezra and Nehemiah. This creates chaos in the understanding of the average Bible reader, because it is unclear how these prophecies fit with the history. Daniel, the final major prophet, prophesied at a different time than the other major prophets, as we can see by the fact that he referred back to the prophesy of Jeremiah (see Dan. 9:1). Daniel was taken as a boy into captivity in Babylon, and he became an influential man and prophet during the exile. His prophecies occurred at the very end of the Babylonian exile, and some of them tell of the future return of his people to their land. In other words, they are about the events recorded in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah.

Following the major prophets are the minor prophets, most of whom were contemporaries with Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Jeremiah and were similarly prophesying the destruction of Israel and Judah by Assyria and Babylon. The exceptions are Haggai,

Zechariah, and Malachi, who prophesied during the time of the rebuilding of Jerusalem and declared a coming greater glory.

In this brief outline of the books of the Old Testament, we can see the potential confusion caused by placing the prophetic books about the 586 BC destruction of Jerusalem and exile into Assyria and Babylon *after* the books about the rebuilding of Jerusalem. The current timeline in our Bible is completely off.

## A REVISED CHRONOLOGY

Below is a concept for Bible organization that would work much better. It is not perfect, but it at least gives a sense of how the history relates to the prophetic books.

History	Pre-Exile	Return	Post-Return
Genesis–2 Chronicles	Isaiah– Zephaniah  (Esther as a contemporary with Ezekiel)	Daniel, Ezra, and Nehemiah	Zechariah, Haggai, Malachi

Here, prophecy is divided into two portions, one before the exile and one after. At the end of History, where the kingdoms have divided and the kings are becoming increasingly evil, are the Pre-Exile prophets (excepting Daniel) and the minor prophets. Thus the prophecies regarding the exile to Assyria

and Babylon are placed in close proximity to the record of the historical event. Finally, the Old Testament would end with the return of a remnant of Judah to Jerusalem to rebuild the city and the temple, as recorded in Daniel, Ezra, and Nehemiah, followed by the three Post-Return prophetic books. This would give a much more chronologically-accurate picture of the Old Testament.

The poetry books could then be added in several different ways. We could split them up, putting the psalms written by Moses after Deuteronomy, the psalms written by David after First Samuel, and the material by Solomon after 2 Samuel. Or they could simply be put into a section for just poetry. The question of Job, of course, is a tricky one. Perhaps we could insert a note in the midst of Genesis, where Job should chronologically appear, referring readers to Job, which could appear immediately following Genesis. It may be a long time before the books of the Bible are reorganized in this manner, but having this organization in our minds can help us make sense of the text as we read it. It will help us remember that Isaiah was prophesying a destruction that happened at the end of Second Kings, not something in our future. Unfortunately, a lot of confusion about the Old Testament prophesies has arisen from this lack of understanding regarding the timeline, what events the prophets foretold, and when those events happened in Israel's history. This simple understanding of chronology will take us a long way in interpreting the Bible.

## NEW TESTAMENT CHRONOLOGY

New Testament chronology is not nearly as problematic. The organization really doesn't matter as much in the New Testament because all twenty-seven books of it span only a forty-year period. By comparison, Genesis alone spans 2,417 years, and the remainder of the Old Testament spans another 1,300 years. Compared to that, forty years is just a dot on the timeline. In other words, the New Testament was written within one generation by authors who all lived in the same general political and social environment. As mentioned previously, some scholars do attempt to prove that some of the New Testament was written in AD 80 or later. However, John A. T. Robinson, a tremendous theologian and scholar, has written a book called *Redating the New Testament*, in which he has demonstrated why *all* of the New Testament must have been written between AD 30 and AD 70. Kenneth Gentry also wrote his doctoral dissertation, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, which has yet to be refuted, to prove that Revelation was written under the reign of Nero in the AD 60s. As these authors demonstrate, the weight of proof is for a New Testament written entirely between AD 30 and AD 70—over just forty years. For this reason, the chronology of the New Testament books is not nearly as important.

## THE FIVE MAJOR COVENANTS AND CANONS

Now that we've discussed the chronology of the Bible, and particularly the Old Testament, we are going to consider the storyline of the Bible. Obviously, chronology is very important in understanding the storyline. The story of the Bible is not just a story of human history or of a religion; it is the story of

God's covenant journey with humanity. This story rests on the foundation of God's covenants with people through history, and we cannot rightly understand the story if we do not understand the covenants and the canons attached to those covenants.

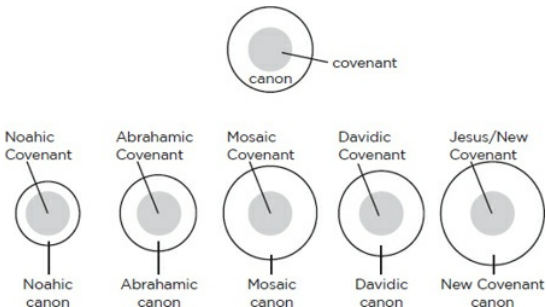
In the ancient world, when two parties made a **covenant** together, they would write and sign the covenant, and it would be legal and binding. Then, over the course of that covenant agreement, the two parties would add something called a **canon**, or the history of how the two parties walked out that covenant together. This included poetry, music, art, and culture formed during that covenant. A canon is a body of literature. What we have in Scripture is five major covenants between God and a human (or nation) and the surrounding canon of material for each covenant:

1. God's covenant with Noah
2. God's covenant with Abraham
3. God's covenant with Moses
4. God's covenant with David
5. Jesus' new covenant

Each of these covenants has a surrounding canon. The canon for the new covenant is the entire New Testament, but the other four covenants and their canons are within the Old Testament. The following diagram depicts the covenants as grey circles, with the surrounding white circle representing the



canon of that covenant.



Based on the size of the canon of literature surrounding each covenant, the circle surrounding the Noahic covenant should be very small. Abraham's should be a little bit larger. The Mosaic canon is really large. The Davidic is a little smaller. And then the New Covenant, the Jesus Covenant, has the largest canon (twenty-seven books).

If we don't understand that the Old Testament actually contains four separate covenants and canons, we will not have a clear picture of what happened in the Old Testament and why. For example, Genesis 1 through Exodus 19 predate the Mosaic covenant, which began on Mount Sinai in Exodus 20. Interestingly, prior to Exodus 20, God never tells what will make Him wrathful. The first time God explains what will stir up His wrath is in Exodus 22, and it is related to neglecting the widows

and the orphans. If people really wanted to make God mad, that was the way to do it. Before that, Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed, and the Flood brought destruction, yet the text never mentions the wrath of God. Instead, at the Flood, God's heart was grieved, and at Sodom and Gomorrah, He responded in justice to the horrific reports coming to Him about those two cities. But only two chapters after the establishment of the Law, the wrath of God makes its first appearance. This makes more sense when we read Romans 4:15, which says, "*The law brings wrath....*" In other words, the wrath of God came with the Law. It was not part of the previous covenants or canons, which is important to understand in our reading of the storyline. Even with proper chronology, we will miss a lot in the Old Testament if we read it as one big storyline without understanding the differences within each covenant and canon. They are not all inter-connected but are separate covenants, and their canons are separate stories of God's relationships with people.

The problem comes when we, as new covenant believers, try to apply to ourselves aspects of an older covenant that was not written to us. The Book of Job has nothing to do with our covenant and canon, and we cannot read it as though it was written for us. Yes, we can learn from it, but we are living in the new covenant, with different circumstances and a different relationship with God. Thus, we need to understand the differences between the covenants and which ones apply to us today. This is sometimes complicated by the fact that some of the promises in the canons of the older covenants are fulfilled in the new covenant.

Reading the Bible from the perspective of the covenants

and their canons completely changes our perspective. Instead of starting in Genesis 1 and reading it as a simple story, we realize that Genesis 1 and the following chapters are part of the canon telling the history leading up to God's covenant with Noah. It's giving the context for how the world became so evil and why the Flood became necessary. The same is true of the record of God's covenant with Abram (Abraham), a man God chose to make a covenant with. Israel did not yet exist, and people at that time knew almost nothing about God. Abram grew up as an idol worshipper, like his neighbors, yet God called him out and began a relationship with him. The unfolding story is the canon surrounding that covenant.

Then, years later, we find Moses and the Israelites in slavery in Egypt. God called them out and created a completely new covenant with that nation involving a precise system of worship and Law abiding. All of the rules and the history of the nation of Israel are part of the canon of this covenant. Many years after that, David came on the scene and wanted to build a house for God. God told him He does not dwell in human houses, but He said He would give David a house by establishing a covenant with him related to his family line. These are the major Old Testament covenants. Then finally, when Jesus came, He established a new covenant through His death and resurrection.<sup>21</sup>

When it comes to understanding the storyline of the Bible, Christians have traditionally used one of the three filters we discussed in Chapter 5: dispensationalism, covenant theology, and new covenant theology. But none of these filters work. The Bible cannot fit inside of any of these three systems.

Instead, it is comprised of five different covenants and the canons that surround them. In the coming chapters, we will examine each of these covenants and their canons in much more detail. As we look at them in chronological order, we will see how they are connected, what happened, how they moved to the next covenant, and how some earlier promises were fulfilled inside the new covenant.

## REVIEW TEST QUESTIONS

1. Genesis to Esther, Job to Song of Songs, Isaiah to Daniel, and Hosea to Malachi represent the Bible's current divisions into what four categories?
2. Genesis covers \_\_\_\_ years, and Exodus through Malachi covers \_\_\_\_ years; however, the New Testament only covers \_\_\_\_ years.

## KEY TERMS

covenant	canon
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## RELATED MATERIALS

Kenneth Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*.

Scott Hahn, *Kinship by Covenant*.

John A. T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament*.

<sup>21</sup> This system of interpretation is taken in large part from Scott Hahn's book, *Kinship by Covenant*. Scott Hahn is a very well-respected and brilliant Catholic scholar, and in this book he examines the five covenants and their canons. He also examines three types of covenants, because not all five covenants are the same type of covenant, and the type of covenant makes for a significant difference.

## eight



# THE NOAHIC COVENANT

After laying a foundation in the first seven chapters, we now will delve into the biblical text. We will approach this differently than many theology books and seminaries in that we are not doing a survey of the Old and New Testaments, covering the basic storyline. Instead, we will read the story from the perspective of the five major covenants and their canons, beginning with the first—the Noahic covenant.

Noah's covenant occurs in Genesis 9, but its canon starts in Genesis 1:1 and goes through the end of Genesis 11. Genesis 1 gives an overview of creation, telling all seven days (with humanity created on the sixth) and ending with God's rest. Then in Genesis 2 the story of humanity's creation is given in greater detail, including the details of the Garden of Eden. In

Genesis 3, the Fall of humanity is recorded. The serpent deceived Adam and Eve, and they disobeyed God. As a result, in Genesis 4, they were cast out of the garden, and we read the stories of Cain, Abel, and Seth. Genesis 5 contains the lineage from Adam to Noah. Genesis 6 talks about the wickedness that had filled the earth, and it introduces Noah. God told Noah about the coming Flood and promised to make a covenant with him. Genesis 7 tells of the journey inside the ark during the Flood and the landing afterward. Genesis 8 encapsulates the landing and tells the story of Noah sending out the raven and the doves. In Genesis 9, as promised, God made His covenant with Noah. This chapter also tells the story of Noah becoming drunk. Genesis 10 gives the lineage of Noah's three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Genesis 11 tells the story of the tower of Babel and another lineage from Shem to Abram. This is the end of the canon surrounding Noah's covenant, as Genesis 12 begins with the story of Abram.

<b>The Noahic Covenant in Genesis</b>	
Genesis 1	Seven days of creation
Genesis 2	Creation of humanity in detail, the Garden of Eden
Genesis 3	Humanity's Fall
Genesis 4	Cain and Abel
Genesis 5	The lineage, Adam to Noah
Genesis 6	Wickedness, Noah, the promise of the covenant
Genesis 7	Inside the ark

Genesis 8	Landing and coming out
Genesis 9	God's covenant with Noah, Noah gets drunk
Genesis 10	Lineage of Shem, Ham, and Japheth
Genesis 11	Tower of Babel, lineage from Shem to Abram

In this chapter, we will highlight certain parts of the Noahic covenant and canon that are important to give us an overall understanding. Our goal in this book is to understand the whole Bible, which does not mean knowing every word. We will skip over a lot of material, but at the same time, we will lay the groundwork for an understanding of the whole picture. When we have that, we will be able to study within that picture and discover the text makes sense in ways we never realized before.

## THE GARDEN OF EDEN

To understand Noah's covenant properly, we must first look at the context or back story to the covenant contained in the first eight chapters of Genesis. Genesis 1 tells the story of the seven days of creation; Genesis 2 gives us the detailed version of humanity's creation and tells us about the Garden of Eden, which we will look at in greater detail:

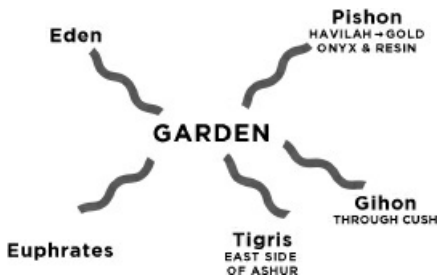
*Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. The Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the*



*ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. A river watering the garden flowed from Eden; from there it was separated into four headwaters. The name of the first is the Pishon; it winds through the entire land of Havilah, where there is gold. (The gold of that land is good; aromatic resin and onyx are also there.) The name of the second river is the Gihon; it winds through the entire land of Cush. The name of the third river is the Tigris; it runs along the east side of Ashur. And the fourth river is the Euphrates (Genesis 2:8–14).*

The first important piece of information here is that the river flowed from Eden to the garden and then continued on. People often refer to this garden as the Garden of Eden, thinking Eden was the name of the garden. Actually, Eden was the name of the land, and within that land was this garden. So the river flowed from Eden into the garden. This means Eden must have been topographically above the garden.

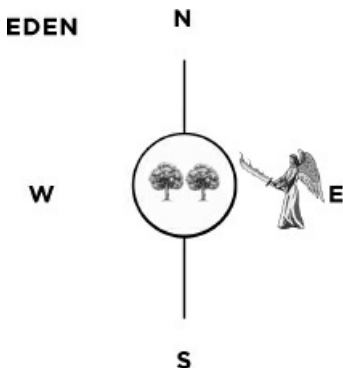
The water in the garden came from Eden. As it flowed out of the garden, it divided into four headwaters—the Pishon, the Gihon, the Tigris, and the Euphrates. This diagram gives an aerial view. The passage does not tell us what directions the rivers flowed, so that is placed arbitrarily on the diagram.



Another way to describe the garden would be as an oasis in the land of Eden. A big river flowed into it and spanned out into four smaller rivers. At the place of this division, a watery, marshy, fertile area was created where all kinds of trees and crops grew. This was the garden. From it, these rivers spread out, the Gihon winding through the land of Cush; the Pishon winding through a land with gold, onyx, and resin; the Tigris winding east of Ashur, and the Euphrates. Throughout the rest of the Bible, the Tigris and Euphrates rivers are often mentioned, but we never again hear of the Pishon or Gihon, and we do not know where they were located. Even the Tigris and Euphrates mentioned later in Scripture may not have been in the same location as they were here because of the Flood that happened a few chapters later.

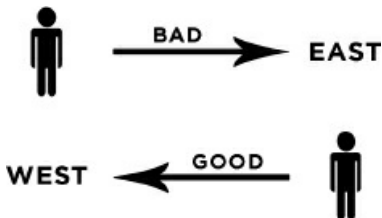
Often, when we consider the Garden of Eden, we think of it related to theological concepts, not as a map. When we consider it as a map, we realize Eden must have been on higher ground than the garden, which was slightly east of Eden, and

the landscape below the garden must have been very well watered. With this in mind, the next diagram shows us something very important:



The circle in the center represents the garden. Inside the circle are the two trees—the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Adam and Eve were permitted to eat the fruit of the first but not the second. To the east of the garden is an angel with a sword. When Adam and Eve disobeyed God, it says in Genesis 3:24, *“After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.”* God sent them out to the east, and they could no longer return to the garden. This directional detail shows us an important pattern that continues throughout

Scripture:



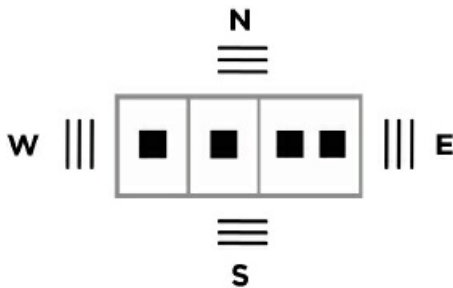
When humans go east, it is *bad*; when they go west, it is *good*. When they move westward, they are moving back toward the garden, and that is good. This symbolism continues throughout Scripture. For example:

- When Cain was cast out of the land, he wandered in a land called Nod, east of Eden (see Gen. 4:16).
- Lot moved east and settled near Sodom (see Gen. 13:11).
- When Israel left Egypt, they actually went around Moab and crossed the Jordan going from east to west. They went around Moab in this direction so they could cross the Jordan in a westward way, because in going to the Promised Land they were, in essence, going back toward the garden (see Josh. 5:1).
- When Israel went into exile in Babylon, many years

later, they went to the east.

- When Israel came out of exile and returned to rebuild Jerusalem under Nehemiah and Ezra, they moved toward the west, back toward the garden.
- When the wise men came to see the baby Jesus, they came from the east to the west (see Matt. 2). They went west to find the garden and the tree of life in Jesus.

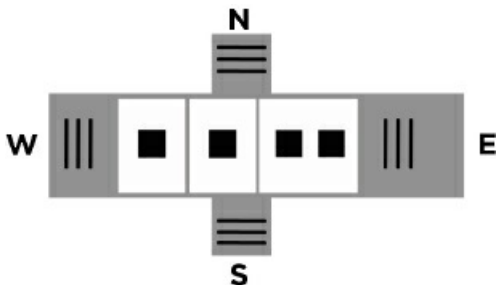
We find yet another picture of this in the encampment of Israel while they traveled through the wilderness. Whenever the cloud moved, they would break camp and follow it, and when the cloud stopped, they would set up camp following a specific order laid out in Numbers 2. The diagram below shows the tabernacle in the middle of the camp, with three of the twelve tribes (symbolized by the short lines) in each direction:



The tabernacle was set up in such a way that the room to the west, the holy of holies, contained the ark of the covenant. The middle room was the inner court, and the room to the east was the outer court. In this way, the placement of the tabernacle showed the farther west one went, the closer one got to God. The priest entered on the eastern side and progressed westward toward the holy of holies. When the priest left the tabernacle, he had to travel eastward.

From all this we can see that the Garden in Eden was the original symbol of God's presence on the earth, followed by the ark of the covenant, Jesus, and now every believer. And within this symbol we have the concept of east to west as the progression toward God's presence.

Looking at the diagram of the encampment of Israel, we find another interesting fact. The tribes to the west of the tabernacle were the smallest, while on the east, the farthest tribe from the tabernacle was Judah, which had a larger encampment than the others. The tribes to the north and south were about equal to each other in size. The result was that the encampment was shaped as a cross, with the top of the cross being the far western end of the camp.



So an aerial picture of the twelve tribes camped around the presence of God—which would later be Jesus—gives us a picture of the cross. In all this we can see the tremendous symbols embedded in the details of the account of the Garden in Eden. It is important to remember as we move forward through the Bible that the little details can contain much more meaning than we initially realize.<sup>22</sup>

## CAIN AND ABEL

After the Garden in Eden, in Genesis 3, we come to the story of the Fall of humanity. As a result of the Fall, Adam and Eve had to leave the garden and settle to the east, where they had two sons, Cain and Abel.

In Genesis 4:6–7, the Lord said to Cain:

*Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it.*

As we already mentioned in the Chapter 4 discussion of original sin, this passage creates a stark contrast to the common view of sin. Here God told Cain that sin was outside him, and He told him he must rule over it, which shows us that mastering sin must be possible. At that time in history, no one had ever been murdered. The sin they knew was eating the fruit in the garden. They were not very far removed from that reality yet, and God kept it simple for Cain. Do what is right, and you will be accepted. No covenant or law existed at that time, yet because God told Cain to do what was right, we can see they had an inherent code of right and wrong. Murder was clearly wrong.

Some might wonder whether Cain even knew what death was, since he was a member of the very first family. Yet God had killed a goat to clothe Adam and Eve, and we can assume they continued that method in clothing their sons. So the concept of death in animals existed. Some Christians believe death did not exist before the Fall. However, God's statement to Adam and Eve, "*When you eat from it, you will surely die,*" does not mean death did not exist. Only human death was exempted by this statement. In fact, basic ecology and biology in this world involves a cycle of life and death among plants and animals. Even the eating of a plant is a form of death for that plant. So the life cycle of the garden included death among plants and animals, but humanity was exempt from this cycle



until after the Fall. Originally, we had a unique form of life, different from the rest of creation, that was free from death, but Adam and Eve relinquished that privilege when they chose to sin.

However, the choice to sin did not make their offspring inherently sinful (as the doctrine of original sin teaches). This is why God told Cain he had a choice about whether or not he would give in to sin. Many theologians use Romans 5:12 to support the idea of original sin. It says:

*Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man [Adam], and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned.*

Adam sinned, and through his sin, death entered the world, which is inherited by all of humanity. Everyone after Adam gets death because of Adam's sin. However, the next verse adds an important detail:

*To be sure, sin was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not charged against anyone's account where there is no law (Romans 5:13).*

The Law is the old covenant or the Mosaic covenant. In Romans 5, Paul was pointing back to say that sin was in the world before the Mosaic covenant. Historically, there were 2,847 years from Adam until the exodus from Egypt when the Israelites received the Law. That is nearly three thousand years on earth without the Law. That is a really long time compared to the 1,300 years of the Mosaic covenant. The passage continues:

*Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who is a pattern of the one to come (Romans 5:14).*

In other words, though the Law did not exist, death still reigned, even over those who did not sin by breaking a commandment. There were no commandments, so no sin was being charged against their account. Then Paul jumped thousands of years into the future to reference Jesus' death and resurrection and compare Jesus to Adam.

*But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man [Adam], how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many! Nor can the gift of God be compared with the result of one man's sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification (Romans 5:15–16).*

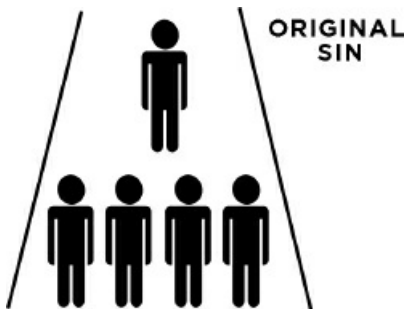
In the same way that Adam caused everyone after him to receive death, Jesus came to distribute overflowing grace to many. The gift of grace in Jesus trumped the curse of sin through Adam. Condemnation came after just one sin, but the gift was able to nullify the impact of millions of sins over several thousand years of history. Paul ended with this triumphant statement:

*For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who*

*receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ (Romans 5:17).*

Through Adam, death was given the power to reign, but through Christ, we received the gift of righteousness and the ability to reign in life. What an incredible truth.

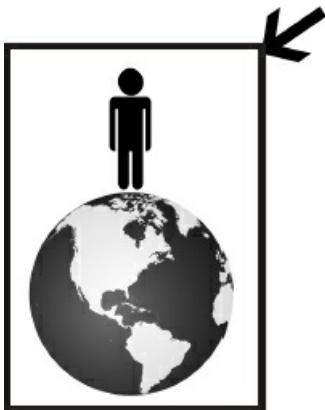
Romans 5 contains an important detail that has often been read to support the idea of original sin, but it actually does just the opposite. Original sin says sin is passed down to all humans at birth. It runs in the bloodline, as the diagram below shows:



However, Romans 5 gives us a different picture:



Verse 12 tells us sin entered the world through one man. It entered the world, not the world family or the lineage of humanity. Instead, it literally entered creation. In the diagram above, humans are placed on top of the earth, showing the rulership over the planet earth they received from God. They were literally the keepers of planet earth, and they could choose to let sin into the atmosphere or keep it out. When they sinned, they invited death into humanity's world. As the gatekeepers, Adam and Eve allowed sin into the world, which brought about death. In this way, "*death came to all people because all sinned.*" This next diagram depicts Adam allowing sin into the atmosphere of the world.



Because of Adam's choice, every single person, at some point in life, will willfully choose to rebel against God by stepping into sin. That moment in every person's history is when sin enters that person's life. It does not enter at birth but at the choice to rebel like Adam. This is the picture Romans 5 paints. Adam, as the ruler over creation, gave the gateway and opened the door for sin to enter into the earth, bringing with it death. Now sin is in the atmosphere, and as a result, people grow up and eventually choose to sin. They open the door like Cain did.<sup>23</sup>

Atonement theory is a very broad and complex topic that we cannot do justice to here (but will examine more fully in

Chapters 14 and 15). In brief, for the first thousand years of Christianity, the majority of Christians had one view on the atonement, called **Christus Victor**. This view states that Adam and Eve were given the keys to reign over planet earth, to subdue, fill, and multiply. When they gave in to the temptation, they gave the keys (their authority) to the devil. The devil then reigned under the power of sin and death until Jesus came as a man, as the “new Adam,” to live as a second Adam and take back the keys of death and Hades from the devil. Thus, Jesus Christ is the victor. Now, there are many views on the atonement. The concept above, of Adam over the earth and allowing sin into the atmosphere of the earth, aligns with the original *Christus Victor* view of the atonement.

After the story of Cain and Abel in Genesis 4, we find the brief story of Cain’s descendant Lamech. The Bible does not tell us much about him, but it does say, “*Lamech married two women...*” (Gen. 4:19). This is the first time polygamy is mentioned in the Bible. The temptation in the garden and the fight between Cain and Abel were inspired by envy, but here sexual tension, in the form of polygamy, arises for the first time. A few verses later, it says:

*Lamech said to his wives, “Adah and Zillah, listen to me; wives of Lamech, hear my words. I have killed a man for wounding me, a young man for injuring me (Genesis 4:23–24a).*

Lamech, as he described himself, possessed a very intense level of bitterness and anger. He had killed someone for wounding him! That is extreme. What we see here is a link

between bitterness and polygamy. Jesus also referenced this in the gospels when he told the Jews Moses had given them permission to divorce because of their hardness (bitterness) of heart (see Matt. 19:8). This is a good picture of why divorce happens. If both people have soft hearts, they will be able to work through their issues, but if one or both of them have hardened their hearts, it will be impossible to work through. Similarly, Lamech was extremely bitter and angry, and he was also the first man to have two women. Because of the hardness in his heart, one woman was not enough to satisfy him. This is a significant piece in the issue of sexual sin. When people have held onto bitterness and anger and allowed their hearts to become hard, the tendency is to turn to more than one wife. In modern times, this is like having an affair or turning to pornography.

## THE LINEAGE, ADAM TO NOAH

When most people reach Genesis 5, the Bible's first genealogy, their eyes glaze over and they skip ahead to the next chapter. It is the written account of Adam's family line. One of the most famous members of Adam's lineage was Enoch, who walked closely with God. Of Enoch, Genesis 5:22–24 says:

*After he became the father of Methuselah, Enoch walked faithfully with God 300 years and had other sons and daughters. Altogether, Enoch lived a total of 365 years. Enoch walked faithfully with God; then he was no more, because God took him away.*

People generally understand this to indicate a sort of one-man rapture, where Enoch was taken directly to heaven without experiencing death. One important fact to notice about Enoch is that he walked closely with God while also having sons and daughters. In other words, he was not a mystic hermit in a cave by himself. He was married and had a family while also walking faithfully with the Lord for three hundred years. As a family man, he communed so deeply with God that he was translated into the spirit and simply was no more. This contradicts the mystical ideals many people hold—that to be truly holy one must be apart from normal life, eating a certain mystical diet and living in seclusion. But Enoch, one of our greatest examples of a holy person, was clearly a family man living in the midst of his culture yet walking intimately with God.

However, there is more to this genealogy than the brief histories of a list of men. What many of us miss, because of cultural and language differences, is the significance of the names listed in the genealogy. Chapter 5 lists the following individuals: Adam, Seth, Enosh, Kenon, Mahalaleh, Jared, Enoch, Methuselah, Lamech, and Noah. If we look at the meanings of each of these names in order, we find a hidden message:

Adam: Man
Seth: Appointed
Enosh: Mortal
Kenon: Sorrow



Mahalaleh: The blessed God
Jared: To come down
Enoch: Teaching
Methuselah: His death shall bring
Lamech: The weary
Noah: Rest

All together it says: “Man appointed mortal sorrow. The blessed God is to come down teaching. His death shall bring the weary rest.” This is a messianic prophecy. When Hebrews read this in the Torah, they would see this prophetic message, because they would be reading it in the original Hebrew and understand the meanings of the names.<sup>24</sup>

It is interesting to think about what these men must have thought about the genealogy as it progressed. Obviously, they could not see the big picture, yet perhaps they noticed the beginnings of the message. Methuselah, who was the oldest person recorded in history, lived 969 years. His name means “His death shall bring.” Alongside the messianic meaning, which Methuselah would not have known, his name also prophesied a much nearer event. Perhaps for most of his life Methuselah wondered what his death would bring, and then in the same year that he died, God shut the door of Noah’s ark. Noah was several generations after Methuselah, but because Methuselah lived so long, he was still alive during the years Noah spent building the ark. One wonders whether he

connected the dots and believed what Noah said about a coming flood. Perhaps Noah also noticed the significance of Methuselah's name and wondered, as he built the ark, whether Methuselah's death would align with the Flood God had told him was coming.

## THE FLOOD

Genesis 6, which tells the story of Noah, begins with this very interesting passage:

*Then the LORD said, "My Spirit will not contend with humans forever, for they are mortal; their days will be a hundred and twenty years" (Genesis 6:3).*

Many people use this passage to define what they call "the age of man"—meaning after the Flood God limited the lifetime of humans to 120 years. However, that is not at all what God was saying. We know this because after the Flood every individual listed in the genealogy between Noah and Abram in Genesis 11 lived more than 120 years. Instead, God was declaring the time remaining until the Flood, when He would destroy the humans living at that time and start over with Noah's family. He was saying, *"Their days [until I kill them] will be a hundred and twenty years."* We can see that this was true, based on Noah's age, the time of the Flood, the time when he received the command to build, and how long it took him to build the ark.<sup>25</sup>

The point of the beginning verses of Genesis 6 is that God

was grieved with humanity. It was time for a change:

*The Lord regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled. So the Lord said, "I will wipe from the face of the earth the human race I have created—and with them the animals, the birds and the creatures that move along the ground—for I regret that I have made them." But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord (Genesis 6:6–8).*

In other words, God was saying to Himself, "This is not turning out how I thought it would. These people are being completely and unbelievably evil to each other and to this planet I created, and I regret this." His heart was "*deeply troubled*" or "*grieved*" (NASB). What we are getting here in the story of the Flood is a picture of what was happening from God's perspective. The Flood was not motivated by the furious anger of a wrathful God. It was motivated by God's grief at how incredibly evil people had become and the realization that He needed to put a stop to it. People sometimes read the Genesis stories of the Flood, the Tower of Babel, and Sodom and Gomorrah through the lens of the old covenant (Mosaic covenant). They see these events as an overflow of the wrath of God, but that is a wrong interpretation, as Genesis 6:6–8 makes clear. As mentioned previously, the wrath of God is not once mentioned in the Bible until the institution of the Mosaic covenant. The story of the Flood is not one of God's wrath but of His grief at the unbelievable evil humanity had sunken to. As a result, God decided to wipe the earth clean and start over with Noah, who had found favor in His eyes.

So God revealed His plan to Noah:

*“But I will establish my covenant with you, and you will enter the ark—you and your sons and your wife and your sons’ wives with you. You are to bring into the ark two of all living creatures, male and female, to keep them alive with you. Two of every kind of bird, of every kind of animal and of every kind of creature that moves along the ground will come to you to be kept alive. You are to take every kind of food that is to be eaten and store it away as food for you and for them.” Noah did everything just as God commanded him (Genesis 6:18–22).*

This is the first place we hear of the covenant; it is not mentioned again until God established His covenant with Noah in Genesis 9:9. In the meantime, in Genesis 7–8, Noah built and entered the ark, and the Flood came and destroyed everything outside the ark. After forty days and nights, the rain ended, and eventually Noah and his family and the animals were able to land the ark and come out to the new earth.

There is a good deal of debate over the actual extent of the Flood. Some theologians argue it was local flood that killed everything in a large region in the Middle East. The people at that time had not spread very far from the Garden in Eden, so a whole-earth flood was not necessary to wipe the slate clean.<sup>26</sup> Those who hold this position argue that the original language indicates a more local area, not the entire world (not unlike the word used in Matthew 24:15 as we have discussed previously).<sup>27</sup> The other position argues for a whole world

Flood based on evidence from the fossil records that give proof of a great flood on every continent of the earth. Geologically, the possibility of a worldwide Flood is there. This side also argues for the idea of a one-continent Pangaea that was broken up into many continents that spread out during the worldwide Flood. This could explain what the Bible refers to as “*the fountains of the great deep*” (Gen. 7:11).<sup>28</sup> Many people debate these positions, yet either is plausible and still takes the Bible story seriously. Clearly, everyone outside the ark was killed; that is the most important point. Whether the waters extended around the globe or just over the Middle East is debatable.

Also, another important result of the Flood was the disappearance of the Garden in Eden. Until the Flood, the Garden in Eden remained, still guarded by an angel, but after the Flood it was gone. And the four rivers that flowed out of the Garden in Eden were either obliterated or rearranged. Two of the rivers, the Tigris and the Euphrates, are mentioned again in the Bible, but most likely they were no longer at the same location as the original rivers because of the massive impact of the Flood upon the geography.

## THE COVENANT WITH NOAH

In Genesis 9, after Noah and his family had exited the ark, God made His promised covenant with Noah. He started with the command—“*Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth*” (Gen. 9:1). This sounds very much like Genesis 1:28, where God gave a similar command to Adam and Eve. The

difference is that, while He said in both places to increase, in His command to Noah He left out the command to subdue that He gave Adam and Eve. This is because Adam had already given away humanity's authority to reign over the earth. Death was still in the atmosphere, and *Christus Victor* hadn't happened yet. Noah did not have the authority Adam had. He was simply commissioned to populate the earth, not to subdue and cultivate it, as Adam was meant to. The covenant God made with Noah was a promise to never again destroy the earth and start over:

*I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you and with every living creature that was with you—the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals, all those that came out of the ark with you—every living creature on earth. I establish my covenant with you: Never again will all life be destroyed by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth (Genesis 9:9–11).*

To understand the impact of this covenant, we need to consider what Noah and his family had just experienced. Never before in the history of the earth had it rained, yet for forty days and nights it had rained constantly, and everyone but them had drowned in the Flood caused by that rain. Imagine the fear that must have struck Noah's heart every time it began to rain after that. While all their friends and extended family were dying, Noah's family was stuck on an ark with a massive number of animals, trying to feed and tend for them all. The stress of this, added with the unknowns about what would happen next, must have been unimaginable. Further, when they

did get off the ark onto dry land, the landscape of the earth had significantly changed, and everything they had known was gone. It is difficult for us to imagine this sort of full-scale trauma in their lives. It is no wonder Noah built a vineyard and got drunk (see Gen. 9:20–21). They had been through a lot, and God’s covenant with them and with the whole earth addressed the trauma they had just experienced. “Never again,” said God, “will I do what I have just done.” This was not only an amazing promise for humanity but also a comfort to Noah’s heart. He would not need to worry when it rained. He would never again need to get back on that ark. This promise was essential to Noah’s family’s ability to fulfill God’s command to increase. Only when they felt secure would they be able to settle down and have children. This covenant enabled them to begin again.

The sign of the covenant was the rainbow. When Noah and his family saw the rainbow, they were reminded of God’s promise to never send another Flood to destroy the earth. This implied that, in the future, God would address human evil in a different way, as prophesied in the genealogy of Genesis 5.

After God made His covenant with Noah, we read that Noah built a vineyard and got drunk. While he was drunk and naked in his tent, his son Ham saw him and told his brothers, apparently in a mocking way. But the other two brothers, Shem and Japheth, found a cloak and backed into their father’s tent to cover him honorably. When Noah awakened and found out what had happened, he cursed Ham but blessed Shem and Japheth.

*He said, “Cursed be Canaan [Ham]! The lowest of*

*slaves will he be to his brothers.” He also said, “Praise be to the Lord, the God of Shem! May Canaan be the slave of Shem. May God extend Japheth’s territory; may Japheth live in the tents of Shem, and may Canaan be the slave of Japheth” (Genesis 9:25–27).*

The descendants of Ham were known as the Canaanites, who later became Israel’s enemy. Shem was the ancestor of Abram, who was the father of the nation of Israel. The word *Semite*, which is a shortening of *Shemite*, refers to the group of people originating in southwestern Asia, including Jews and Arabs. These are the descendants of Shem. When Shem’s descendants in the nation of Israel entered the Promised Land, they fought against and took the land from the descendants of Ham. In other words, Noah’s prophecy came to pass.

In Genesis 10 we find the genealogy of Noah’s three sons as their descendants spread out across the earth.

## THE TOWER OF BABEL

Genesis 11 is the final chapter of the canon of the Noahic covenant. In it, we find the story of the mysterious Tower of Babel. The story begins with a segment of people moving eastward, which is symbolic of moving away from God. This is the first clue that what is about to happen is problematic. The second is that these people settled in a plain in Shinar, which tells us who they were—the descendants of Ham, who had been cursed by Noah: “*The first centers of his kingdom were Babylon, Uruk, Akkad and Kalneh, in Shinar*” (Gen. 10:10). They had been cursed by Noah, who had a relationship with



God, so they headed east to build something in rebellion against God. The text continues:

*They said to each other, "Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly." They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves; otherwise we will be scattered over the face of the whole earth" (Genesis 11:3–4).*

This tells us three important things. First, these people did not want to be scattered, which was in direct opposition to God's command to Adam and Eve and then to Noah and his sons. Second, they wanted to make a name for themselves. In modern terms, this means they wanted to become a superpower nation with large armies and the ability to oppress other peoples. Third, they built a tower that reached to the heavens. Because of how this is phrased, some people picture a tremendously tall building that reached into the sky in such a way that it actually threatened God. Clearly, that was not the case, as no human building could ever be tall enough to threaten God. A better way to translate this phrase is "a tower to honor the heavens." In other words, they were building a temple of sorts that involved astrology, or creation worship. These sorts of large ancient towers, called **ziggurats**, were built throughout that area in the ancient world. This one was the first of its kind. The most elaborate ziggurat recorded in history was actually located in ancient Babylon, which was the later name for the place known here as Babel. In other words, it was the same location, and the tower was specifically

connected to astrology and occult worship.

Also, it's important to note here the level of skill and intelligence these people had. They actually invented bricks, some of which may still be standing in the ruins of the ziggurat in Babylon. They were only a few generations from the Flood, yet they had developed this incredibly durable building material. The point here is that these people were not less intelligent than we are. They had unified language and were able to organize in order to build this massive structure using materials they had just invented. From the very beginning, the human race has been incredibly creative and intelligent; we did not evolve from less intelligent beings but from the very beginning were created in the image of God. In this instance, people were using that ability to try to make themselves great.

However, verse 5 tells us, *"But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower the people were building."* This idea sounds strange, but it is expressed this way to make a point. No matter how large and magnificent the tower was, it was still so far beneath God that He had to "come down" to see it. In the same way that Adam and Eve had tried to become great without God, the descendants of Ham were attempting to build an empire apart from God. As we will see in the next chapter, the actions of these people were contrasted with Abram, to whom God promised, *"I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing"* (Gen. 12:2). Because Abram's power came from God, it was a blessing. But the builders of the Tower of Babel intended to use their power for their own gain. If God had allowed Babel to make a name for itself, it would not have been

a blessing to the earth. So after He confused the efforts at Babel, God did something different by calling Abram and saying, *“I will make your name great.”*

In response to the people’s attempt to create an empire, God confused their language and caused them to scatter across the earth:

*The LORD said, “If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other.” So the LORD scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. That is why it was called Babel—because there the Lord confused the language of the whole world. From there the Lord scattered them over the face of the whole earth (Genesis 11:6–9).*

The text tells us *Babel* indicates confusion. Yet it also has a literal meaning in Hebrew; *Babel* is a compound of two words: *bab*, meaning “gate,” and *el*, meaning “God.” So *Babel* means “gate of God.” The people were trying to build a ziggurat, which would serve as a sort of gate between heaven and earth. Historians believe the usual practice with ziggurats was to place a shrine at the very top, where the god of that city was believed to come down from the sky, land on the shrine, and speak to the priest. It was literally seen as a gateway between the land of the gods and the earth.<sup>29</sup> In this way, the tower was a mockery of the Garden in Eden, where heaven and earth originally met. God had come down and walked with Adam and

Eve there. Now people were trying to replicate a meeting place between heaven and earth, but on their own terms with their own god. Though the people at Babel intended their tower to be “the tower of the gate of god,” God renamed it, “the tower of confusion.” Later, in Genesis 28, when God came down to meet with Jacob, He showed him not the gate of God (Babel) but the house of God (Bethel). This shows us the difference between the god of Babel, with a big temple and ritualistic worship, and the God of Bethel, who simply encountered a man in an unknown place where he was not even looking for Him.

God’s response to Babel was confusion, but one day in the distant future, He would reverse what happened at Babel. This is prophesied in Zephaniah 3:9:

*Then I will purify the lips of the peoples, that all of them may call on the name of the Lord and serve him shoulder to shoulder. From beyond the rivers of Cush my worshipers, my scattered people, will bring me offerings.*

This prophecy was fulfilled in Acts 2:6–12 on the day of Pentecost:

*When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. Utterly amazed, they asked: “Aren’t all these who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and*

*Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!” Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, “What does this mean?”*

In the natural realm, at the Tower of Babel, God scattered the people into many nations, tribes, subcultures, and languages. But what Zephaniah prophesied and what then happened inside the new covenant was that God brought them back together. Through the gift of tongues, He brought the peoples back together in the Spirit. This does not mean we speak every language. However, the spiritual language of love that we have been given crosses all language barriers on earth. The gift of tongues is a taste of the full reversal of the confusion brought at the Tower of Babel that will happen in heaven. In Genesis 11:6, God noted the power of unified language, saying, *“Nothing will be impossible for them.”* This, too, was restored at Pentecost, and in the new covenant, God declared that nothing is impossible for the people of His Kingdom (see Matt. 17:20). The power God withheld from the people at Babel has been given freely to us.

## **REVIEW TEST QUESTIONS**

1. The river flowed from the Land of \_\_\_\_\_ to the garden, and then it continued out from there.

2. Moving to the east is \_\_\_\_\_; when people head to the west it is \_\_\_\_\_, because in essence they are going back toward the \_\_\_\_\_.
3. What does an aerial picture of the twelve tribes encamped around the Tabernacle look like?
4. What is the name of the view that says Adam and Eve gave their authority away to the serpent until Jesus came as a man to take back the keys?
5. Who described an intense level of bitterness, which was linked to his polygamy?
6. In the genealogy in Genesis 5, if you write out the meaning of the names of Adam through Noah, what sentence is formed that starts with the word *man* and ends with the word *rest*?
7. In Genesis 6, God was not limiting the span of human life to 120 years; rather He was declaring there were 120 years left until what would happen?
8. What event in Acts 2 was the reversal of Genesis 11?

## KEY TERMS

Christus Victor	ziggurats
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# RELATED MATERIALS

Kevin Conner, *The Tabernacle of Moses: The Riches of Redemption's Story as Revealed in the Tabernacle*.

Kevin Conner, *The Tabernacle of David: The Presence of God as Experienced in the Tabernacle*.

Kevin Conner, *The Temple of Solomon: The Glory of God as Displayed Through the Temple*.

Harold Eberle, *Precious in His Sight: A Fresh Look at the Nature of Man*.

<sup>22</sup> An excellent resource on this subject is the author Kevin Conner, who has written a series of books on the tabernacle of Moses, the tabernacle of David, and the temple of Solomon.

<sup>23</sup> Harold Eberle's book, *Precious in His Sight: A Fresh Look at the Nature of Man*, provides a good discussion of the connection between Romans 5, the creation, and the doctrine of original sin.

<sup>24</sup> Chuck Missler, "Meanings of the Names in Genesis 5." Missler, of Koinonia Calvary Chapel, has done a great deal of research on Old Testament names and their original root word meanings.

<sup>25</sup> Noah took less than eighty years, not 120 years, to build the ark. We know this because the text says Noah conceived his three sons when he was 500, and he was 600 years old when he entered the ark. When God commanded Noah to build the ark, He included Noah's sons and their wives, which means that at the time of beginning to build, all three sons

had to be old enough to be married, at minimum, Noah started to build the Ark when he was 520 and finished when he was 600.

<sup>26</sup> Collins, “Yes, Noah’s Flood May Have Happened.”

<sup>27</sup> *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance*, Hebrew #776.

<sup>28</sup> “Pangea in the Bible?”

<sup>29</sup> Hamblin and Peterson, “Ziggurats are temple platforms of ancient Mesopotamia”; German, “Ziggurat of Ur.”



## nine



# THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT

The Abrahamic covenant is the second of the five major biblical covenants. The Abrahamic covenant and canon span a much longer time period and, therefore, a much larger amount of material than the Noahic. It is primarily contained in Genesis 12–25 but actually spans the whole way till Genesis 50. Even summarizing chapters 12–25 would take much more space than what we have room for in this chapter. Therefore, we will simply highlight the key parts essential to understanding the big picture of this covenant.

The Abrahamic covenant is significant to the new covenant and is mentioned often in the New Testament.

However, our goal here is to examine it in isolation, apart from our lens as people living thousands of years later under the new covenant. In Chapter 13, we will examine the Abrahamic covenant inside the New Testament, but for our purposes here, we want to see it as much through Abram's eyes as possible.

## THE JOURNEY BEGINS

The covenant begins with the story of Abram and his wife Sarai, which immediately follows the story of the Tower of Babel and the genealogy from Shem to Abram. In Genesis 12, God told Abram to leave his father's house and gave him this blessing:

*The Lord had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Genesis 12:1–3).*

Essentially, God called Abram out and promised to make Abram's name great even though Abram was not looking to have a great name. The Lord just gave it to him. We often think of Abram as the father of the faith, but he was not actually called by God to start a new religion. Instead, he was called to start a new nation, the nation that would eventually become Israel. It is easy to forget this if we are reading it through the lens of the new covenant, but Abram simply saw his commission as the call to start a new nation. He knew God had

promised to bless him, make his name great, make this new nation great, and bless the whole earth through him. He did not understand that God was separating him from the surrounding people in order to create a new religion. If we do not understand this, parts of Abram's story will not make sense. For instance, we cannot read the events of his life through the lens of the Mosaic covenant, because that covenant and the Law did not yet exist. Like Noah, all Abram had was the standard of conscience.

When Abram and Sarai left home, they took along their nephew Lot, as well as their household of servants and livestock. One of the first places they stopped was near Bethel, where Abram built an altar to God. As we discussed in the last chapter, Bethel is the house of God (in contrast to Babel, the gate of God). This Bethel, the house of God, shows up over and over in Genesis as people crossed back and forth through that area.

Near the end of chapter 12, we read of a great famine that caused Abram to take his family to Egypt. Here it is important to note Abram's time in history. People often imagine the pyramids in Egypt were built by the Hebrew slaves during their four hundred years in Egypt. However, history indicates that the pyramids were built approximately five hundred years before Abram arrived in Egypt.

## Abrahamic Covenant (2)

### Genesis 12-25 (50)



When Abram and Sarai entered Egypt, some interesting events took place:

*As he was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife Sarai, "I know what a beautiful woman you are. When the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife.' Then they will kill me but will let you live. Say you are my sister; so that I will be treated well for your sake and my life will be spared because of you."*

Because of his insecurity, Abram feared the Egyptians would kill him in order to take his wife, so he devised this deception. As a result, the Pharaoh, believing Sarai to be Abram's sister, took her into his palace, presumably to be part of his harem. However, *"The Lord inflicted serious diseases on Pharaoh and his household because of Abram's wife Sarai"* (Gen. 12:17). In the end, Abram and Sarai were sent away from Egypt. Even though Abram had lied, God backed him up and protected his wife by inflicting disease on Pharaoh. This does not mean it was okay to lie back then; however, the fact is, Abram did not have an explicit command against lying. Instead, as Paul wrote in Romans 1, God dealt with people according to

conscience. Because Abram's conscience was fear-based at that point, he thought the right answer in his situation was to deceive the Egyptians.

In the next chapter, Genesis 13, Abram and his nephew Lot separated because the shepherds under them started to quarrel. Lot chose to go east, toward Sodom. At this time, Sodom was not the evil Sodom that God eventually destroyed. But because we know going east symbolizes going away from God's presence, we know this is a bad sign.

In Genesis 14, the kings in the region began to war with each other, fighting and taking captives. Some of these kings took Lot and his family captive, so Abram gathered his household army of 318 men, pursued and attacked these kings, and rescued Lot and his family. This becomes a theme in Lot's life. He is a victim in need of a rescuer.

## MELCHIZEDEK

After Abram had defeated the enemy kings and freed the captives, the king of Sodom and the king of Salem, Melchizedek, came out to meet him.

*After Abram returned from defeating Kedorlaomer and the kings allied with him, the king of Sodom came out to meet him in the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley). Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, and he blessed Abram, saying, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. And praise be*

*to God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand.” Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything.*

Melchizedek is a mysterious person, whom we do not know much about, and many theories have circulated about him. We will discuss his significance in more detail in Chapter 17. What we know about Melchizedek is that he was the king of Salem, which was the early name for the city later known as Jerusalem, as well as the first priest of God mentioned in Scripture. Also, from Hebrews 7, which also talks about Melchizedek, we learn that Melchizedek was actually a title, not a name. Jesus was a priest in the order of Melchizedek; this was a title meaning “priest of righteousness” or “righteous one.” After Melchizedek blessed Abram, Abram gave him a tenth of the spoils of the war, which is the first tithe in Scripture.

Then the king of Sodom, whose people and goods Abram had rescued from capture, told Abram he would take his people back, but he offered for Abram to keep the goods for himself. However, Abram responded:

*With raised hand I have sworn an oath to the Lord, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth, that I will accept nothing belonging to you, not even a thread or the strap of a sandal, so that you will never be able to say, “I made Abram rich.” I will accept nothing but what my men have eaten and the share that belongs to the men who went with me—to Aner, Eshkol and Mamre. Let them have their share (Genesis 14:22–24).*

This was an intense moment. The king of Sodom wanted to bless and reward Abram for his fighting, but Abram strongly refused him. God had told Abram not to receive anything from the king of Sodom, and he obeyed. Chances are he had already discerned the evil heart of the king of Sodom. Accepting a gift from him would have put them in a covenant relationship, which was exactly what Abram and God did not want.

In Chapter 15, immediately after this, God confirmed Abram's obedience. *"After this, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: 'Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.'"* In other words, God was encouraging Abram that He was his true reward, better than any reward from the king of Sodom, and also his true protector. No reward from or alliance with the king of Sodom compared to the great reward and protection of covenant with God. When Abram made the choice to obey by turning down the king of Sodom, God immediately came and filled the place Abram had left for Him.

## CUTTING COVENANT

However, Abram responded by pointing out his lack of an heir:

*Sovereign Lord, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus? ... You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir* (Genesis 15:2–3).

In that day, if a man did not have an heir, the servant who had been with him for the longest time became the fill-in to inherit the estate. As Abram listened to the Lord's promise to be his shield and great reward, he wondered what it mattered if he did not have an heir. Essentially he was saying to God, "What about Your promise to me that I would become a great nation? What does it matter if I have no heir and end up giving it all to my servant Eliezer?" This same Eliezer would be the trusted and loyal servant Abram sent to find a wife for his promised son, Isaac, many years later. He too must have expected he would inherit everything from Abram once he died, but when the miracle child was born in Abram's old age, Eliezer stayed loyal to their family. He is an important and interesting character to consider.

God did not despise Abram for his complaints but answered him with hope for the future:

*Then the word of the Lord came to him: "This man will not be your heir; but a son who is your own flesh and blood will be your heir." He took him outside and said, "Look up at the sky and count the stars—if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness (Genesis 15:4–6).*

Then, in Genesis 15, God came to Abram and told him to gather certain animals, cut them in half, and make a pathway through the middle of these halved animals. This was a normal form of covenant-making during that time. When those "cutting covenant" walked down the path through the animal



halves, they were declaring to each other, “If I do not fulfill the obligations of the covenant, may it be done unto me as it was to these animals.” In other words, this was a very intense blood covenant ritual. Abram followed God’s instructions; then, while he waited for God, he chased away the birds of prey that attempted to eat the carcasses. As far as we know, Abram did not know exactly what God intended, so he waited for Him to show up. Eventually, evening came, and Abram fell into a deep sleep. The Lord then came to him while he was sleeping and said:

*Know for certain that for four hundred years your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own and that they will be enslaved and mistreated there. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions. You, however, will go to your ancestors in peace and be buried at a good old age. In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure (Genesis 15:13–16).*

Then, in the darkness, while Abram still slept, a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces. And so God made a covenant with Abram:

*To your descendants I give this land, from the Wadi of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates—the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites and Jebusites (Genesis 15:18–21).*

So, while Abram slept, God told him what would happen to his descendants in the distant future and promised the land of the Amorites to them once the Amorites had become so wicked that God must punish them. In other words, God gave the Amorites a certain amount of time while the Israelites were growing as a nation under Egyptian slavery. But by the end of those four hundred years, God knew the Amorites would have reached a point where they needed to be punished for their wickedness. Israel's conquest in the land was God's punishment on the Amorites, but prior to that, they received mercy from God because they had not yet become so evil.

God confirmed this promise by appearing as a smoking firepot with a blazing torch and passing between the pieces. Interestingly, Abram did not pass through the pieces because he was asleep. In other words, God was declaring His obligation to Abram to fulfill the covenant, but it did not hinge on Abram fulfilling his part. If he had a part to fulfill, he would have been awake and walked through the animals like God did. This shows us what type of covenant God made with Abram. In that day, three types of covenants were common:

1. **Grant Covenant**—A covenant when a greater and lesser person came into covenant, and the greater one took on all of the obligations. The lesser one only needed to receive the covenant.
2. **Kinship Covenant**—A covenant when two equal parties came together, as in a marriage. Each party took on a small list of obligations in the covenant. This type of covenant had a small set of obligations and was very

evenly divided between the two parties. A kinship covenant was also referred to as a **parity covenant**

3. **Vassal Covenant**—A covenant when a greater and lesser person came into covenant based on the greater one's ability to destroy the lesser one. Instead of destruction, the greater one offered the lesser one safety in exchange for the ability to collect taxes and tribute, take slaves, and so forth. Typically this happened when a king conquered a nation and offered the people of that nation their lives in exchange for a level of servitude to his harsh rule. As a result, in this covenant, the greater person had all the power, and the lesser person had to fulfill a large number of obligations. A vassal covenant was also referred to as a **suzerain covenant**.<sup>30</sup>

Clearly, a grant covenant is the best type, followed by a kinship covenant. A vassal covenant is completely undesirable. In this list of the five major biblical covenants, both the Noahic and Abrahamic covenants are grant covenants. God simply came to Noah and to Abraham and made them promises that He would fulfill, without any stipulations or obligations on their part. When God passed through the animals, He was saying, "I am putting a death threat on myself that I will absolutely keep my covenant to you." This is what it means in the Book of Hebrews when it says, "*When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself*" (Heb. 6:13). Though it is obviously impossible for God to receive the same treatment as the animals, He used that picture

to communicate the level of His commitment to Abram. And while God took the obligations upon Himself, Abram slept. This is a grant covenant. It did not have any stipulations that the promises hinged on. God did not say to Noah, “I will never send a flood again to wipe out the earth *unless...*” And He did not say to Abram, “I will give your descendants this land *if...*” No, He made unqualified promises that did not require anything of the recipients.

## HAGAR AND ISHMAEL

In Genesis 16, Abram and Sarai decided to take God’s promise into their own hands and attempted to fulfill it on their own:

*Now Sarai, Abram’s wife, had borne him no children. But she had an Egyptian slave named Hagar; so she said to Abram, “The Lord has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my slave; perhaps I can build a family through her” (Genesis 16:1–2).*

This was a normal custom in that region at that time, but it was not God’s plan for Abram and Sarai. As a result of their scheming, Hagar got pregnant, and conflict arose between Sarai and Hagar. It escalated to the point that, even though this whole thing was Sarai’s idea in the first place, she mistreated Hagar so severely that Hagar fled into the wilderness. However, the Lord met Hagar, told her to return and submit to her mistress, and made her a promise regarding her son.

*The angel of the Lord found Hagar near a spring in the*

*desert; it was the spring that is beside the road to Shur. And he said, "Hagar, slave of Sarai, where have you come from, and where are you going?" "I'm running away from my mistress Sarai," she answered. Then the angel of the Lord told her, "Go back to your mistress and submit to her." The angel added, "I will increase your descendants so much that they will be too numerous to count." The angel of the Lord also said to her: "You are now pregnant and you will give birth to a son. You shall name him Ishmael, for the Lord has heard of your misery" (Genesis 16:7–11).*

Here Hagar is the first of only four people in Scripture to whom God reveals the names of their children while still in the womb. Ishmael was first, followed by Isaac. Then it does not happen again until the New Testament, first with John the Baptist and second with Jesus. Only these four were named by God in the womb. Ishmael means "God hears," and to Hagar it was a promise that God had heard her difficulty and would not forget her. In response, Hagar called the Lord "the God who sees me," and she returned to Abram and Sarai, where she eventually gave birth to her son Ishmael. This same Ishmael would eventually become the father of the Arab nations from that region, while Isaac became the father of the Israelites.

## CONFIRMING THE COVENANT

The next chapter picks up the story thirteen years later, when Abram was ninety-nine years old. The Lord again appeared to Abram and said, *"I am God Almighty; walk before*

*me faithfully and be blameless. Then I will make my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers”* (Gen. 17:1–2). This must have seemed a little odd for Abram. After all, God had already made a covenant with him in Genesis 15. Here He mentioned it as though it was still future, and again in Genesis 22 He said something very similar. In our English translations, this can seem confusing. It can sound like God was saying, “I will make a covenant with you” when He already made a covenant with Abram. What God was actually communicating to Abram was this: “I will confirm My covenant.” It’s not that He hadn’t made the covenant but that now He was coming and confirming an aspect of the covenant. Here is a simple outline of the covenant process in Abram’s life:

1. In Genesis 12, God promised Abram five things: I will bless you; I will make your name great; everyone who blesses you will be blessed; everyone who curses you will be cursed; and all your offspring will be a blessing to the whole world.
2. In Genesis 15, God made a covenant with Abram.
3. In Genesis 17, God began confirming the covenant by changing Abram’s name to Abraham and by introducing the standard of circumcision.
4. In Genesis 22, God finalized confirming the covenant through His test of Abraham on Mount Moriah.

For this reason, we cannot point to just one chapter as the Abrahamic covenant. It was explained and confirmed over a

series of years.

In Genesis 17, God appeared to Abram to confirm the covenant, and He said:

*As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. The whole land of Canaan, where you now reside as a foreigner, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God (Genesis 17:4–8).*

He went on to mention circumcision. While we will not discuss this in depth, it is important to note that circumcision was common among other ancient peoples of that day. This was not a brand new concept; Abram would have known exactly what God was talking about. Here God inserted it into the Israelite tradition and also renamed both Abram and Sarai. Abram (“honored father”) was renamed Abraham (“father of many nations”), and Sarai (“contentious one”) was renamed Sarah (“princess”).<sup>31</sup>

SODOM AND GOMORRAH

In Genesis 18, three visitors (angels) came to Abraham and Sarah on their way to Sodom and Gomorrah to see if the evil of Sodom and Gomorrah was as bad as the outcry against them and, if it was, to release judgment. When they stopped to visit with Abraham, they gave him this word: *“I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son”* (Gen. 18:10). At this, Sarah, who was listening in the tent, laughed to herself, thinking this promise impossible since she was beyond childbearing years. However, the Lord rebuked her, saying:

*Why did Sarah laugh and say, “Will I really have a child, now that I am old?” Is anything too hard for the Lord? I will return to you at the appointed time next year, and Sarah will have a son* (Genesis 18:13–14).

Then the Lord announced His plan to go check out Sodom and Gomorrah, and Abraham began to barter with God about how many righteous people were needed to save the cities from destruction. He said to God:

*What if there are fifty righteous people in the city? Will you really sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous people in it? Far be it from you to do such a thing—to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?* (Genesis 18:23–25).

God agreed, and they went back and forth—50, 45, 40, 30, 20, 10. Abraham was satisfied at ten, thinking there must be at



least that many righteous people in two cities. Because the Law did not yet exist, we must ask what Abraham meant by *righteous*. There was not yet a structured concept of what it meant to be righteous apart from walking according to one's conscience and honoring God. The only qualification for righteousness listed thus far in Scripture was, "*Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness*" (Gen. 15:6). In other words, people who believed God were considered righteous. However, even by these standards, they only found six righteous people—Lot, his wife, his two daughters, and his two sons-in-law. If Abraham had gone down just once more, to five, he may have saved Sodom and Gomorrah. But the end result was that the cities had to be destroyed, and in Genesis 19 the two angels went down to warn Lot and his family to flee the city. The angels were able to convince Lot, his wife, and his daughters to flee the city; however, the two sons-in-law did not believe Lot when he told them judgment was coming.

The angels told Lot's family, "*Flee for your lives! Don't look back, and don't stop anywhere in the plain! Flee to the mountains or you will be swept away!*" (Gen. 19:17). They told them how to avoid being caught in the destruction. However, Lot told them he was too old to make it to the mountains and asked if instead they could go to a nearby town. The angels agreed to this, and Lot and his family hurried to it. When they had reached the town of Zoar, God rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah and completely destroyed the cities and everything in that plain, including all the plants. However, Lot's wife looked back at the destruction and became a pillar of salt. While many people tend to think of this as some sort of

divine judgment on Lot's wife, most commentators point to a natural cause. When God poured down burning sulfur, it destroyed everything on the plains. This is why the angels told them to run and not look back. They were literally running as the destruction was happening behind them, and Lot's wife made the mistake of stopping to look behind her, and she got caught in the destruction. According to many commentaries, it is very possible that she would have been close enough to the burning sulfur to have been crystallized by the heat, almost like an instant fossil. In essence, the entire plain was crystallized into a salt-like fossil, which is substantiated by archeological findings in that region of the world.<sup>32</sup>

The story of Lot's wife gets even more interesting when we look at two **targums**, or written religious documents that often include history and lineage not found in Scripture. The **Targum of Jonathan** and the **Targum of Jerusalem** both indicate that Lot's wife (who is unnamed in Scripture) was named Aedith, and she was a native of Sodom. It is interesting to consider this possibility. All those years ago, when Abram and Lot parted ways, Lot decided to go east to Sodom and married a woman from Sodom. If this is true, it means she had a relational connection to the city that caused her to not want to leave and to look back at the destruction.

Also, it is important to understand here that salt is a covenantal element. We see this in Numbers 18:

*Whatever is set aside from the holy offerings the Israelites present to the Lord I give to you and your sons and daughters as your perpetual share. It is an*

*everlasting **covenant of salt** before the Lord for both you and your offspring (Numbers 18:19).*

In that day, many covenants were like treaties between people, and they could be changed and re-communicated over time, as the individuals renewed the covenant. However, a **salt covenant** was different.<sup>33</sup> It was an everlasting, unchangeable covenant. In the ancient world, people would wear a small pouch of salt at their hip. When two men made a salt covenant with each other, they would each take a pinch of salt from their own pouch and place it in the other man's pouch. This meant, "If you can reach into my pouch and take back only your grains of salt, then you can change or break your covenant with me." Obviously, that would be impossible, which made a salt covenant permanent. This is why, earlier, Abram had turned down the King of Sodom when he offered Abram all of these riches and connection. He did not want a covenant obligation to Sodom.

In Lot's wife we find the opposite picture. She was a native of Sodom and could not leave it behind. She was, in a salt manner, connected through covenant to the city and, therefore, could not give it up, even at the expense of her life. Lot's wife is mentioned only one other time in Scripture, in Luke 17:31–32, where Jesus was prophesying the AD 70 destruction of Jerusalem. As He was talking about what would happen, He recalled Lot's wife and said:

*On that day no one who is on the housetop, with possessions inside, should go down to get them. Likewise, no one in the field should go back for*

*anything. Remember Lot's wife!*

Do not be like Lot's wife, who turned back because her heart was connected to the city and her possessions there. According to Jesus' statement, part of Lot's wife's connection to Sodom was based on her materialism. She could not let go of it, even at the cost of losing her own life.

## THE BIRTH OF ISAAC

Genesis 20 begins with a near repeat story in which Abraham lied about Sarah being his sister instead of his wife, only this time it was to Abimelek. Once again, Abraham was concerned that he would be killed because of Sarah's beauty. This time, too, God protected Sarah, turning everyone in Abimelek's household barren. Suddenly nobody was able to have children.

*Then Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Abimelek, his wife and his female slaves so they could have children again, for the Lord had kept all the women in Abimelek's household from conceiving because of Abraham's wife Sarah (Genesis 20:17–18).*

This scenario is once again baffling. Why did Abraham get away with lying? Why did God still back him up? We find an answer to this in Genesis 17:18–21, where Abraham asked God if Ishmael could be the promised son. In essence, God said, "No. I will only make My covenant with the son Sarah bears to you." In other words, God's covenant was not only with Abraham but also with Sarah, and He had declared she would

be the mother of nations just as Abraham was the father of nations. Thus, God would not accept Abraham's son born to Hagar. When we understand the significance of Sarah to the covenant, we can see why God protected her purity, even when Abraham was in the wrong. He needed to protect her so He could fulfill His covenant promise through her.

And in the next chapter, that is exactly what God did. At long last, when Abraham was one hundred years old, Sarah became pregnant and gave birth to the promised son, Isaac. On the eighth day after his birth, they circumcised Isaac just as God had commanded. This is an interesting detail that holds a lot of significance. Abraham did not know why God had told him to circumcise on the eighth day; he was simply being obedient. However, there was actually a scientific reason for this. When babies are born, their level of vitamin k, which helps with blood clotting, dips significantly during the first seven days of life. However, on the eighth day, vitamin k levels rise above 100 percent, giving babies more vitamin k on that one day than they will have naturally on any other day in their lives!

This is why God told Abraham to circumcise Isaac on the eighth day. If he had done it before then, he would have risked serious bleeding in his young son, because Isaac's ability to clot blood was low during that first week. Now, in modern days, the medical community usually gives infant boys a large dose of vitamin k and performs the circumcision within the first two days. But Abraham did not know any of this, which shows us the amazing goodness of God hidden in His commands. In the same way, God's laws later enabled His promise to protect the

Israelites from the diseases of Egypt.<sup>34</sup>

*If you listen carefully to the LORD your God and do what is right in his eyes, if you pay attention to his commands and keep all his decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the LORD, who heals you (Exodus 15:26).*

God gave them specific laws about what they could not eat or touch and how to purify themselves, and these laws were directly connected to preventing disease at a time in history when sanitization was very rare and preventable diseases were common. He promised that if they obeyed His Law, they would not catch these diseases, and now we know medically why that was true.

Another interesting aspect of the story of the birth of Isaac is the Muslim perspective. Muslims also refer back to Abraham as their father, but they cast Ishmael as the promised son, saying it was actually Isaac who was the son of the slave woman. And when Abraham took his son up the mountain to sacrifice him, Muslims say it was Ishmael, not Isaac.<sup>35</sup> It is important for us to understand if we dialogue with Muslims, because their history has flipped the story completely to make Ishmael and the Arabs God's chosen people.

After Isaac was weaned, Sarah saw Ishmael mocking her son, and she demanded he and his mother be sent away, because she did not want him to share in her son's inheritance. Abraham, as a good father, was grieved by this, because he cared about both of his sons. However, God comforted him,

telling him He would take care of Hagar and Ishmael. He promised to make Ishmael into a nation, too, because he was also Abraham's son. Abraham believed God and sent Hagar and Ishmael away into the dessert with some water and food. When they ran out of water, Hagar told Ishmael, who at this point was probably fourteen or fifteen years old, to lie under a bush. Then she went a little bit away to cry, because she believed they were both going to die, and she did not want to see it. As Hagar was crying, God called out to her:

*What is the matter, Hagar? Do not be afraid; God has heard the boy crying as he lies there. Lift the boy up and take him by the hand, for I will make him into a great nation (Genesis 21:17–18).*

God then opened her eyes to see a well of water, so she filled her water skin and gave Ishmael a drink. From then on, God was with Ishmael as he grew up, and he became an archer and married a woman from Egypt. In this way, God fulfilled His promise to Abraham to protect and care for Ishmael. This is important for us to remember as we read the next story of Abraham's life. He had already developed a history of trust with God as the one who steps in and provides in difficult situations.

## THE SACRIFICE

Genesis 22 tells the story of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac on Mount Moriah. This story has often been misunderstood because in it God told Abraham to kill his son, something which He later forbade under the Mosaic Law. Many have

accused God of being cruel because of this story, but this is only because they are reading it from our perspective in history, not according to Abraham's original perspective, as someone who did not have the Law. All Abraham knew was that every religion he had ever seen demanded the sacrifice of children to the gods. Now this God he was getting to know said the same thing—only He interrupted Abraham and prevented him from killing his son. It can be difficult, from our vantage point, to put ourselves back in Abraham's shoes in order to understand his experience of it, but we must try to, especially for challenging stories like this one.

To do that, we will start with the first verse: “*Some time later God tested Abraham*” (Gen. 22:1). That is our first clue; what was happening was only a test. It was not an expression of God's desire. To test Abraham, God told him, “*Take your son, your only son, whom you love—Isaac—and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you*” (Gen. 22:2). In English, this sounds like a command, but some scholars have pointed out that this is actually phrased in an imploring tone in Hebrew. It is almost as if we could inject the word *please*.<sup>36</sup> He could have refused, and God would have accepted it. A modern paraphrase of the essence of what God was communicating could go like this: “Look, I know how much this son means to you. He is your only son. He is the one you love. I understand. But will you do what I am asking of you?” In other words, God was making a request, and Abraham had a real choice. God had already made a grant covenant with Abraham, so God's promises to him were not on the line. Abraham simply needed to choose whether he would honor this request from his covenant partner. This was a



difficult test, because not only did Abraham love Isaac, but Isaac was the only son he had left. Ishmael was already gone, entrusted into God's hands. Abraham, the man of great faith, decided to trust God with this son, too.

Abraham said yes to God and prepared to leave with Isaac. He did this in faith that God would raise Isaac, as the promised son, from the dead. This was why he said to his servants, *"Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you"* (Gen. 22:5). This was what Abraham believed. The writer of Hebrews reflected on this story, *"Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the dead, and so in a manner of speaking he did receive Isaac back from death"* (Heb. 11:19). Reading this four thousand years after Abraham, we cannot help but see that the scenario between Abraham and Isaac was a foreshadowing of God's sending of His own Son to die on the cross and be resurrected. It is not a perfect picture, in the sense that Isaac never actually dies, but it does foreshadow Christ's death because Abraham viewed it as though Isaac would die and be raised from the dead. Abraham fully believed God would raise him, which is spectacular when we consider that no one had ever been raised from the dead before. Abraham had never heard a story of what he believed would happen. This is why Abraham is called the father of faith. He believed God's promise to make Abraham into a great nation through Isaac, and he knew God would make that promise happen, even if it meant raising someone from the dead.

When Abraham and Isaac arrived on the mountain, Abraham was about to slay Isaac when God stopped him and

provided a ram for the sacrifice instead. Then he and his son went back down the mountain together, just as he had expected. Abraham had passed the test. Shortly afterward, God spoke with Abraham again, saying:

*I swear by myself, declares the Lord, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me (Genesis 22:16–18).*

This sounds like a repeat of the same covenant, but it is the confirmation we mentioned previously. God was saying that Abraham's decision to offer Isaac secured for him endless offspring. Previously God had confirmed part of the covenant when the fiery pot passed through the animals, and then another part through the implementation of circumcision; here he confirmed the rest through the test of Abraham. What Abraham received from God through this grant covenant was so large and significant that God chose to confirm it in three parts between Genesis 12 and 22. In Genesis 12 He gave Abraham a list of promises. Then, in Genesis 15, 17, and 22 consecutively He confirmed portions of the covenant. This was the final confirmation.

## SARAH'S SIGNIFICANCE

Genesis 23 tells the story of the death of Sarah. The fact

that the Bible gives us an entire chapter on Sarah's death, her age, and her burial site shows the significance of this woman. The first verse of this chapter tells us Sarah lived to be 127 years old. *This is the only recorded age of a woman in the Bible.* After Abraham mourned his wife, he went to the Hittites to inquire about purchasing a burial site. Initially, the Hittites wanted to just give him whatever land he wanted because of their great respect for him, but Abraham insisted on paying. What this story shows us is not only Abraham's value for Sarah but God's value for her.

We often read the story of Abraham as being primarily about him, with Sarah playing only a minor supporting role. The reality is, God made His covenant with both Abraham and Sarah, as a married couple. We see this, as mentioned before, in the fact that God would not accept Abraham's other son from a different woman. The promised son had to come from Sarah as much as he had to come from Abraham. Abraham and Sarah had to become one to bring this promise into fruition. That is powerful. And it shows God's desire, yet again, for equality between men and women. Abraham did not get it, but God desired to revise humanity's understanding of the relationship between men and women. Not until Jesus would God's desire for equality between men and women be actualized. Sarah is a picture of God's heart for equality from the beginning. He did not ignore Sarah or leave her out. Instead, He honored her alongside Abraham as an equal partner in the covenant, as the mother of nations (see Gen. 17:16). The New Testament confirms this view of Sarah in several places. In Galatians 4, Paul honored Sarah by using her as a type of the new covenant. Then, in Hebrews 11, Sarah is one of the few women

included on the list of the heroes of the faith. We have had a tendency to look down on her, but God put her alongside Abel, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses. She is the mother of faith. Lastly, in First Peter 3, Peter admonished Christian women to imitate Sarah, to be daughters of Sarah (see 1 Pet. 3:6). No other Old Testament female character was held up with the same level of regard as Sarah was. We must not underestimate her significance in the covenant story.

After Sarah's death, the Bible records only one significant event before the death of Abraham. In Genesis 24, Abraham sent the servant Eliazer to find a wife for Isaac, who was heartbroken at the loss of his mother. Eliazer found Rebecca and returned with her, and Isaac loved her and was comforted after his mother's death. Then, in Genesis 25 we read of the death of Abraham and the lineage of some of Ishmael's sons, as well as Isaac's sons, Jacob and Esau. This is the end of the primary story surrounding the Abrahamic covenant, though the canon continues until the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and the establishment of the Mosaic covenant. The main emphasis of this story of God's covenant with Abraham is the simple walk of faith. Abraham started hearing the voice of God, following after His promises, and obeying what He said. He had no rules or Law or conditions; he simply walked in faith, and because he believed God, he was credited as righteous. This very simple understanding of relationship with God is the picture the Book of Romans tries to point us back to under the new covenant. Because of this, the Abrahamic covenant has much more in common with the new covenant than the Mosaic covenant does. That is why Hebrews 8:8-9 refers to God's promise to make a new covenant with His people that will *not*

be like the covenant He made with their ancestors after He led them out of Egypt (see also Jer. 31:31–32); the new covenant is not like the Mosaic Covenant, it is like the Abrahamic. When God said this, He actually pointed back to the Abrahamic covenant, which was based on walking with God by faith and being righteous simply based on faith in God. That is the picture we get from Abraham, which carries over into the new covenant.

## REVIEW TEST QUESTIONS

1. Before the Law was given, God dealt with people according to what?
2. Was Melchizedek a name or a title, and what did it mean? (See Hebrews 7:2.)
3. Name the three types of covenant.
4. Where is the phrase, “*covenant of salt*,” mentioned in the Bible?
5. God told His people to circumcise infants on the eighth day because on this day people have more of *what* than they will ever have on any day of their lives?
6. There is only one recorded age of a woman in the Bible. What is her name, and how old was she when she died?

# KEY TERMS

grant covenant	targums
kinship covenant	Targum of Jonathan
parity covenant	Targum of Jerusalem
vassal covenant	salt covenant
suzerain covenant	

# RELATED MATERIALS

H. Clay Trumbull, *The Salt Covenant*.

H. Clay Trumbull, *The Blood Covenant*.

H. Clay Trumbull, *The Threshold Covenant*.

S. I. McMillan, *None of These Diseases*.

Faisal Malick, *The Destiny of Islam*.

Paul Copan, *Is God Moral Monster?: Making Sense of the Old Testament God*.

<sup>30</sup> Hahn, *Kinship by Covenant*, 29.

<sup>31</sup> “Sarah, Sarai, Sara.” “Elsdon C. Smith suggests it may signify ‘contentious’ or ‘quarrelsome,’ but was changed, not accidentally, or by the whim of the bearer, but by God Himself that it might be a sign of His purpose, into Sarah, implying ‘the princess, a princess or princesses, the source of nations and kings.’”

<sup>32</sup> See the commentary on this passage from *Ellicott’s Commentary for English Readers Barnes’ Notes on the Bible*, both available at Biblehub.com.

<sup>33</sup> H. Clay Trumbull studied the ancient Near East covenants and wrote several ground-breaking books: *The Salt Covenant*; *The Blood Covenant*; and *The Threshold Covenant*. These provide insight on the various types of covenants during that time of history.

<sup>34</sup> S. I. McMillan has written a book called *None of These Diseases*, in which he compiles the medical science behind many of the laws God gave Israel.

<sup>35</sup> Faisal Malick, a former Muslim who is now a Christian leader, has written about this in his book, *The Destiny of Islam in the End Times*.

<sup>36</sup> Copan, *Is God a Moral Monster?*, 47. Copan goes into detail on this story, demonstrating that the way the question was phrased gave Abraham room to say no.

ten



# THE MOSAIC COVENANT

## PART 1

The Mosaic covenant is a very large topic. As the chart below shows, the Mosaic covenant is divided into two parts, not only because of length but also because of content.

<b>Study of the Covenants and Canons</b>
Noahic (Genesis 1–11)
Abrahamic (Genesis 12–50)



Mosaic Part 1 (Exodus 1–45; Numbers; Leviticus)
Mosaic Part 2 (Deuteronomy)

Part 1 of the Mosaic covenant is a kinship covenant, but part 2 is a vassal covenant. In other words, God's covenant with Moses and the nation of Israel changed over time. Part 2 will be the subject of the next chapter. In this chapter, we will examine part 1 of the Mosaic covenant, focusing primarily on the Book of Exodus.

Because of the length of the canon surrounding this covenant, we will skip over Exodus 1–18, including Moses' early years, the plagues, and Israel's escape from Egypt. We will pick up the story at Mount Sinai, where the Israelites make the worst mistake in the history of their nation.

## ISRAEL'S WORST MOMENT

The kinship covenant recorded in Exodus sprang out of Israel's worst moment as a nation. In Exodus 19, the Israelites reached the foot of Mount Sinai, led by the cloud of God's presence. In chapters 19 and 20, God gave the Law to the Israelites. For the estimated 2,847 years of human history prior to that, no Law existed. After the Law was given, there were about 1,300 years until Jesus came. Thus, there were twice as many years without the Law as there were with it. And the advent of the Law brought a drastic shift that Paul mentioned in Second Corinthians 3:6: *"He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit;*

*for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.*” In other words, when the letter of the Law was given, the letter brought death. Thus, we find a pattern of death and punishment after Exodus 19 and 20 that did not exist beforehand. Consider these examples:

### **Before the Law was given at Sinai:**

- Exodus 15:22–26: The Israelites’ grumbling at the start of their journey led to no punishment.
- Exodus 16:1–15: The Israelites’ grumbling about the manna and quail led to no punishment.
- Exodus 16:27–30: A Sabbath violation resulted in a reprimand.
- Exodus 17:1–7: The Israelites’ grumbling over the water led to no punishment.

### **After the Law was given at Sinai:**

- Numbers 11:1–3: The Israelites’ grumbling led to a destroying fire.
- Numbers 11:33–34: The Israelites’ grumbling about the manna and quail led to a killing plague.
- Numbers 15:32–36: A Sabbath violation resulted in death by stoning.

- Numbers 21:4–6: The Israelites’ grumbling over food and water led to the Lord sending deadly serpents among the people.

In other words, something radically changed at Mount Sinai with the giving of the Law. To understand what happened, we need to start at the beginning, where God first initiated a covenant with the Israelites.

*This is what you are to say to the descendants of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: “You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites (Exodus 19:3–6).*

Here, God initiated the covenant with a wonderful offer of a grant covenant. He promised divine protection and the privilege of being a nation of priests unto Him. In other words, everyone would have direct access to God. This was an incredible offer. In verse 8, the people wisely accepted His offer, saying, *“We will do everything the Lord has said.”*

Then, in verses 9–13, God gave Moses instructions for how the people should prepare themselves for the covenant ceremony. He told them to consecrate and wash themselves over three days, and on the third day God would come down

on the mountain in a dense cloud. He told them they must not touch the mountain or come near it until they heard the blast of the ram's horn. But after that blast, they could come. They were invited to approach, but only after three days. So the people did as God said. In verses 16–17, on the morning of the third day, a thick cloud came down over the mountain, with lightning, thunder, and a loud trumpet blast. Everyone in the camp trembled, and Moses led them out to meet with God at the foot of the mountain. The story continues:

*Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the Lord descended on it in fire. The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace, and the whole mountain trembled violently. As the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke and the voice of God answered him (Exodus 19:18–19).*

It is at this point in the story that we need some missing information. In Deuteronomy 5 we see the behind the scenes story of what happened when the people heard God speaking in Exodus 19:19.

*When you heard the voice out of the darkness, while the mountain was ablaze with fire, all the leaders of your tribes and your elders came to me. And you said, "The Lord our God has shown us his glory and his majesty, and we have heard his voice from the fire. Today we have seen that a person can live even if God speaks with them. But now, why should we die? This great fire will consume us, and we will die if we hear the voice of the Lord our God any longer. For what*

*mortal has ever heard the voice of the living God speaking out of fire, as we have, and survived? Go near and listen to all that the Lord our God says. Then tell us whatever the Lord our God tells you. We will listen and obey” (Deuteronomy 5:23–27).*

The people got scared and told Moses they didn’t want to hear God any more and that Moses should go on their behalf and simply get the rules and they would obey. Because of their slave-minded fear, they sacrificed relationship and asked for rules instead. Now we can understand the rest of the story in Exodus 19.

*The Lord descended to the top of Mount Sinai and called Moses to the top of the mountain. So Moses went up and the Lord said to him, “Go down and warn the people so they do not force their way through to see the Lord and many of them perish. Even the priests, who approach the Lord, must consecrate themselves, or the Lord will break out against them.” Moses said to the Lord, “The people cannot come up Mount Sinai, because you yourself warned us, ‘Put limits around the mountain and set it apart as holy.’” The Lord replied, “Go down and bring Aaron up with you. But the priests and the people must not force their way through to come up to the Lord, or he will break out against them.” So Moses went down to the people and told them (Exodus 19:20–25).<sup>37</sup>*

We can see from this that the Lord adjusted to the Israelites’ request, and rather than the whole nation coming up

to have relationship, only Moses and Aaron were allowed to come up to get the rules.

That was Israel's most tragic moment, because when God came down and talked to the whole nation audibly in Exodus 19:19, they decided, even though they realized they could hear His voice and live, they did not want to hear Him anymore. Instead, they chose Moses as a go-between because of their slave-minded fear. They were so gripped by the majesty of God before them that they shut down and pushed away the possibility of relationship with God. They said, "We are afraid we will die in His presence," even though He had just demonstrated to them that no one would die in His presence. Instead, they asked Moses to talk with God and find out what He wanted, and they would just obey His rules. This was a horrible turning point.

It is interesting to note that this is the first instance in the Bible when people are recorded as being so terrified of God that they ran away and refused to interact with Him. Even Adam and Eve, who hid from God, came to Him when He called them. We cannot know for sure why the Israelites responded in this way to God, when no one else ever had. More than likely, the 430 years of slavery had damaged their perspective and distanced them from an understanding of who the God of their fathers was. The only gods they had known were the gods of Egypt, and then those gods were defeated very dramatically by this God of their ancestors. Perhaps this created concern and fear in the Israelites. Regardless of the reason for their fearful response, God intended to show them they need not be afraid. Just as God had tested Abraham with the command to sacrifice

Isaac in order to show Abraham that He is different from other gods, God also tested the Israelites here, as Moses pointed out to them in Exodus 20:20. God was testing them to show them what He is actually like, but they stepped into the spirit of fear rather than allowing the test and stepping into the cloud, where God could show them what He is really like.

This may be hard for some people to accept, but in Scripture, God actually uses offenses. Jesus did offensive things many times in His ministry. He told a lame man to get up and walk. He made mud from spit and put it on a blind man's eyes. Then He told the blind man to find his way to a certain pool so he could wash the mud off. This must have been incredibly offensive, yet the man overcame his offense and did what Jesus said, and as a result he was healed. The Lord uses these offensive approaches as a test to see whether we will persevere in the relationship or back off because of offense. That is exactly what God did with the Israelites here, and sadly, they decided they did not want relationship. They had seen Him do so many amazing things. He had decimated their captors, opened the sea so they could walk through on dry land, protected them from their enemies, given Miriam a long prophetic song, fed them with quail and manna, and so forth. All these things were signs that should have shown them what sort of person He is and whether or not they could trust Him. Yet when He tested their understanding of His character and their trust in Him, they completely failed. They rejected His offer of a grant covenant in which every person could be a priest, and they elected Moses as mediator. In other words, they chose rules over relationship, and they initiated a kinship covenant instead of the grant covenant God had proposed.

## FROM GRANT TO KINSHIP COVENANT

This is how, in Israel's worst moment, they shifted their covenant with God from a grant covenant to a kinship covenant. In Exodus 19:3–6, God proposed the grant covenant. Yet, in Exodus 19:19 and the parallel passage in Deuteronomy 5:23–27, the Israelites responded in fear to God and asked Moses to be the mediator (this is reiterated in Exodus 20:18–19). Immediately following this is the giving of the Ten Commandments, which is actually a kinship ceremony. Rather than Exodus 20 being the record of God making every person a priest, a holy nation, and a treasured possession (as He had proposed), it is the record of a kinship ceremony. Anyone reading this in the ancient world would have understood this as a shift from a grant covenant to a kinship covenant ceremony.

This is how a normal kinship ceremony worked. If two people groups came together to make a covenant with each other, that meant two equals were coming together to make a kinship covenant. Together, they would draft a list of rules that both groups must obey. This list of rules would embody the covenant they made together. This is what happened in the story of the Ten Commandments.

However, our modern ideas of the Ten Commandments have become a handicap that keeps us from understanding what they really were. We imagine them as two rounded-off tablets of stone with the commands listed by Roman numeral, five on one tablet and five on the other. However, in the ancient world, this would have been considered a tremendous waste of

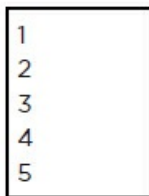
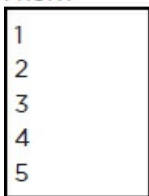


materials. Instead, these tablets would have been square, with commands 1–5 on the front and 6–10 on the back. Exodus 32:15b actually tells us the tablets were inscribed on both sides: “*They were inscribed on both sides, front and back.*” In other words, both tablets had all of the commandments on them:

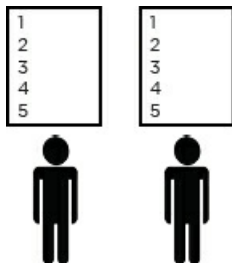
### One stone tablet and duplicate copy

(back lists 6-10)

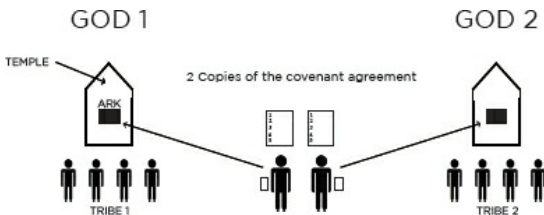
FRONT



The second tablet was a copy, a duplicate, which was a normal practice in the ancient world (as it is today). In this way, when the two parties came together and made their list of rules signifying the covenant, each party could take home one of the copies of the covenant agreement. This was normal practice in a kinship ceremony.

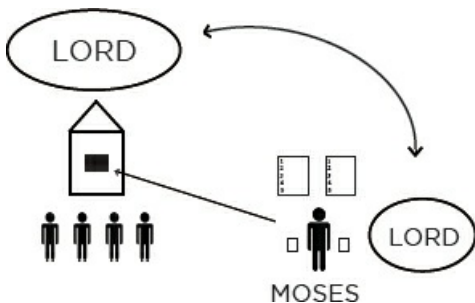


When the delegates of the nations who had just made a kinship covenant returned home, they would take their copies of the covenant to their temple or tabernacle, where they would put it in a box called an ark. Israel was not the first nation to have an ark; it was common practice at that time, and it was specifically used to hold copies of covenant agreements. Thus, it was named the ark of the covenant.



In the diagram above, we see delegate 1 returned to his

tribe and put the tablet in the ark to his god (god 1). Delegate 2 did the same, putting the tablet in the ark to his god (god 2). The understanding was that if tribe 1 violated the covenant with tribe 2, the god of tribe 1 would punish them for being in violation. *In other words, their own god would punish the tribe that violated the covenant*, because that was the god they believed in, not the god of the other tribe. So when these two tribes created a kinship covenant together, they were saying, “If we violate our covenant with you, then our god will punish us.” This was the normal concept for a kinship covenant, but in the case of Israel and God, it did not quite work that way. This is because, as this diagram shows, God was representing Himself:



On the right side, God was all by Himself. He did not have a people or a God above Him to keep Him in line. He did not have a temple to keep His copy of the tablet in. Thus, when the Lord

came to meet with Moses and Moses communicated Israel's desire for a kinship covenant, Moses kept both copies of the covenant tablets. Eventually, he put both copies in the ark of the covenant, but first Israel had to build a tabernacle, and God had to tell them how to do it, because they had never had one before. They were a nation of ex-slaves who had never really had a religion before. All this put God in a strange position, because no one was over Him to make sure He kept His word, which is why it says of God, "*You have magnified Your word above all Your name*" (Ps. 138:2 NKJV). In other words, He chose to put Himself under His Word as a promise that He would keep His promise, no matter what.

## PARTNER AND PUNISHER

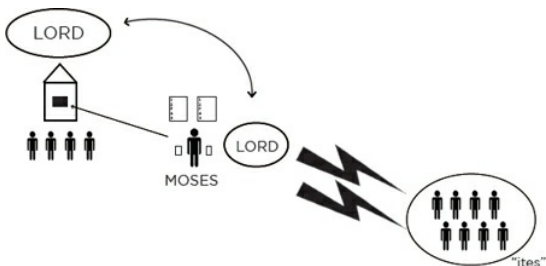
The most awkward part of this arrangement was that God had to fulfill the roles of both god 1 and god 2 in the equation. He was the one making the covenant and holding Himself accountable to it, but He also had to hold Israel, *His covenant partner*, accountable to it. This put Him in a horrible position as *the punisher* of His covenant partner, Israel, whenever they violated the covenant. It is important for us to understand that this was not God's idea but Israel's. Through their counter-offer of a kinship covenant, they put God in a position He never wanted, and now He was forced to punish them.

God wanted a nation of priests who all had direct access to Him and represented Him to the rest of the world. He wanted a treasured possession and a holy nation. Instead, they asked Him for this kinship arrangement, like what they had seen in

Egypt. Really, the grant covenant was too big of a blessing for the slave-minded people to comprehend or accept. Instead, they chose a kinship covenant, which initially sounded like it would be very equal, but it was really a set-up for failure. Even though God recognized it was a bad idea, He condescended to their level and agreed to do it their way.

This was the covenant they lived with for forty years, while they wandered in the wilderness—the Ten Commandments, as well as instructions on how to build the tabernacle, the ark, and the furniture for the tabernacle and guidelines for how the priests should take care of the tabernacle. He just gave them these basics. But even the basic Ten Commandments placed God in the position where He had to punish Israel whenever they violated the covenant, which happened frequently. This explains the difference in God's responses to Israel's complaining before and after Sinai. Before Sinai, He would reprimand them slightly, because He wanted them to become a nation of priests. But after Sinai, He was forced by the covenant to punish them for violating it. This was a horrible position for God to be in.

The other aspect of the kinship covenant is that it put God at odds with all of Israel's enemies. He was now obligated by the covenant to rain down judgment against the Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, and other peoples who fought against Israel. Under the grant covenant, He would not have had to do this, because His people would have been priests to represent Him to humanity. But under the kinship covenant, God was Israel's partner and must join in fighting against Israel's enemies, which was something He never intended.



In other words, not only did God have to be the punisher He never wanted to be, but He also had to be the ally for fights He did not pick or desire. This is why, in Second Corinthians 3–4, Paul said the Mosaic covenant, or the old covenant, put a veil over God. Only in Christ was the veil taken away. This is because the grant covenant God offered in Exodus 19 came from God's heart, while the kinship covenant of the Law came from the people's hearts. That covenant did not represent Him or His heart toward humanity. It did not represent His interests or what He wanted to do on earth. *Thus, the kinship covenant and the Law put a veil over God, disguising the true desires of His heart.* As a result, for the next 1,300 years, people were confused about God. Many still are, because they look back at the Law, and it obscures what God is actually like.

Here is what we must remember. The Law is a veil. It is something God never called for or desired; it didn't come from God's heart. Yet even in the Law, He did His very best to show His heart. For example, the Israelites had just come out of

slavery in Egypt, where they made bricks under very difficult circumstances, seven days a week. They had no break. Thus, in the middle of the commands, God included one that gave them liberty to take a day off from work so they could rest. In other words, He was trying to inject His heart even into this horrible arrangement. But the people could not see it. So instead of receiving the Sabbath as a blessing, they turned it into a crippling weight. This is why Jesus, reflecting on what people had done to the Sabbath, said, *“The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath”* (Mark 2:27).

We find another instance of God’s heart leaking through in Exodus 23:28–30, where He told Moses His plans for emptying the Promised Land so the Israelites could have it:

*I will send the hornet ahead of you to drive the Hivites, Canaanites and Hittites out of your way. But I will not drive them out in a single year, because the land would become desolate and the wild animals too numerous for you. Little by little I will drive them out before you, until you have increased enough to take possession of the land.*

In other words, He was going to use natural forces (*not* war) to drive them out. He was going to cause them to leave on their own rather than through Israel attacking them, thus preserving many lives, both in Israel and in the other nations. However, unfortunately, the people who were being driven out by these natural causes started attacking Israel, which led to a back-and-forth in fighting that demanded the Lord’s intervention on Israel’s behalf. Later, in the Book of Joshua, the

situation had changed, which we will discuss after we talk about Deuteronomy. But initially, God's plan did not involve war.

It is also interesting to note that after God audibly spoke the Ten Commandments to the entire nation, at the kinship ceremony, that was the last instance of the audible voice of God speaking corporately in the Old Testament. God was done talking corporately, because the people had chosen a mediator, so from then on, He spoke only to Moses. Thus, immediately after the Ten Commandments were given, Moses went into the thick darkness where God was to speak with Him, and there he received further commands for the people (see Exod. 20:21). This was the official transition away from God's original desire for a nation of priests to the people's desire for a mediator between them and God. And from then on, the audible voice was absent until the life of Jesus. Moses was in the cloud for forty days receiving these instructions from God. When he returned to the people, he discovered that they had built a golden calf.

## THE GOLDEN CALF

While Moses was on the mountain speaking with God, he left Aaron in charge. After a while, the people began to reason, *We don't know what has happened to Moses. He is probably dead. Let's make a god.* They had just heard God audibly talk to them and give them the Ten Commandments, including the command against making idols, yet almost immediately they made an idol. Within the first forty days of their covenant



agreement, the people had violated the first two commandments. Clearly, the kinship covenant was not going to work out well for them. In direct violation of the covenant, the people had Aaron build a golden calf for them.

They exchanged the creator of the universe for a small golden calf about the size of an actual calf. Some have imagined it as a towering statue, but that is not the sense the text gives us. It says Aaron made the calf from a mold and carved it with an engraving tool (see Exod. 32:4). This means it needed to be small enough for them to make a cast molding for it. This image was obviously vastly inferior to the God who had led them out of Egypt, yet they were willing to illogically ascribe their miraculous escape to this golden calf: “*Then they said, ‘This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!’*” (Exod. 32:4). They gave the calf credit for what God had done.

Then, after the calf was constructed, they worshipped it on the next day in the way they had learned in Egypt:

*The next day the people rose early and sacrificed burnt offerings and presented fellowship offerings. Afterward they sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry (Exodus 32:6).*

Many Bible versions translate the final phrase as “rose up to play,” but what was going on here was actually much more serious. The God’s Word translation gives a more accurate picture of what was happening:

*Early the next day the people sacrificed burnt offerings*

*and brought fellowship offerings. Afterward, they sat down to a feast, which turned into an orgy.*

In this way, the people entered into a pagan sacrificial ceremony, including sacrificing to this idol and participating in pagan sexual worships acts. (The translators have used very mild terms to present the very serious and evil situation in Exodus 32:6.) That is important, because it helps us understand the severity of God's judgment against them.

After God told Moses what the people had done, He said:

*"I have seen these people," the Lord said to Moses, "and they are a stiff-necked people. Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation" (Exodus 32:9–10).*

According to the covenant the people had chosen, this would have been their just punishment. God was ready to move on, because the kinship covenant was not working. However, Moses did something extraordinary:

*But Moses sought the favor of the Lord his God. "Lord," he said, "why should your anger burn against your people, whom you brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians say, 'It was with evil intent that he brought them out, to kill them in the mountains and to wipe them off the face of the earth'? Turn from your fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people. Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and*

*Israel, to whom you swore by your own self: 'I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and I will give your descendants all this land I promised them, and it will be their inheritance forever.'” Then the Lord relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened (Exodus 32:11–14).*

Here Moses appealed to the heart of the Lord on the basis of His grant covenant with Abraham, *not* His kinship covenant with Israel. The kinship covenant would have been a great reason to kill them all immediately, so Moses appealed back to God’s promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob about the descendants they would have. He pulled on the grant covenant from a previous time to get some mercy from the kinship covenant. God agreed with Moses and decided not to destroy the nation, but just those involved in the idol worship. When Moses came down the mountain, he smashed the tablets of the covenant that God had written for him. Then:

*He stood at the entrance to the camp and said, “Whoever is for the Lord, come to me.” And all the Levites rallied to him. Then he said to them, “This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: ‘Each man strap a sword to his side. Go back and forth through the camp from one end to the other, each killing his brother and friend and neighbor.’” The Levites did as Moses commanded, and that day about three thousand of the people died. Then Moses said, “You have been set apart to the Lord today, for you were against your own sons and brothers, and he has blessed you this*

day” (Exodus 32:27–29).

This command to kill can sound really arbitrary unless we remember an orgy was happening. So when Moses released the Levites to kill, they killed those involved in the orgy and worship of the idol.<sup>38</sup> This ended up being three thousand people. On the same day when the Law was finalized through the writing of the tablets, three thousand people died. By contrast, on the day of Pentecost, when the Spirit was given, three thousand people were saved. This is why the apostle Paul wrote, “*The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life*” (2 Cor. 3:6). This is the contrast between the old covenant and the new covenant, between the covenant the people desired and the covenant God desired.

## THE RESULT

Now that the idol worshippers had been destroyed, God had to decide what to do next. How could He handle this kinship covenant in the best way possible? So He said to Moses:

*Leave this place, you and the people you brought up out of Egypt, and go up to the land I promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, saying, “I will give it to your descendants.” I will send an angel before you and drive out the Canaanites, Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. Go up to the land flowing with milk and honey. But I will not go with you, because you are a stiff-necked people and I might destroy you*

*on the way* (Exodus 33:1–3).

In other words, He was saying, “I will keep My covenant with them, but I am going to stay back here and send an angel with you instead, because the people are so stiff-necked I might kill you all.” This might sound harsh, but it was God’s fair assessment of the situation and their inability to be good covenant partners. In this way, He was attempting to be merciful to them, despite their betrayal of the covenant. This was serious, and it caused the Israelites to mourn. Then Moses took a tent and pitched it outside the camp as a place where he could meet with the Lord. There the Lord came to him in a pillar of cloud and spoke to him face-to-face, as a friend. And there Moses talked with the Lord about the situation, asking Him who would go with them. He asked God to reconsider and to come with them, based on the fact that Moses had found favor in His sight and He knew him by name. And the Lord agreed to this.

Then Moses asked the Lord to show him His glory. This is a well-known passage, but we often miss some of the details. When Moses asked God to show him His glory, they were still together in the tent of meeting. Moses was not yet on the mountain, where God hid him in the cleft of the rock. In response to Moses’ request, God said:

*There is a place near me where you may stand on a rock. When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will remove my hand and you will see my back; but my face must not be seen* (Exodus 33:21–

23).

This was God's promise to Moses, but it had not happened yet. Immediately afterward, God told Moses to chisel two stone tablets like the first ones, which he had broken, so that God could write the covenant commandments on them again. So, the first time God made the tablets and wrote on them, and the second time Moses made the tablets, but God still wrote on them. Moses did as God instructed him, and he took the tablets up the mountain to God. There, God passed before him, as promised:

*Then the Lord came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the Lord. And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation." Moses bowed to the ground at once and worshiped. "Lord," he said, "if I have found favor in your eyes, then let the Lord go with us. Although this is a stiff-necked people, forgive our wickedness and our sin, and take us as your inheritance" (Exodus 34:5–9).*

Over the next forty days, Moses again received all the instructions from the Lord for the people regarding the tabernacle, consecration of the priests, the festivals, and so forth. When he came back down to the people, it had been

eighty days since the kinship covenant was created. The rest of Exodus tells how they began to walk out God's instructions. In Exodus 35–37, they gathered the materials and begin to build the ark, the tabernacle, the table, the altar of incense, and the lampstand. In Exodus 38–39, they made the priestly garments and built the washbasin. Exodus 22–30 gave the instructions for these items; now the Israelites were following them. By Exodus 40, everything was finished and the tabernacle was set up according to God's instructions. After this:

*Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. Moses could not enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled on it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. In all the travels of the Israelites, whenever the cloud lifted from above the tabernacle, they would set out; but if the cloud did not lift, they did not set out—until the day it lifted. So the cloud of the Lord was over the tabernacle by day, and fire was in the cloud by night, in the sight of all the Israelites during all their travels (Exodus 40:34–38).*

Here we see the Israelites knew God's presence was there, with them, and they knew God was meeting with Moses. They had tangible proof of His presence, but they had distanced the relationship and no longer interacted with Him personally. Though they could see with their eyes God's presence with them, they chose to maintain a safe distance. This was the tragic turning point of Israel's history, and it only got worse from there. When they pushed God away, everything went into decline. We cannot know for sure what it would have looked

like if Israel had accepted the grant covenant God proposed. If He was going to create a divine priesthood, as He said in Exodus 19:6, it seems He would have inaugurated what we know as the new covenant as early as at Mount Sinai. Obviously, He would have needed to do something about the unregenerate state of the people, but had they accepted His grant covenant, He must have had a plan for how He would remedy their identity as fallen humans. Instead, the old covenant was created and endured for 1,300 years.

## TO THE PROMISED LAND

After Exodus comes the Book of Leviticus, which is a guidebook for the priests so they would know how to operate with God's tabernacle that Moses had just established. Leviticus also includes instructions regarding what animals were considered clean or unclean for eating.<sup>39</sup> This system of cleanliness was not just present within Israel or with the patriarchs; it was common belief to all the ancient peoples alive during that time. If we can attempt to put the Bible back into the culture it was written about, it starts to make more sense. For example, the concept of clean and unclean was widespread, originating back before Noah (since he knew how to divide the animals between clean and unclean). Simply put, scavenger animals were considered unclean, and all other animals were clean. This means the concept of clean and unclean did not originate in the Law, and God never intended these guidelines simply to be restrictive but to be protective. He was affirming the understanding of that day that scavenger animals are, indeed, unclean (unhealthy to eat) and should be avoided.



Though these ancient people did not have the scientific understanding of animals and health that we do, the diet God gave them was very healthy.<sup>40</sup>

The timeline of the Israelites resumes in the Book of Numbers, which begins with a census. Then we read of the Israelites celebrating their first Passover, which means they had now been at the foot of Mount Sinai for a year. In Numbers 10, they began their journey from Mount Sinai to the Promised Land. In Numbers 11, the people grumbled about the manna, so instead God sent quail, but with the grumbling came a plague. As mentioned previously, this was because they were now living under the kinship covenant they had requested. In Numbers 12, Miriam and Aaron rebelled against Moses, and as a result, the Lord gave Miriam leprosy. However, she was healed through Moses' intercession.

In Numbers 13, God told Moses to send twelve spies into the Promised Land: *"Send some men to explore the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the Israelites. From each ancestral tribe send one of its leaders"* (Num. 13:2). The concept here is one covenant partner asking the other to send a team to look at the land the first partner is going to give to the second. In other words, God did not ask them to assess whether they could take the land; He simply asked them to look at the land. This was how Moses phrased it to these twelve spies:

*"Go up through the Negev and on into the hill country. See what the land is like and whether the people who live there are strong or weak, few or many. What kind*

*of land do they live in? Is it good or bad? What kind of towns do they live in? Are they unwalled or fortified? How is the soil? Is it fertile or poor? Are there trees in it or not? Do your best to bring back some of the fruit of the land.” (It was the season for the first ripe grapes) (Numbers 13:17–20).*

God had already promised to give the land to them, yet ten of these twelve leaders misunderstood and thought they must get the land on their own. Thus, they focused on the giants in the land and, at the end of forty days, returned with great fear, spreading a bad report about the Promised Land. Only Caleb and Joshua gave a good report. As a result, in Numbers 14:1–10, the people conceived a plot to kill the leaders and return to Egypt. This was ridiculous, especially considering how much God had proven Himself to them since they had left Egypt. Every day He had given them food from heaven. And for over a year, His cloud had been sitting by the tent of meeting, and when Moses met with Him, his face started shining from God’s glory. Yet despite this revelation of the glory and power of God, the Israelites became so concerned about the giants that they actually want to kill Moses and return to slavery in Egypt! Not surprisingly, the Lord then threatened to kill them all and start over with Moses, like He had considered doing in Exodus 32–33.

*The Lord said to Moses, “How long will these people treat me with contempt? How long will they refuse to believe in me, in spite of all the signs I have performed among them? I will strike them down with a plague and destroy them, but I will make you into a nation*

*greater and stronger than they” (Numbers 14:11–12).*

But once again Moses intervened, saying:

*Then the Egyptians will hear about it! By your power you brought these people up from among them. And they will tell the inhabitants of this land about it. They have already heard that you, Lord, are with these people and that you, Lord, have been seen face to face, that your cloud stays over them, and that you go before them in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. If you put all these people to death, leaving none alive, the nations who have heard this report about you will say, “The Lord was not able to bring these people into the land he promised them on oath, so he slaughtered them in the wilderness.” Now may the Lord’s strength be displayed, just as you have declared: “The Lord is slow to anger, abounding in love and forgiving sin and rebellion. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation.” In accordance with your great love, forgive the sin of these people, just as you have pardoned them from the time they left Egypt until now (Numbers 14:13–19).*

Here Moses appealed not only to the concern for God’s reputation among the surrounding nations but also to His love. Though the people had threatened to sin greatly by killing the leaders and returning to Egypt, Moses asked God to forgive them again and to continue on with the plan. Because they had

a kinship covenant, God could have rightfully destroyed them, based on their rebellion against the covenant, but Moses appealed to His forgiving nature. And thus we see how God kept extending His forgiveness and great love to people who did not deserve or appreciate it. As His covenant partner, Israel was terrible, yet God kept pardoning them. Instead of destroying them, God decided to punish them by causing them to wander in the wilderness for forty years before they could enter the Promised Land. For each day the spies spent in the land, the people would wander one year in the wilderness (see Num. 14:34). Only the ten spies who gave the bad report were killed instantly. Yet, the forty years in the wilderness were actually a death sentence, as God revealed in Numbers 14:29–30:

*In this wilderness your bodies will fall—every one of you twenty years old or more who was counted in the census and who has grumbled against me. Not one of you will enter the land I swore with uplifted hand to make your home, except Caleb son of Jephunneh and Joshua son of Nun.*

By the end of the forty years, Israel would be comprised of a new generation, and that new generation would enter the Promised Land.

## THE FORTY YEARS

For this reason, Israel had to take forty years walking in the wilderness when they could have crossed it in approximately eleven days. By the end of the forty years, the twenty-year-

olds would be sixty, and all the slave-minded people of the older generation would be dead, except for Joshua and Caleb. This marks another significant shift in Israel's history and mindset. Before, when they had rebelled against God, even under the kinship covenant, He had primarily responded with mercy, only punishing the people directly responsible for the rebellion. Now an entire generation had to pay, and they learned the meaning of God's words: *"You will suffer for your sins and know what it is like to have me against you"* (Num. 14:34). After pardoning them over and over, God was done with that generation. This was the first experience like this in Israel's history.

Here, it is important to mention that the Old Testament does not give us the same clarity about heaven and hell as the New Testament, and this story does not say this entire generation went to hell. Instead, it simply says God set them aside, because He could no longer work with them, and He would wait for the next generation to fulfill His promise. When the Israelites established the sacrificial system, during their years in the wilderness, they believed forward toward the Messiah who would come. And the fact that they were excluded from the Promised Land on earth did not necessarily mean they were excluded from heaven. Even Moses was not allowed to enter the Promised Land.

Numbers 15–36 contains the story of their forty-year journey. During this time, the Canaanites actually begin to come out into the wilderness and attack Israel, which meant God had to defend them as their covenant partner. In Exodus 23, God had promised to drive the Canaanites out through

natural means, and this was what He would have done if the spies had not spread the bad report. But the Israelites were now stuck wandering in the wilderness for forty years, and during that time, the Canaanites actually became aggressors against them. This set up an enemy scenario between the Israelites and Canaanites that would ultimately be walked out in the conquest of Canaan years later. However, it was not God's original intention. When the Israelites reached the end of the forty years, they experienced another significant change in covenant, from kinship to vassal. We will examine this in the next chapter.

## REVIEW TEST QUESTIONS

1. *"The letter \_\_\_\_\_, but the Spirit gives \_\_\_\_\_"* (2 Cor. 3:6).
2. What was the worst moment in the history of the nation of Israel?
4. In the ancient Near East, who was considered a priest in each household?
5. Moses appealed to the Lord for mercy on Israel on the basis of God's covenant with whom?

## RELATED MATERIALS

Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger*.

Jordan S. Rubin, *The Maker's Diet*.

<sup>37</sup> Here, it is important to point out that when God mentioned priests, He was not referring to the priests that came later under the Law, because the Law had not been given yet. Instead, He referred to the understanding in the ancient Near East that the oldest male member of each household was automatically the priest of that family. This was how the patriarchal system was set up. So when God referred to the priests in this passage, He was referring to the heads of households, making sure they knew the command to consecrate themselves applied to them, too.

<sup>38</sup> Edersheim, *Bible History: Old Testament*, 218.

<sup>39</sup> Mary Douglas' *Purity and Danger* is an anthropology book that analyzes ancient civilizations and the concepts of ritual uncleanness and other issues pertinent to our understanding of the ancient world.

<sup>40</sup> Rubin, *The Maker's Diet*.

# eleven



## **THE MOSAIC COVENANT PART 2**

As mentioned in the last chapter, the Book of Deuteronomy marks the shift in the Mosaic covenant from a kinship covenant to a vassal covenant. Thus, the book begins with Moses' proclamation to the Israelites on the first day of the eleventh month of the fortieth year in the wilderness. Now that the forty years were ending, it was time for the Book of the Law, also known as Deuteronomy. Until then, the primary laws the Israelites had were those contained in Exodus and Leviticus regarding what to eat, how to handle diseases, the



operation of the priesthood, and so forth. Moses was now 120 years old, and he was getting ready to die. He was not able to enter the Promised Land but needed to pass the leadership of the nation over to Joshua. To do that under a kinship covenant required a renewing of the covenant. Moses, on behalf of Israel, and God were kinship partners together. Now that Moses was about to die, God was about to lose His covenant partner. So Israel had to supply a new covenant partner—Joshua. The entrance of this new partner required a renewing of the covenant, which also involved assessing how the covenant had worked thus far.

## FROM KINSHIP TO VASSAL COVENANT

If two kings were in kinship covenant together, but one of the kings was a terrible covenant partner, when that king died and it was time to make a new covenant with his successor, the other king would most likely ask for a change in the arrangement, since the previous one had not worked well. He could not change the covenant while in partnership with the first king, but when his successor came along, then he could change the covenant. This is exactly what happened between God and Joshua. When God was in covenant with Moses, He could not change His covenant with Moses. This is why He never threatened to destroy Moses along with the people. Moses was His covenant partner. If God had destroyed the nation, He still would have started over with Moses.

However, when Joshua came along, God instituted a new covenant with him, in the Book of Deuteronomy, which was a

downgrade to a vassal covenant. While a kinship covenant is between two equal partners, a vassal covenant is between a greater king and a lesser king. In other words, they were no longer meeting on equal ground. We find proof that Deuteronomy is a vassal covenant in its structure, which is broken into the same five-part structure used in vassal covenants throughout the ancient Near East.<sup>41</sup> Here is how the five-part structure of a vassal covenant is fulfilled in Deuteronomy:

### **1. The Preamble: Deuteronomy 1:1–5**

Every one of these ancient vassal covenant treaties started with a preamble telling the date when the meeting took place and who the mediator of the covenant was. It served as an introduction.

### **2. Historical Prologue: Deuteronomy 1–4**

Next is the covenant history, or the history of how the two partners had walked together in covenant previously, including whether or not either of the partners was unfaithful to a previous covenant.

### **3. Stipulations / Obligations: Deuteronomy 5–26**

This section lists what is required for living inside the vassal covenant. It is always the largest part of the five-part structure. This is why Deuteronomy contains chapter after chapter of rules. These are the stipulations of the covenant.

#### **4. Final Sanctions / Covenant Ratification: Deuteronomy 27–30**

This is the covenant agreement, where the lesser king comes into agreement with the greater king's stipulations.

#### **5. Covenant Continuity / Dynasty Succession: Deuteronomy 31–34**

Here it says who the successor of the covenant will be. It lists who is dying and who is taking that person's place.

Toward the end of Deuteronomy, after Moses had written down the Law, God told him to place it beside the ark of the covenant as a witness against Israel (see Deut. 31:26). Previously, the two tablets of the kinship covenant (the Ten Commandments) were placed inside the ark, but the book of the Law was placed outside. In other words, it was an addendum. The kinship covenant was the real covenant that they had received in stone, but because Israel had done a horrible job of following that covenant for forty years, this addition changed that covenant to a vassal arrangement. As a result, all these new obligations were added. Thus, it served as a picture of the extra weight brought upon Israel through the book of the Law.

#### **THE CURSE OF THE LAW**

Here we will look more closely at the ratification of the Law. God established the format for this in Deuteronomy 27:14–15:

*The Levites shall recite to all the people of Israel in a loud voice: “Cursed is anyone who makes an idol—a thing detestable to the Lord, the work of skilled hands—and sets it up in secret.” Then all the people shall say, “Amen!”*

The rest of Deuteronomy 27 takes this rhythm, where the Levites declared a curse for disobedience, and the people responded with “Amen!” In other words, God’s stipulations and the consequences for disobedience were being declared aloud, and the people were required to voice their agreement. This shows that the covenant was no longer an equal partnership. Instead, the greater king (God) was giving them a list of rules, and they were required to agree. This is based on the fact that Israel had repeatedly violated their former kinship covenant with God, which gave Him the right to essentially say, “You must obey these stipulations, or you will die.” In other words, He was having mercy by offering them another change instead of simply releasing the punishment they deserved from their failure at the kinship covenant.

This concept continued in Deuteronomy 28, which contained the blessings for obedience and the curses for disobedience. The blessings of Deuteronomy 28 are applicable to us, in that they foreshadowed the even greater blessings released to us in the new covenant. So we can upgrade the blessings of Deuteronomy 28 and claim them over our lives. However, it is important to note here that these curses do not apply under the new covenant, because we now are forgiven when we sin. We do not get cursed, because our covenant partner does not hand out curses under the new covenant.

That does not mean we do not experience consequences for our actions. The biblical principle of sowing and reaping still applies, and if we sow foolishly, we will reap accordingly. That is not God putting a curse on us. It is just our own stupid decision. We all have the freedom to make stupid decisions, but it is not recommended. Likewise, it is possible to be cursed by someone else, but that is not the same as God putting a curse on us. The difference between the new covenant and the old is that God does not curse us for our poor decisions. Unlike us, the Israelites lived under the weight of the reality that if they disobeyed the covenant, God would curse them.

## THEIR PROPHESED FAILURE

In Deuteronomy 29, where Moses renewed the covenant, he prophesied Israel's failure and destruction. Here is a portion of that prophecy:

*Your children who follow you in later generations and foreigners who come from distant lands will see the calamities that have fallen on the land and the diseases with which the Lord has afflicted it. The whole land will be a burning waste of salt and sulfur—nothing planted, nothing sprouting, no vegetation growing on it. It will be like the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboyim, which the Lord overthrew in fierce anger. All the nations will ask: “Why has the Lord done this to this land? Why this fierce, burning anger?” And the answer will be: “It is because this people abandoned the covenant of the*

*Lord, the God of their ancestors, the covenant he made with them when he brought them out of Egypt. They went off and worshiped other gods and bowed down to them, gods they did not know, gods he had not given them. Therefore the Lord's anger burned against this land, so that he brought on it all the curses written in this book. In furious anger and in great wrath the Lord uprooted them from their land and thrust them into another land, as it is now" (Deuteronomy 29:22–28).*

Here Moses was giving a picture of the destruction that would happen to the nation during the Assyrian and Babylonian exiles. All the people had just finished ratifying the covenant and saying amen to all the curses for disobedience. Then Moses prophesied their future failure. He reminded them, "This is what you asked for. I tried to make you into a nation of priests, but you did not want that. You opted for a mediator. And then you doubted your covenant partner and tried to go back to Egypt. This covenant is a result of those choices you made, and I know you will fail because you are a stiff-necked people."

Then, in Deuteronomy 30, Moses told them they would return to the land after the destruction:

*When all these blessings and curses I have set before you come on you and you take them to heart wherever the Lord your God disperses you among the nations, and when you and your children return to the Lord your God and obey him with all your heart and with all your soul according to everything I command you*

*today, then the Lord your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you and gather you again from all the nations where he scattered you. Even if you have been banished to the most distant land under the heavens, from there the Lord your God will gather you and bring you back. He will bring you to the land that belonged to your ancestors, and you will take possession of it. He will make you more prosperous and numerous than your ancestors (Deuteronomy 30:1–5).*

This prophesies the return from exile experienced under Ezra and Nehemiah, when the Jews returned to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple. It does not refer to the endtimes, as some people teach. We know this because verse 6 tells us the time period:

*The Lord your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live (Deuteronomy 30:6).*

This is the first time the Bible mentions circumcising the heart, and it is one of the first mentions of the future new covenant. In other words, through Moses, God was prophesying that after the Israelites returned from exile to their land, He would institute a new covenant. This means this passage must refer to a time period prior to the new covenant and cannot possibly refer to the endtimes. After Moses prophesied Israel's failure and exile, He also promised the future advent of a new covenant, a different covenant

involving the circumcision of their hearts. Thus, hidden in the bad news of their current situation was the promise of something much better in the future.

## NOT TOO DIFFICULT

It is important to note here that even though Moses prophesied Israel's failure, it was completely possible for them to succeed. Many people say, "We cannot keep the Law because it is too difficult, it is humanly impossible." However, Deuteronomy 30 says exactly the opposite:

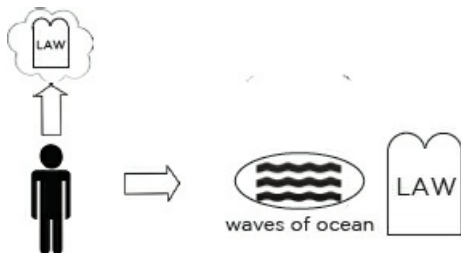
*Now what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach. It is not up in heaven, so that you have to ask, 'Who will ascend into heaven to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?' Nor is it beyond the sea, so that you have to ask, 'Who will cross the sea to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?' No, the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it. See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. For I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in obedience to him, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess. But if your heart turns away and you are not obedient, and if you are drawn away to bow down to other gods and worship them, I declare to you this day that you will certainly be destroyed. You will not live long in the*



*land you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the Lord your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the Lord is your life, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Deuteronomy 30:11–20).*

There is a lot to look at in this passage. First, we will consider what some people discern as an implied narcissism. To some, the command to love God sounds like arrogance and narcissism on His part. But this is a cultural misunderstanding. The command to love the greater king was simply part of the vassal covenant, because the opposite of love is hate, and hatred would compel the people to break the laws of the covenant. Thus, faithful service and obedience was referred to as “love.” Some people have also interpreted God’s sanctions against worshipping other gods as narcissism, but the reality was that, within a covenant, worship of another god was equal to adultery. Because they were in covenant with God and claimed Him as their Lord, when they worshipped other gods, they were cheating on their covenant partner. This is why the Old Testament always connects idolatry to adultery. God was a faithful partner to Israel. He did not make covenants with other nations, and He wanted Israel to honor Him in the same way, by not worshipping other gods. This is why, in a world of pantheism, the Israelites were called to worship *only* the God of Israel.

Second, we will look at the myth that the Law was too difficult for humans to obey. The following diagram illustrates what God said to them about the accessibility of the Law:



In other words, “The Law is not up in heaven and out of reach. It is not on the far side of the sea, where you would have to swim a long distance to reach it. It is actually nearby—in your heart and mouth.” This is very different from how this is normally taught. Many people believe Jesus came to walk out the Law perfectly because no one had ever done that before. Not only does that contradict the Bible, but it does not make sense, because Jesus did not come to win the blessings of the Law, which were all material blessings. He did not purchase the blessings of Deuteronomy 28 by fulfilling Deuteronomy perfectly. Instead, He came to establish a completely new covenant. We will talk more about this later, but the point here is that Jesus was not the first person to obey the old covenant.

If that was the case, and if it was impossible for a person to

obey the Law, that would speak poorly of God. Do we really believe He would give a Law no one could keep and doom the Israelites to failure? This is far from the truth, as the above passage indicates. What we must remember is that the old covenant was based on blessings and curses, and the result of obeying the covenant was blessings in this life. We read the Old Testament, and we think following the Law would lead to salvation, but salvation and eternal life are not mentioned in any way in the Law. The reward for obedience was simply blessing in this life. The Law had nothing to do with eternal life, so even if people obeyed it perfectly, it was still an inferior covenant and needed to be replaced with the new covenant. This is important for us to understand. Of course, the Law did reveal the sinfulness in people's hearts, as Paul pointed out in Romans 3:20—"through the law we become conscious of our sin." And in First Corinthians 15:56, he said, "*The power of sin is the law.*" The Law revealed sin, but that does not mean it was impossible to obey.

We see this in Philippians 3, where Paul wrote about his own experience prior to salvation:

*For it is we who are the circumcision, we who serve God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh—though I myself have reasons for such confidence. If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on*

*the law, faultless* (Philippians 3:3–6).

Here Paul clearly claimed he was righteous according to the Law, that he obeyed it faultlessly. Regarding Zechariah and Elizabeth, Luke 1 says, *“Both of them were righteous in the sight of God, observing all the Lord’s commands and decrees blamelessly”* (Luke 1:6).

People often get the idea that we cannot keep the Law from James 1, where it says that if we violate one part of the Law we violate it all. In other words, it requires 100 percent consistency. That is true, and that makes the Law difficult, but it does not make it impossible. James and the other apostles argued against returning to the Law, not because it is impossible but because it was an inferior covenant. They were telling the early Christians not to return to the Law, but to stay in the new covenant. They were saying, “Even if you do keep it flawlessly, what would be the point? You would avoid death and receive blessings in this life, but you would miss out on the better promises of the new covenant.” It is far better to live under the new covenant (a grant covenant), where our hearts are circumcised and we do not need to worry about perfectly following the Law in order to avoid death. The new covenant is so much superior to the old that the idea of returning to the Law is ridiculous. This is what the apostles were pointing out. They were not saying the Law was impossible to keep.

We find another example of the Law’s accessibility in the story of the rich young ruler, who claimed he had kept all the commandments since he was a child. Jesus did not rebuke him for this statement, saying such a thing is impossible. He

accepted the rich young ruler's assessment of himself and invited him to sell all and follow Him if he wanted to find eternal life (see Matt. 19:16–21). This concept contradicts what so many Christians have been taught—that God gave a Law that was impossible to keep.

Yet, if I, as a father, required my two-year-old to carry a 50-pound stone above her head while walking across the yard—or else I wouldn't feed her—I would be a psycho who should be locked up. The idea that God would require the Israelites to follow an impossible-to-keep Law paints Him as a terrible father.

Some have said that the new covenant is a renewal of the old, and that we are now able to keep it because we are new creations and have the Holy Spirit living within us. That completely contradicts what God said about the Law: *"What I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach"* (Deut. 30:11). The Law was possible for them to keep, even in their unregenerate state.

## IN DEFENSE OF GOD

Now we are going to look at the false image of God many people have gotten from the books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy. These two books have probably caused more atheism than any other books in the Bible. Many people read the laws and think they show us what God is like. For example, He must be okay with slavery, mistreatment of women, and all sorts of other things that sound awful to us. Because of this, they begin to develop a wrong perception of God.

Many modern leading atheists, such as Christopher Hitchens, Sam Harris, and Richard Dawkins, approach the Scripture through the lens of Deuteronomy. They pull out these weird laws, which are stipulations of the vassal covenant between God and Israel in Deuteronomy 5–26, and they use them to claim, “Your God is a crazy person. Look at these crazy laws. Why is He okay with this crazy stuff?” For example, Richard Dawkins, one of the most well-known atheists in the world, wrote:

The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully.<sup>42</sup>

All of these ideas are taken from the laws of Deuteronomy. Unfortunately, when faced with statements like this, most Christians do not know how to explain the purpose of the Law and what it does (and does not) tell us about God’s character.

We find another example, this one humorous, in a letter written to Dr. Laura Schlessinger, a former radio personality. An anonymous writer sent her the following letter based on her attempts to be consistent as an orthodox Jewish person according to the Law. He responds to her statement that, for an orthodox Jew, according to Leviticus 18:22, homosexuality is an abomination and is not ever permissible.

Dear Dr. Laura:

Thank you for doing so much to educate people regarding God's Law. I have learned a great deal from your show, and try to share that knowledge with as many people as I can. When someone tries to defend the homosexual lifestyle, for example, I simply remind them that Leviticus 18:22 clearly states it to be an abomination. End of debate.

I do need some advice from you, however, regarding some other elements of God's Laws and how to follow them.

1. Leviticus 25:44 states that I may possess slaves, both male and female, provided they are from neighboring nations. A friend of mine claims that this applies to Mexicans, but not Canadians. Can you clarify? Why can't I own Canadians?
2. I would like to sell my daughter into slavery, as sanctioned in Exodus 21:7. In this day and age, what do you think would be a fair price for her?
3. I know that I am allowed no contact with a woman while she is in her period of Menstrual "uncleanliness"—Lev.15:19–24. The problem is, how do I tell? I have tried asking, but most women take offense.
4. When I burn a bull on the altar as a sacrifice, I know it creates a pleasing odor for the Lord—Lev.1:9. The problem is my neighbors. They claim the odor is not pleasing to them. Should I smite

them?

5. I have a neighbor who insists on working on the Sabbath. Exodus 35:2 clearly states he should be put to death. Am I morally obligated to kill him myself, or should I ask the police to do it?
6. A friend of mine feels that even though eating shellfish is an abomination, Lev. 11:10, it is a lesser abomination than homosexuality. I don't agree. Can you settle this? Are there degrees of abomination?
7. Lev. 21:20 states that I may not approach the altar of God if I have a defect in my sight. I have to admit that I wear reading glasses. Does my vision have to be 20/20, or is there some wiggle-room here?
8. Most of my male friends get their hair trimmed, including the hair around their temples, even though this is expressly forbidden by Lev. 19:27. How should they die?
9. I know from Lev. 11:6–8 that touching the skin of a dead pig makes me unclean, but may I still play football if I wear gloves?
10. My uncle has a farm. He violates Lev. 19:19 by planting two different crops in the same field, as does his wife by wearing garments made of two different kinds of thread (cotton/polyester blend). He also tends to curse and blaspheme a lot. Is it really necessary that we go to all the trouble of



getting the whole town together to stone them? Lev.24:10–16. Couldn't we just burn them to death at a private family affair, like we do with people who sleep with their in-laws? (Lev. 20:14) I know you have studied these things extensively and thus enjoy considerable expertise in such matters, so I'm confident you can help. Thank you again for reminding us that God's word is eternal and unchanging.

Your devoted disciple and adoring fan.

**AJC**

P.S. (It would be a damn shame if we couldn't own a Canadian)

The point here, obviously, is that we must think things through better than we often do. If we say part of the Law applies to us, we need to be consistent. It does not make sense to tell someone he cannot get a tattoo while we eat bacon. It is inconsistent. But even more importantly, we must remember that we are not under the Law but under Jesus. We are part of the new covenant, not the old. Yet the reality is that the old covenant Law still reflects on God, and some of the laws are very hard for us to comprehend in our modern thinking.

In the year AD 144, an early church leader named Marcion came up with a belief system later known as **Marcionism**. We do not have copies of his writings, but Tertullian, a well-known Church father, wrote a five-volume series rebutting Marcion. From this we can see that he was actually very influential at that time. From Tertullian's rebuttal, we can piece together what Marcion believed. The central concept behind his teaching is the idea that the God of the Old Testament is not the father of Jesus. This is based on the reasoning that because Jesus, the reflection of God the Father, is not like the God of the Old Testament based on the laws in the Old Testament, then that God must be different from Jesus' father. Thus, there must be two different gods recorded in the Scripture. Clearly, the seeming disparity between the Old and New Testament depictions of God is something the Church has been struggling with since its beginnings. Modern Christians have offered a variety of answers to this struggle, many of which lack an understanding of the biblical covenants.

For example, some teachers are saying Satan was not mentioned much in the Old Testament because people back then attributed everything to God, both good and evil. So, when the Israelites were killed in plagues or other "judgments," they attributed it to God, but it was actually Satan's work. This requires one to read with a filter that disregards what the text actually says. Other teachers attempt to fit Jesus into every part of the Old Testament, including the Law. This requires some real stretching. Certainly, the Old Testament is full of types and shadows, but the Law is not one of them. It does not point to Jesus except in the promise that God would eventually circumcise their hearts in the new covenant. It is a popular idea

to try to make everything point to Jesus, but the reality is the Law pointed to Israel's situation and the trouble they'd gotten themselves in by rejecting God's offer of a grant covenant and then being unfaithful to their kinship covenant with Him. We will only understand this properly when we see it in light of the five major covenants and canons.

The key to understanding the strangeness of the laws in Leviticus and Deuteronomy is the pattern of rulebooks common in that day. Many other countries around Israel had rulebooks that served as an early attempt at civilization and civil law. One of the most well-known rulebooks from that period is the Code of Hammurabi, which has 282 laws. In like fashion, God gave His people a rulebook full of laws they could follow. What most Christians do not realize is that the laws God gave His people were very similar to the ancient laws of the surrounding peoples, except that God's Law improved on the other laws. For example, if in Hittite country a robber was punished by having his hand cut off, in Israel, the robber was punished by having to pay back four times what he stole (but he gets to keep his hand). In that day, physical mutilation was a common punishment, and the Code of Hammurabi includes at least sixteen punishments that involved mutilation. By contrast, none of the laws in Leviticus and Deuteronomy instituted mutilation as part of the Law. In this way, the Law was an upgrade from those of the nations around them.<sup>43</sup>

Here is the mental disconnect that often happens with the modern reader. We think these laws represented God's heart or ideal. But that is very far from the truth. God's ideal is a law so high that people cannot attain it without being regenerated;

His ideal is the way things were in the Garden in Eden. In the new covenant, His Garden is at the end of Revelation to lead us back to the Garden City, which is His ideal. But the Old Testament Law was not about getting the Israelites back to the Garden. It was simply about adding in the Law to turn their agreement into a vassal covenant. As part of having a vassal covenant, they had to receive a law, yet in God's goodness, He gave them a law that was better than the laws of the surrounding nations. However, it was not the Garden ideal. It did not reflect His heart.<sup>44</sup>

It is not God's heart for slavery to exist. It is not His heart for parents to sell their daughters into slavery. It is not His heart for robbers to even have to pay back four times. God's heart is forgiveness—to see people restored, regenerated, and changed. But inside a civil society with no regenerated people, God had to give them laws. And in His wisdom and kindness, He gave them laws that were superior to any others at that time. However, we must understand that this law code was in no way God's ideal. It did not reflect His heart. It was His improvement upon the pattern set by the surrounding nations, because Israel had chosen that lifestyle. They had rejected the offer of regeneration and a grant covenant. So He gave them the best they could receive in that situation, but it was not the Garden in Eden. Some people say we need to put the Mosaic Law into our government so we can apply "God's ideals" to our nation. But the Old Covenant Law is not God's ideal! It was simply a slight upgrade of the horrible situation the nation of Israel had chosen.

In the new covenant, we discover God's ideal in Jesus'

command to love: *“My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you”* (John 15:12). A few verses later, He says it again: *“This is my command: Love each other”* (John 15:17). The old covenant standard was, *“Love your neighbor as yourself”* (Lev. 19:18), which is based on conditional love. In other words, we love others based on our own standards on a particular day. Jesus upped the standard in the new covenant when He commanded us to love as He loves, which is an unconditional sort of love. A *huge* difference exists between the conditional love of the old covenant and the unconditional love of the new covenant! His ideal is not revealed in the old covenant.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the old covenant actually obscured and veiled God. Though it was a slight improvement of the laws of the surrounding peoples, it was nowhere near to God’s actual heart or ideals. For example, He was not saying slavery is okay with Him but, “If you are going to have slaves because of this horrible situation as unregenerated people, and I am in covenant with you, and I know you will not do this well, I am not going to give you a law so difficult that it is impossible for you to keep. I will give you a law that is really near where you are. I will not give you a law based on My ideals, where everyone is free and equal, where racism and misogyny do not exist and everything is equal and good. Such a law would crush you, and you could never keep it, because you are not regenerate. Instead, I will come down to your level, and I will give you a law that is similar (but better) to that of the peoples around you so that you will actually be able to obey it.” That is the law He gave them, but it did not flow out of His heart. It does not represent Him or show us what He

is like. Instead, it shows us how He came down to the Israelites' level in order to give them a law they could actually relate to and obey.

Unfortunately, so many people have read the Law as a depiction of what God is like. This has placed a veil over their eyes, which keeps them from seeing His heart; all they see is the crazy laws. And three thousand years later, we cannot relate to those laws at all, because even our most common laws in a civil western society are significantly better than the Code of Hammurabi, other laws of ancient peoples from that time, and even the laws given to the Israelites. For the most part, civilization has seen a vast improvement. The standards modern people live by are much higher than the Law God gave Israel, and this confuses us if we do not realize that the Law was simply a reflection of the time period and not of God's heart.

## THE SONG OF MOSES

After the covenant was ratified and Israel's failure was predicted, God told Moses to write a prophetic song about it.

*And the Lord said to Moses: "You are going to rest with your ancestors, and these people will soon prostitute themselves to the foreign gods of the land they are entering. They will forsake me and break the covenant I made with them. And in that day I will become angry with them and forsake them; I will hide my face from them, and they will be destroyed. Many disasters and calamities will come on them, and in that*

*day they will ask, 'Have not these disasters come on us because our God is not with us?' And I will certainly hide my face in that day because of all their wickedness in turning to other gods. Now write down this song and teach it to the Israelites and have them sing it, so that it may be a witness for me against them. When I have brought them into the land flowing with milk and honey, the land I promised on oath to their ancestors, and when they eat their fill and thrive, they will turn to other gods and worship them, rejecting me and breaking my covenant. And when many disasters and calamities come on them, this song will testify against them, because it will not be forgotten by their descendants. I know what they are disposed to do, even before I bring them into the land I promised them on oath." So Moses wrote down this song that day and taught it to the Israelites (Deuteronomy 31:16–22).*

The entire song is recorded in Deuteronomy 32. Moses recited the words of the song from beginning to end in the hearing of the whole assembly of Israel. He ended with these words in Deuteronomy 32:46–47:

*Take to heart all the words I have solemnly declared to you this day, so that you may command your children to obey carefully all the words of this law. They are not just idle words for you—they are your life. By them you will live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to possess.*

Immediately afterward, in Deuteronomy 32:48–52, is the

record of Moses' death. In Deuteronomy 33, Moses blessed the tribes. This is a little out of order, but that is because Moses wrote the majority of the Law, but then his successor, Joshua, added in an amendment that talked about the death of Moses. This was standard procedure when it came to renewing covenants and passing them on to successors. Deuteronomy 34 again records the death of Moses. This, too, would be an add-on by Joshua after Moses' death to complete the vassal covenant of Deuteronomy.

After this, the Bible does not record a further renewal of this covenant. Once the kinship covenant was changed into a vassal covenant, it did not need to be renewed with each new ruler. It simply passed on from generation to generation. After Joshua came a series of Judges. Then Israel had a succession of three kings, Saul, David, and Solomon. After Solomon, the kingdom split, and a succession of many different kings ruled over Israel and Judah until they went into captivity. During the entirety of Israel's history, until Jesus came with the new covenant, Israel lived under the vassal covenant recorded in Deuteronomy. Essentially, this covenant stretched from Numbers 1 through the end of the Old Testament, with a short taste of something else during the reign of David (which we will talk about in the next chapter).

## **REVIEW TEST QUESTIONS**

1. The Book of Deuteronomy is based on the same structure as ancient vassal treaties; it is broken into a



structure containing how many parts?

2. In a vassal covenant, the greater king stated the rules and expected the lesser to say “amen”; this part of the covenant deal was called a r\_\_\_\_\_.
3. True or False: God gave a Law that was impossible to keep, making Jesus the only one ever able to do so.
4. Which two books of the Bible have caused more atheists than any others?

## KEY TERM

Marcionism	
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## RELATED MATERIALS

Paul Copan, *Is God a Moral Monster?: Making Sense of the Old Testament God*.

Scott Hahn, *Kinship by Covenant*.

Meredith G. Kline, *Treaty of the Great King*.

Jason Meyer, *The End of the Law: Mosaic Covenant in Pauline Theology*.

John H. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament*.

<sup>41</sup> *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament* by John H. Walton shows actual vassal treaties between other nations around Israel during that time period that have been found archeologically. All contain this same five-part structure. Another excellent book on this is *Treaty of the Great King*, by Meredith G. Kline, who was one of the premier authorities on covenant. It is a commentary that goes through the Book of Deuteronomy and explains how the five-part structure works.

<sup>42</sup> Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 31.

<sup>43</sup> Copan, *Is God a Moral Monster?*, 121. Here Copan shows how mistranslations have made the Law sound like it includes mutilation in a few places, but it does not.

<sup>44</sup> Jason Meyer's *The End of the Law: Mosaic Covenant in Pauline Theology* shows the contrast between the new covenant and the Mosaic covenant inside the New Testament.

twelve



# THE DAVIDIC COVENANT

Several hundred years after the inauguration of the Mosaic covenant, God made a special covenant with David in the midst of the Mosaic covenant. Yet as we will see, it was very different from the Mosaic covenant. After the establishment of the vassal covenant under Joshua, the Israelites conquered the Promised Land. At the end of his life, Joshua did not raise up a successor, which resulted in a series of judges who ruled over Israel. These are recorded in the Book of Judges, which is a history of Israel's cycle of falling away from God until calamity came and God sent a judge to rescue them. When a judge died, the whole cycle was repeated. Eventually, the prophet Samuel began leading the nation as a judge, and he anointed the first king of Israel, Saul. Though Saul started out well, he walked away from God and needed to be replaced by Israel's greatest king, David.

Although some people debate whether or not God intended Israel to have kings, in God's promises to Abraham, God made mention of future kings who would come from his lineage (see Gen. 17:6). He repeated this promise of kings to Abraham's grandson Jacob (see Gen. 35:11). Here we do not get the sense that kings were, in themselves, the problem. Instead, when we look at the story surrounding the appointment of Saul, we see that the problem was that the people had turned their hearts away from God and were rejecting God in favor of a king. As a result, they received Saul. But had they waited until God was

ready to give them a king, perhaps David would have been their first king, and they would have been able to forego the forty years under Saul's often despotic leadership.

Jumping hundreds of years from Joshua and the advent of the Mosaic vassal covenant, we come to King David and his covenant, which is contained in Second Samuel 7 and Psalm 89. The canon for the Davidic covenant includes First and Second Samuel, First and Second Kings, First and Second Chronicles, Song of Songs, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and some of the Psalms. Not all of the 150 psalms are part of the canon because they have many different authors and were written in many different time periods. For this reason, not all of them fit within the canon of the Davidic covenant.

## A HOUSE FOR GOD

In Second Samuel 7, we see David as an older, more mature leader who had spent most of his rulership as a wonderful and God-honoring king. Now he decided he wanted to build a house for God. He had already built his own house, and he felt convicted about the fact that God was living in a tent (the tabernacle) while he was living in a palace. When David told his idea to build a house for God to Nathan the prophet, Nathan responded, "Do whatever is in your heart." This was Nathan's instinctive response, but he did not spend any time praying about it. We know this because, in the middle of the night, God spoke to Nathan and told him He did not want David to build Him a house, and He made several promises to David.

*Go and tell my servant David, “This is what the Lord says: Are you the one to build me a house to dwell in? I have not dwelt in a house from the day I brought the Israelites up out of Egypt to this day. I have been moving from place to place with a tent as my dwelling. Wherever I have moved with all the Israelites, did I ever say to any of their rulers whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, ‘Why have you not built me a house of cedar?’”*

*Now then, tell my servant David, “This is what the Lord Almighty says: I took you from the pasture, from tending the flock, and appointed you ruler over my people Israel. I have been with you wherever you have gone, and I have cut off all your enemies from before you. Now I will make your name great, like the names of the greatest men on earth. And I will provide a place for my people Israel and will plant them so that they can have a home of their own and no longer be disturbed. Wicked people will not oppress them anymore, as they did at the beginning and have done ever since the time I appointed leaders over my people Israel. I will also give you rest from all your enemies.*

*The Lord declares to you that the Lord himself will establish a house for you: When your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and*

*he will be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with a rod wielded by men, with floggings inflicted by human hands. But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever.” Nathan reported to David all the words of this entire revelation (2 Samuel 7:5–17).*

This is the covenant God made with David. In response, David sat before the Lord and, in verse 19, said, “*And as if this were not enough in your sight, Sovereign Lord, you have also spoken about the future of the house of your servant—and this decree, Sovereign Lord, is for a mere human!*” The NIV has actually translated this verse poorly. In the marginal notes we find the correct translation: “*for the human race.*” This gives us the real sense of what David was communicating here. In the original language, it is clear David was very excited about what God had just said to him, and he blurted out with excitement, “This is not just for me but for the whole human race!” He was actually declaring a powerful truth and promise for the future. This is the core of the Davidic covenant. But we completely miss it if we think he said, “for a mere human.”

We can know with certainty that this was a covenant, and not just a few promises, because of what David said in verses 28–29:

*Sovereign Lord, you are God! **Your covenant is trustworthy,** and you have promised these good things to your servant. Now be pleased to bless the house of*

*your servant, that it may continue forever in your sight; for you, Sovereign Lord, have spoken, and with your blessing the house of your servant will be blessed forever (2 Samuel 7:28–29).*

Scholars have actually debated whether or not David had a covenant with God, or simply promises, but David's response makes it clear that, at least in his understanding, he had just received a covenant from God. We also see this in Psalm 89, which was written by Ethan, one of the three seers who served in David's tent of worship. About this event, Ethan wrote: "*You said, [speaking of the Lord] 'I have made a covenant with my chosen one, I have sworn to David my servant, I will establish your line forever and make your throne firm through all generations' "*" (Ps. 89:3–4). Here we see that in that time period, people saw God's promises to David not simply as promises but as a covenant.

## FOUR MAJOR PROMISES

This covenant between David and God contains four major promises:

1. I will make your name great.
2. I will be his father, and he will be My son.
3. I will build you a house.
4. Your house, kingdom, and throne shall be forever.



## **1. I will make your name great.**

This echoes back to God's promise to Abram in Genesis 12. In contrast to the people's effort at the Tower of Babel to make a name for themselves, God chose Abram and promised to make his name great. Here, He did the same for David. He recounted His relational history with David (see 2 Sam. 7:8–9), and then He offered him this covenant that recalled the Abrahamic covenant: *"Now I will make your name great like the names of the greatest men on earth"* (2 Sam. 7:9). Like the Abrahamic covenant, this is a grant covenant. God seems to always want to make grant covenants. He gave them to Noah and Abraham, and He tried to give one to Israel, but they rejected it and asked for a kinship covenant instead, which eventually lead to a vassal covenant. In the midst of this vassal covenant system, David arose as a man who genuinely wanted to honor the Lord, and in response, the Lord honored him back. So the first part of God's promise to David was that He would make his name great.

## **2. I will be his father, and he will be My son.**

In the second part of His promise to David, God spoke of His relationship with David's son, the first successor in his family line. About him, He said:

*He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he will be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with a rod wielded by men, with floggings inflicted by human hands* (2 Samuel

7:13–14).

These verses speak of David's son, Solomon.

### **3. I will build you a house.**

In his desire to honor God, David wanted to build a house for God, so God offered instead to build David a house, or a dynasty.

*...The Lord himself will establish a house for you: When your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom (2 Samuel 7:11–12).*

In the ancient world, if people talked of “the house of David,” it meant his family line and the successors who carried on his rulership. So the third part of God's promise to David was a dynasty.

### **4. Your house, kingdom, and throne will be forever.**

The fourth promise God made to David is found in verses 13 and 16: “...and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever,” and, “Your house [dynasty] and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever.” In other words, He promised David an everlasting dynasty.

## COMPARED TO OTHER COVENANTS

Because this covenant is a grant covenant, it holds many similarities to the Abrahamic covenant. As typical of grant covenants, it did not contain an “unless you screw this up” clause. It was unconditional. Also, both covenants promised a blessing of all nations through a seed. We are more familiar with it in the Abrahamic covenant, because Paul interpreted it in Galatians 3–4 to help us understand God was talking about Jesus. The seed Abraham was promised was not simply Isaac but also Jesus. So, when Abraham received a covenant that would bless all the nations of the earth, that meant it would spread out and bless everyone—which happened especially in the new covenant. The diagram below shows the effect of the Abrahamic covenant.



The same concept exists in Second Samuel 7:12–14:

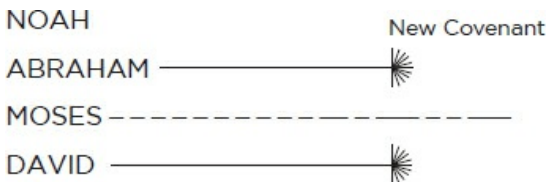
*When your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom*

*forever. I will be his father, and he will be my son ....*

Here, God was talking about David's son Solomon in the immediate context, but He was also speaking in a larger context about His Son Jesus, who was both God's Son and the descendant of David. This language clearly speaks to the distant future and promises something grander than any natural king has ever experienced. This is confirmed in Hebrews 1:5, where the writer directly quotes this passage in reference to Jesus: *"For to which of the angels did God ever say, 'You are my Son; today I have become your Father'? Or again, 'I will be his Father, and he will be my Son'?"* By directly quoting from the promise to David, the writer of Hebrews was showing us that the promise was actually fulfilled in a greater way in Christ. Jesus, the Son of God and the son of David, was the actual intended target, not just Solomon.

In fact, the promise in Second Samuel 7:14—*"I will be his father, and he will be my son"*—referred to Jesus even more than to Solomon. However, the second part of the verse makes it clear that this verse is not just about Jesus, either. The second half reads: *"... When he does wrong, I will punish him with a rod wielded by men, with floggings inflicted by human hands."* Obviously, that does not fit Jesus, as He did no wrong (see Heb. 4:15). This part related to Solomon, who did go wrong toward the end of his reign. Also, it is worth noting that while the NIV translates this phrase "when he does wrong," some other translations say, "if he does wrong," which is more conditional. Solomon was not destined to do wrong; he had options. But if he went wrong, God promised to correct him.

Here we see this significant similarity between the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants, as illustrated by the diagram below. David's covenant was a blessing to David at that time, and Abraham's covenant was a blessing to Abraham at that time, but both of them, when the new covenant arrived, became a blessing to everyone. God promised the offspring of Abraham would someday be a blessing to everyone, and so would the offspring of David.



This is quite a contrast to the Mosaic Covenant, which does not ever become a blessing to everyone. Instead, it actually became a horrible weight upon Israel. As we discussed previously, God wanted to bless Israel with a grant covenant, too. And we see in His offer that He wanted to extend this promise of being a blessing to the whole earth to them as well. This is what it would have meant for them to be a nation of priests. As a nation of individuals who all had direct relationship with God, Israel would have been God's representative to the earth. Through them and their relationship with Him, He wanted to bless the whole earth by drawing all people to Himself. That was God's intention, but Israel refused the offer. As a result, the Mosaic covenant did

not bless the whole world. It could bless Israel *if* they kept the covenant and did not bring curses upon themselves. However, that did not happen very often.

Another similarity between the Davidic and Abrahamic covenants is the appearance of Melchizedek. Only three places in Scripture mention Melchizedek. The first is Genesis 12, where Abram met him. Second, in Psalm 110, David wrote about him. Third, the author of Hebrews wrote about Melchizedek, primarily in chapter 7. In other words, in the Old Testament, Melchizedek was mentioned only in the context of Abraham and David. Significantly, Psalm 110 is the most quoted Old Testament passage in the New Testament—quoted more than thirty times. It is an incredibly important psalm inside the New Testament, and it was written by David and mentioned Melchizedek. The third mention, in the Book of Hebrews, is in the context of the transition between the old covenant and the new covenant. We will consider this significant character in more detail in Chapter 17. For now, the important fact is that through the entire Old Testament, only Abraham and David referred to Melchizedek.

After David died, over the following generations the nation split into two and declined eventually into wickedness. Throughout those years of apostasy, the prophets regularly spoke of the restoration of David's house, meaning a fulfillment of the Davidic covenant. In Isaiah 9, 11, and 55; Jeremiah 3 and 23; Ezekiel 34 and 37; Micah 5; and Amos 9 God spoke through His prophets about a future raising up of "David's fallen tent," which is a reference to the house or dynasty of David. Over and over, God promised to restore it and to fulfill His promise to

David. The most famous of these passages is Amos 9, which is quoted at length in Acts 15 to prove that the Kingdom of Jesus is the restoration of David's fallen tent. By contrast, none of the prophets spoke of the restoration or fulfillment of the Mosaic covenant. At no point did they speak of God getting the nation back on track with the Mosaic covenant. In fact, nothing positive was being spoken about the Mosaic covenant at all. Instead, the prophets were foretelling the restoration of the Davidic covenant. This is a significant difference between the two.

In this way, the Davidic stands alone and is very different in nature from the prevailing Mosaic covenant of that day. In the midst of Israel's vassal covenant, suddenly David received a grant covenant seemingly simply because his heart was right. He loved the Lord and wanted to honor Him, so the Lord was able to give him a grant covenant even though the whole system of Israel was still living under the vassal covenant of Deuteronomy. The rest of Israel saw God through this veil, because they had obscured who He is, but David somehow was able to see around the veil and love the Lord in a way that no one else in Israel understood. In this way, the Davidic covenant stands alone outside of the greater context of what was going on in history at that time. And it becomes a significant player in the new covenant.

## THE CONNECTION TO THE NEW COVENANT

Matthew 1:1 begins the New Testament with these words: *"This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David,*

*the son of Abraham.*” This is the beginning of the canon of the new covenant, and it begins with a reference back to David and Abraham, these two recipients of grant covenants in the Old Testament. The new covenant was inaugurated around the Last Supper and Jesus’ death on the cross, but Matthew 1:1 is the beginning of the story of the new covenant. And here it specifically connects the new covenant to the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants by saying Jesus, the messiah, is the son of David and the son of Abraham. In other words, He is the fulfillment of the promises made to Abraham and David. Then Matthew provides the lineage from David to Jesus to prove He was a literal natural son of David. He was not a symbolic son of David but a flesh-and-blood son. Luke also demonstrates this in his genealogy. Jesus is the prophesied and promised son of David.

In Luke 1, when the angel Gabriel visited Mary, he specifically addressed the Davidic covenant in his declaration to her:

*Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever; his kingdom will never end (Luke 1:30–33).*

Second Samuel 7 contains four specific promises, which we listed earlier. When Gabriel showed up, he declared the fulfillment of each of these promises to David. It is no wonder



that Mary was stunned at his words. Not only was he saying she would have a child as a virgin—which is shocking enough—but also that this child would be the fulfillment of the Davidic covenant and all Israel had been waiting for. Here is the original list of promises and their promised fulfillment in Jesus:

## **Promises of the Davidic Covenant**

1. I will make your name great.
2. I will be his father, and he will be My son.
3. I will build you a house.
4. Your house, kingdom, and throne shall be forever.

### **Fulfillment in Jesus in Luke 1:32–33**

1. He will be great.
2. He will be called the Son of the Most High God.
3. God will give Him the throne of His father, David.
4. He will reign forever, and His kingdom will never end.

Here, the same four promises from the Davidic covenant are repeated in the New Testament, but many Christians have completely missed it.

Throughout the New Testament, Jesus is called the Son of God. This, of course, refers to His identity as a co-equal within the Trinity. Yet it is more than that. To refer to Jesus as the Son of God is to refer back to the promise David received when God said, *"I will be his father; and he will be my son"* (2 Sam. 7:14). When people called Jesus the Son of God, they were referring to the Davidic covenant and saying, in effect, "Jesus is the Son of God whom David was promised." He is the Son of God and the Son of David. Both of these terms were used to refer to this idea. Thus, Blind Bartimaeus called out, *"Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"* (Mark 10:47). He was calling out to Jesus by identifying Him as the one who fulfilled the covenant promise given to David. This means, when we read *Son of God*, we need to put it in its proper context by understanding its reference back to the Davidic covenant.

Likewise, when people referred to Jesus as the Son of God or the Son of David, they meant it in the context of the promised son who would take up the throne of David and have a kingdom without end. Referring to Jesus as the Son of God or the Son of David was the same as referring to Him as the king. Thus, when Jesus mentioned *the Kingdom*, He was talking about taking up the covenant with David as the king who would sit over the Kingdom on the throne that lasts forever. The difference, of course, is that what was promised to David in the natural was fulfilled in Jesus in the kingdom of the Spirit. This explains some of the confusion Jesus' followers

experienced. They knew He was the fulfillment of the Davidic covenant, but they did not understand the Kingdom would be spiritual. They thought He would sit on the earthly throne in Jerusalem and rule Israel. Jesus tried to rewire their thinking through statements like, *“The kingdom of God does not come with observation...the kingdom of God is within you”* (Luke 17:20–21 NKJV). It is easy to see why they were a bit confused when even Jesus drew comparisons between Himself and His disciples and David and his companions:

*One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields, and his disciples began to pick some heads of grain, rub them in their hands and eat the kernels. Some of the Pharisees asked, “Why are you doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?” Jesus answered them, “Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? He entered the house of God, and taking the consecrated bread, he ate what is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions.” Then Jesus said to them, “The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath”* (Luke 6:1–5).

The disciples thought about Jesus and His Kingdom in completely natural terms all through their journey with Him. Not until after the death and resurrection of Jesus did they realize the Kingdom is actually a spiritual kingdom that also impacts the natural realm. What is important for us to realize is that throughout His entire ministry, when Jesus referred to the Kingdom of God or was called the Son of God or the Son of David, the Davidic covenant was in view. Occasionally, He was also referred to as the Son of Abraham. In this we clearly see

that Jesus came as a fulfillment of both the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants.

However, He did not come to fulfill the Mosaic (old) covenant but to replace it. *The Mosaic covenant did not have promises to be fulfilled in the future, like the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants.* Instead, it was a temporary system with promises of blessing for obedience and cursing for disobedience. As we saw in Deuteronomy, God told the Israelites they would fail and go into exile, but He would bring them back from exile and circumcise their hearts. In other words, He would initiate the new covenant. The point is, while the new covenant is the fulfillment of the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants, it is the destruction of the Mosaic covenant.<sup>45</sup> This is a real shift in thinking for a lot of people, who see these covenants as all being similar and connected. In reality, they are completely separate and different. The Abrahamic and the Davidic covenants were fulfilled in Jesus and they continue through His eternal Kingdom. But Moses' covenant does not continue. It was a temporary agreement, and now it is done. It was never meant to continue. This will be discussed in more depth in later chapters.

## THE NATURE OF THE KINGDOM

We see a further connection between the Davidic covenant and the new covenant in the Book of Acts, which continues the story (begun in the Book of Luke) of Jesus and His disciples after His death and resurrection. The book begins by referring back to the story of Jesus told in Luke. It then tells us

that after His resurrection, Jesus appeared to His disciples for forty days and taught them about the Kingdom of God (see Acts 1:1–3). Jesus’ one topic before He left earth was the Kingdom. During this time, He gave the disciples this command:

*Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4–5).*

The order is important here. First He taught them about the Kingdom; then He told them to wait for the Father’s promise of the Holy Spirit. The disciples’ first response was to ask if this was finally the time when Jesus would fulfill the promise to David by restoring Israel’s earthly kingdom. Clearly, they did not yet understand about the Kingdom. They had been hearing all the Kingdom teaching, and when Jesus spoke of the Father’s promise, they interpreted it in the context of a natural kingdom. They still thought Jesus would sit on an earthly throne. Jesus answered them by saying, “*It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority*” (Acts 1:7). In other words, He said He would not tell them when it would happen. Then He added: “*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth*” (Acts 1:8). Immediately afterward, Jesus “*was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight*” (Acts 1:9).

What the disciples did not realize at the time was that this

promise of the Holy Spirit was actually Jesus' answer to their question about the restoration of the Kingdom. He was saying, "I am not going to tell you exactly when, but here is how: You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you." This is even clearer when we look at the Greek. In verse 6, where the disciples ask, "*Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?*" the word *kingdom* comes from the Greek word *basileia*, meaning "authority" (royalty/rule).<sup>46</sup> They were asking when He would return the authority to Israel. But He answered, "*It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority [basileia]. But you will receive power [dunamis<sup>47</sup>]....*" Here He used a different word to contrast the difference between what the disciples expected and the reality of His Kingdom. He was telling them, "I am not going to restore a structure of authority. I am going to give you the power to be my witnesses or delegates."

One scholar wrote about this:

Concerning answering the disciples' question about restoring the reign to Israel and the times and seasons, Jesus immediately states, "But ye shall receive power at the coming of the Holy Spirit upon you and you shall be witnesses to me both in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, unto the ends of the earth." This is a major clue to their question. They ask about the restoring of authority or dominion and Jesus responds that they will receive authority or power when the Holy Spirit comes upon them. When Jesus is reigning in His Kingdom, the true Israel in Heaven, He sends His authority and power to rule

the Israel of God on earth through believers by the Holy Spirit. Thus, the restoration of the Kingdom commences.<sup>48</sup>

This expresses, in part, the shift Jesus was guiding them into. He was challenging them to stop thinking according to a natural kingdom and begin to understand the supernatural power needed to operate and rule in His Kingdom.

Another angle on this is seen clearly in Luke 20, just a little bit earlier in the story:

*Then Jesus said to them, "Why is it said that the Messiah is the son of David? David himself declares in the Book of Psalms: [quoting from Psalm 110] 'The Lord said to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet."' David calls him 'Lord.' How then can he be his son?" (Luke 20:41–44).*

The Pharisees had just asked Jesus an antagonistic question, and He gave them a great response that silenced them. Then He asked them this question, to which no one had an answer. In fact, His answer was overwhelming for them. He was stating, "As the Messiah, I am going to sit at the right hand of the Father while all My enemies are made My footstool." The Pharisees were stunned and perhaps even threatened by Jesus' answer. Two chapters later, Jesus reintroduced this idea at the Last Supper, where He said:

*And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father*

*conferred one on me, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel* (Luke 22:29–30).

Some translations use the word *covenant* instead of the word *kingdom*. It could be translated either way, depending on the context. In reality, it was both; He was conferring on them a covenantal Kingdom, or the Kingdom that was covenanted to David. The Father had called Jesus His Son and given Him a Kingdom as the inheritor of the promises to David. Now Jesus, at the end of His ministry, imparted that Kingdom to His followers. He appointed them as the new leadership on earth in the same way the Father had made Him the first leader on earth. The disciples did not understand what He meant, but this is why He taught them about the Kingdom for the forty days before His ascension. He was giving them the rulership of the Kingdom on earth.

## THE RESURRECTION

In Luke 24, Jesus explained the covenantal promises to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. When Jesus showed up and began walking with them, they did not recognize Him. When He asked about their discouragement, they told Him their understanding of all that had happened in the death of Jesus, including this telling statement: *“But we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place”* (Luke 24:21). This was their picture of Jesus: He was a great prophet, powerful in word and deed before all of the people, but the



chief priests had handed Him over, and He was crucified. They had hoped, instead, He would fulfill the Davidic covenant in the natural and redeem Israel. Clearly, they had no idea what was really going on. They then told Him about the women's report of His resurrection. When they had finished, *"beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself"* (Luke 24:27). Because they did not understand, Jesus took them back through the Scriptures and showed them how it all pointed to Him—to His death and resurrection, which would result in Him being glorified. Jesus explained to them why the resurrection mattered—something we still must understand today.

Under the Mosaic system, a lamb would die to cover the sins of the people. Because of the shedding of blood, Israel would be forgiven for another year. Then Jesus came along as the perfectly sinless lamb, with perfect blood, and died for our sins. Thus, His death released forgiveness. *If He had died but not resurrected, everyone would still be forgiven.* Not one lamb in the Old Testament was resurrected, so in His death, He had already fulfilled the type. What, then, is the significance of the resurrection? The answer is simple. Through His death He provided forgiveness, and through His resurrection He created a new creation. This is why Jesus is called the first fruit; He was the first to raise from the dead. And now like Him, through His death and resurrection, our old selves die and we are resurrected as new creations who are empowered to live righteously by grace. Thus, we come out of our past lives of death and sin, which He has forgiven and cleansed us from, and we step into new life. In other words, if Jesus had only

died, we would be forgiven, but we would not be empowered to live differently. This is a very significant but often overlooked aspect of the gospel message. Throughout the Book of Acts, the apostles put a major focus on Jesus' resurrection, ascension, and enthronement at the right hand of the Father. It was a major part of their salvation message. Without it, the promise to David cannot fully be fulfilled.

This is evident in Peter's sermon in Acts 2, on the day of Pentecost, fifty days after Jesus' resurrection. When the Holy Spirit was poured out on the believers, bystanders were confused, thinking the believers were drunk. So Peter got up to explain what was happening as a fulfillment of the Joel 2 prophecy:

*"In the last days," God says, "I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord. And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Acts 2:17–21).*

Then Peter preached the first gospel salvation message, and three thousand people got saved. His sermon began with some background information on Jesus:

*Fellow Israelites, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. This man was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him (Acts 2:22–24).*

Here we see the doctrine of *Christus Victor*—that Jesus did *not* take on the wrath of the Father but that the Father and the Son planned together to send Jesus to earth to die in order to take back the power of death. This is clearly shown by the statement: “*It was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.*” Christ came and took over. After he established this, Peter began preaching from Psalm 16, written by David:

*David said about him: “I saw the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest in hope, because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead, you will not let your holy one see decay. You have made known to me the paths of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence” (Acts 2:25–28).*

From verse 25 onward, the sermon has a very Davidic focus and flavor, as Peter actually began comparing David to Jesus and showing how Jesus fulfilled the Davidic covenant

promises.

*Fellow Israelites, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day. But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne. Seeing what was to come, he spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah... (Acts 2:29–31).*

How was Jesus placed on the throne of David? According to Peter, the promise that David would have a descendant on the throne was fulfilled in Jesus' resurrection. The sermon continued:

*...he was not abandoned to the realm of the dead, nor did his body see decay. God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it. Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear. For David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said, "The Lord said to my Lord: 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet'" [Psalm 110]. Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah (Acts 2:31–36).*

In other words, Jesus was not only the Messiah but also the king—the king they had been waiting for who would be seated on the throne of David and re-establish his kingdom. He was the fulfillment of the prophecy of Psalm 110, because He

ascended into heaven and sat down at the right hand of the Father. *Jesus' ascension fulfilled the promise to David*—the promise that he would have a descendant who would sit on the throne and rule a secure and perpetual Kingdom.

When the people heard this truth—that they had crucified the very king they had been waiting for—they were cut to the heart. In response, Peter told them to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus, for the forgiveness of sins. Then they would receive the Holy Spirit and live in the promise, too. Peter's gospel message was the fulfillment of the Davidic covenant. That is what the new covenant is—the fulfillment of the promises to David and Abraham.

In these two covenants we see the two sides of the new covenant—Jesus as king and as messiah. In fulfillment of the Davidic covenant, Jesus is now the king who reigns over all, and we need to come under His Kingdom.

*That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:10–11).*

In fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant, Jesus is also the Messiah—the fulfillment of the picture given in the story of Abraham and Isaac of a son sacrificed. This is how the early believers preached the gospel; in that context, the Jewish people of that time understood it. Many modern Christians miss this because of a lack of understanding about the Davidic and Abrahamic covenants, but those who heard on the day of

Pentecost understood exactly what Peter meant. As a result, three thousand people responded to the first preaching of the new covenant after Jesus' ascension (in contrast to the three thousand who died at the inauguration of the old covenant). Truly, the letter of the Law kills, but the Spirit brings life (see 2 Cor. 3:6).

Unfortunately, because modern Christians do not understand how Jesus has already fulfilled the Davidic covenant by ascending and sitting at Father God's right hand, many believe Jesus will come to physical Jerusalem and sit on the throne of David to establish His kingdom in the future. *The Bible does not teach that.* A great deal of confusion exists around the subject of the thousand-year reign in Revelation 20. However, that passage in no way indicates a physical reign on earth in Jerusalem. That idea has been inserted by people who do not realize Jesus *has already* sat down on the throne of David in heaven. They have misunderstood Acts 2, and as a result, they have created some very erroneous beliefs about the future and Jesus' kingship. Ironically, the disciples also expected Jesus to come and sit on a physical throne in Jerusalem, and they too were absolutely wrong. Not until the day of Pentecost did they understand how Jesus had fulfilled the promises to David. Because this reality was the focus of the first gospel message after Jesus' ascension, we cannot afford to overlook it.

The bottom line is this: The Davidic covenant is done. It has been completely fulfilled in Christ, and now we are living inside the Kingdom of King Jesus as His ambassadors on earth. The Davidic covenant has made Jesus a king, and His

Kingdom has been conferred on us, His representatives. One of the ways we get to demonstrate His Kingdom is through the supernatural, because His Kingdom is not an earthly kingdom but a spiritual kingdom that influences earth.

## REVIEW TEST QUESTIONS

1. In David's exclamation in Second Samuel 7, "*for a mere human,*" a better translation would be, "*for the whole h \_\_\_\_\_ r \_\_\_\_\_.*"
2. When the Lord said He would build David a house, He was not literally saying He would give David a building but that He would give him a d \_\_\_\_\_ and make his name great.
3. What type of covenants are both the Abrahamic and the Davidic?
4. True or False: The Mosaic covenant eventually became a blessing to everyone.
5. Which Scripture shows us that Jesus is the Son of David and Abraham?
6. Under the Old Covenant, three thousand people \_\_\_\_\_ in one day; under the New Covenant, three thousand people got \_\_\_\_\_ in one day.
7. The main topic of the first gospel message preached by Peter on the day of Pentecost was the fulfillment of the \_\_\_\_\_ covenant.

<sup>45</sup> A solid proof of this is found in Don Preston's *Torah to Teleos: The Passing of the Law of Moses*. Despite the fact that Preston is a full



preterist, it is a very insightful book on the end of the Law in AD 70.

<sup>46</sup> *Strong's Concordance*, Greek # 932.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, #1411.

<sup>48</sup> McLarty.

# thirteen



## THE FULFILLMENT OF THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT

In Chapter 9, we covered the Abrahamic covenant from the perspective of the Old Testament. In this chapter, we will examine it from the perspective of the New Testament. As mentioned in the last chapter, the introduction to the New Testament is “*This is the genealogy of Jesus, the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham*” (Matt. 1:1). This is what the New Testament is about. It is the fulfillment of the Abrahamic

and Davidic Covenants, as well as the closing out of the Mosaic Covenant. The last chapter covered how this is true of the Davidic covenant; here we will look more in depth at how it also applies to the Abrahamic covenant.

## JESUS AS MESSIAH

We will begin with Matthew 1:17, which closes out the genealogy: *“Thus there were fourteen generations in all from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to the Messiah.”* Here, in this division, we find four main characters or topics—Abraham, David, the exile, and the Messiah. All four of these are related to covenant in a very direct way. Abraham and David received covenants from God. The exile was part of the Mosaic covenant at the end of Deuteronomy, where God said, “You will be dispersed into other nations, and then I will draw you back and circumcise your hearts” (see Deut. 30:1–6). In other words, when God sent Israel into exile even that was covenantal. Lastly, the Messiah came to inaugurate the new covenant and circumcise the people’s hearts.

Luke 1, which tells the story of the birth of John the Baptist, also holds some important information on this subject. After John’s birth, his father Zechariah was filled with the Spirit and began to prophesy:

*Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come to his people and redeemed them. He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David (as he said through his holy prophets of long*

*ago), salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us (Luke 1:68–71).*

Here, he was not talking about his son John but about the Messiah, who would come from the house of David. Then, in the next verses, he prophesied about how the Messiah would fulfill the Abrahamic covenant as well:

*To show mercy to our ancestors and to remember his holy covenant, the oath he swore to our father Abraham: to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all our days (Luke 1:72–75).*

Finally, Zechariah began to prophesy about his son John, who would pave the way for the coming Messiah. It is significant that in both of these gospels, the story of Jesus is introduced with references to His fulfillment of the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants. This is such an important foundation for properly understanding the gospel message: The New Testament is about the fulfillment of these previous covenants. This is why the New Testament authors regularly referred to the Scriptures (the Old Testament), and even Jesus said, “*You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me*” (John 5:39). When the people of that day read the Old Testament, they read God’s promises to Abraham and David about an offspring who would someday come and bless the whole world. This is the Messiah they were waiting for. When Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John set out, as eye witnesses, to write their gospels, they were

embarking on something very scary for their culture. They were declaring that what everyone was anticipating and waiting for had already happened. The Messiah had already come.

As discussed in the previous chapter, in Acts 2, Luke told the story of the day of Pentecost and Peter's sermon, which revealed Jesus as the fulfillment of the promises to David. Acts 3 tells us the story of Peter and John healing the lame man by the Gate Beautiful. After the man was healed, Peter and John began to preach, this time touching on the Abrahamic covenant.

*And you are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, "Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed." When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways (Acts 3:25–26).*

This is the end of the second recorded sermon after the ascension, which emphasized the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant. In the next chapter, we read that many who heard the message believed, and as a result, the number of believers increased to five thousand. This gospel message, based on the fulfillment of the covenants, was very different from the typical modern salvation message. Essentially, they were preaching, "This person whom you crucified is the fulfillment of these covenantal promises. Now He is enthroned at the right hand of God, and you need to repent, submit your life to Him, and believe He is the fulfillment of the covenantal promises to Abraham and David." This is also what we see in Romans

10:9–10, where Paul said to “*believe in your heart that Jesus is Lord*” and believe “*God raised Him from the dead*” in order to be saved. This is the basic gospel message: Believe Jesus is Lord and God raised Him from the dead in order to receive salvation.

These two essential beliefs are connected to the two covenants made to David and Abraham. As mentioned in the last chapter, the fact that Jesus is Lord fulfills David’s covenant, and the fact that He was raised from the dead connects to Abraham’s covenant. In Genesis 22, Abraham laid down his son in the same way that God the Father was willing to send the Son to die for us. These were the two elements of the gospel one had to understand, according to the early Church.

## JESUS: GREATER THAN ABRAHAM

In John 8 we find a debate going on between Jesus and some of the Jews who believed in Him:

*To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” They answered him, “We are Abraham’s descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?” (John 8:31–33).*

Here these Jews responded very literally and completely missed the point. They heard Jesus’ promise—“*the truth will*

set you free”—through a natural, physical perspective, and they responded, “But we are not slaves! We don’t need to be set free. We are Abraham’s descendants.” So, Jesus explained what He meant:

*Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. I know that you are Abraham’s descendants. Yet you are looking for a way to kill me, because you have no room for my word (John 8:34–37).*

Here He was talking to people who actually believed in Him, yet they were looking for a way to kill Him because they could not receive His message about this spiritual slavery and freedom. They had no room for His word. This is the word He had heard from His Father (God), which He contrasted to what they had heard from their father.

*I am telling you what I have seen in the Father’s presence, and you are doing what you have heard from your father. You are doing what you have heard from your father (John 8:38).*

They claimed Abraham was their father, but Jesus set them straight:

*“Abraham is our father;” they answered. “If you were Abraham’s children,” said Jesus, “then you would do what Abraham did. As it is, you are looking for a way to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. Abraham did not do such things. You*

*are doing the works of your own father... ” (John 8:39–41).*

If they were actually Abraham’s children, they would not be looking for a way to kill Jesus. Because Jesus had ruled out Abraham as their father, they then instead claimed God as their father, saying, *“We are not illegitimate children”* (John 8:41). Finally, Jesus told them who their father really was:

*Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love me, for I have come here from God. I have not come on my own; God sent me. Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. You belong to your father, the devil...”* (John 8:42–44).

He continued with a very strong statement about their true desires and motives, as well as the remedy found in Him:

*...and you want to carry out your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe me! Can any of you prove me guilty of sin? If I am telling the truth, why don’t you believe me? Whoever belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God* (John 8:44–47).

In other words, He told them that being natural descendants of Abraham did not matter at all if they were not



actually like Abraham in faith. Natural lineage did not necessarily mean anything spiritually. Instead of being like Abraham, they were like their true father, the devil. The Jews, not surprisingly, were offended and answered, *“Aren’t we right in saying that you are a Samaritan and demon-possessed?”* (John 8:48).

The argument between them continued like this:

*“I am not possessed by a demon,” said Jesus, “but I honor my Father and you dishonor me. I am not seeking glory for myself; but there is one who seeks it, and he is the judge. Very truly I tell you, whoever obeys my word will never see death.” At this they exclaimed, “Now we know that you are demon-possessed! Abraham died and so did the prophets, yet you say that whoever obeys your word will never taste death. Are you greater than our father Abraham? He died, and so did the prophets. Who do you think you are?” Jesus replied, “If I glorify myself, my glory means nothing. My Father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me. Though you do not know him, I know him. If I said I did not, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and obey his word. Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad.” “You are not yet fifty years old,” they said to him, “and you have seen Abraham!” “Very truly I tell you,” Jesus answered, “before Abraham was born, I am!” At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds (John 8:49–59).*

In summary, what Jesus was saying here was that it is not about physical descent but about believing His words, because He is God. It is easy for us to miss it here, but the Jews in this passage clearly understood that Jesus was claiming to be God. When He said, *“Before Abraham was born, I am,”* He was echoing God’s declaration of His name to Moses from the burning bush: *“I am who I am”* (Exod. 3:14). To make a statement like that, to the Jews, was blasphemy worthy of stoning to death. This is why they picked up stones to stone Him. They knew what He was claiming, and they were unwilling to accept it. We find another example of this in John 5:18: *“For this reason they tried all the more to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.”* It is just as true today as it was then: The claim that Jesus is God bothers and offends people. No one is offended by the idea of a prophet or saint, but the claim that He is God requires submission to Him. Many people, like the Jews, are unwilling to accept that. But by claiming to be greater than Abraham, Jesus clearly declared, *“I am God. I am the word that was with God and was God.”* True descendants of Abraham, the father of faith, will recognize Jesus as the Messiah promised to Abraham.

This foundational belief of the new covenant that Jesus is greater than Abraham is further underlined in the Book of Hebrews, where it discusses Abraham’s interaction with Melchizedek (see Heb. 6:13–7:3). In this passage, the author of Hebrews first talked about God’s promise to Abraham. Then he transitioned to talking about Jesus being in the order of Melchizedek, a topic that continues through chapter 7. Jesus’ position in the order of Melchizedek is important because of

Abraham's relationship to Melchizedek. When Abraham gave a tenth or tithed from the spoils of war to Melchizedek, he declared Melchizedek to be greater than himself. Thus, if Jesus is of the order of Melchizedek, and Melchizedek was greater than Abraham, then Jesus is greater than Abraham, too. Because Jesus is in the order of Melchizedek, He is a class above Abraham. This is exactly what Jesus claimed in John 8, and it was a huge statement to make in that culture, where Abraham was the father and hero of their faith. In this way, Jesus declared that He was the fulfillment of the promises to Abraham.

## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CIRCUMCISION

The fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant in the new covenant is also seen in the issue of circumcision. Each of the Old Testament covenants came with a sign that served as a symbol or reminder that these two parties were in covenant together. So, every time Noah saw a rainbow, he was reminded that God would not send another worldwide flood. Abraham had circumcision as a daily reminder of his covenant with God. Moses and the Israelites had the Passover celebration as a reminder of their covenant with God, as well as His deliverance of the nation from Egypt. David's symbol is a little less certain, because he saw God's promises to him as a covenant, but they did not actually have a covenant ceremony. So, the sign of the covenant could be a throne, or it is possible David's covenant does not have a sign like the others. The point is, for Abraham, circumcision was a sign of his covenant with God. All the males in his family were circumcised as a sign that they were

part of Abraham's covenant with God.

When the Mosaic Law was introduced years later, the Law said all males must be circumcised on the eighth day after birth. In this way, circumcision went from being a sign of the Abrahamic covenant to being part of the Law. Then, it was no longer just a sign but became a burden in a different kind of way. As time progressed, the concept of circumcision changed. In the time when Jesus lived on earth, the concept of circumcision went like this: We are the sons of Abraham. We are better than all the nations of the world. We have covenant with God because we have been circumcised. This is a subtle but significant shift. They were trusting in the sign of the covenant instead of trusting in the covenant itself. They had taken circumcision because Moses had it in the Law, so they trusted in their circumcision. But circumcision was just the sign of the Abrahamic covenant and the relationship between Abraham and God the Father. While Abraham trusted in his covenant with God (of which circumcision was the sign), the Jews had actually begun to trust in circumcision (the sign) instead of the relationship. This would be like trusting in your wedding ring, which is a sign of your marriage, rather than actually developing your marriage relationship. Baptism is just a sign of the relationship; the relationship is that which brings salvation. This is what had happened with the concept of circumcision by the time of Jesus' life on earth.

After Jesus' death and resurrection, circumcision became a point of debate throughout the early Church. Many were asking, "Do we need to still circumcise?" According to the teachings of the apostles Paul, Peter, James, and John, the

circumcision Jesus brought was a circumcision of the heart, which meant men no longer needed the outward sign of the covenant. The new covenant is an inward covenant through which God puts a new heart (a new spirit) in us. He makes us partakers of the divine nature, and He begins to make invisible changes inside our hearts. This means we no longer need the outward sign and symbol of circumcision. However, for many years it was a major debate in the early Church, because people were still adjusting to the realities of the new covenant. Many of the Jewish believers wanted Gentile believers to be circumcised when they converted, because they thought circumcision was a necessary outward sign of the covenant.<sup>49</sup>

Paul made a very strong statement against the pro-circumcision group in Galatians 5:12: *“As for those agitators, I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves!”* Paul was very disgusted with the pro-circumcision movement, because he saw it for what it was—a step backward toward the old covenant. He realized the foolishness of those living under the new covenant keeping old covenant laws. But many did not understand, just as many today still do not understand. To prove his point, Paul looked back in history to circumcision under the Abrahamic covenant and said, *“Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is the new creation”* (Gal. 6:15). In other words, *“This sign no longer matters. What matters is being a new creation, having the circumcision of the heart.”* By saying this, Paul was saying that *none* of the old covenant mattered now that the new covenant had arrived, because the new had made the old obsolete. In this way, he struck at the foundation of the system of the Law.

## THE CIRCUMCISION OF THE HEART

This idea struck at the very heart of first century Jewish religion, as we see in the story of Stephen, who was actually stoned over the issue of circumcision. In Acts 6, Stephen was on trial for preaching the gospel. The Jews brought in false (paid) witnesses to testify against him. In response, in chapter 7, Stephen launched into an amazing speech that was essentially a biblical survey following the major covenants, starting with Abraham and ending with Jesus. After that, he rebuked the Jews for their rejection of Jesus as the promised Messiah:

*“You stiff-necked people! Your hearts and ears are still uncircumcised. You are just like your ancestors: You always resist the Holy Spirit! Was there ever a prophet your ancestors did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him—you who have received the law that was given through angels but have not obeyed it.” When the members of the Sanhedrin heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. “Look,” he said, “I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.” At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul*

(Acts 7:51–58).

It was not simply that he saw Jesus that was so offensive. What bothered the Jews was his rebuke against them: “*You stiff-necked people! Your hearts and ears are still uncircumcised.*” In it, he was referring back to Deuteronomy 30:6, which prophesied that after the exile to Babylon the people would be brought back and God would circumcise their hearts. He was accusing them of rejecting the fulfillment of that prophecy by rejecting the new covenant and the one (Jesus) sent to circumcise their hearts. This shows us the reality of what the early Church was preaching about Jesus as the fulfillment of the promises made to Abraham and David. Throughout the New Testament, this emphasis is clear. And it was this message that caused the Jews to stone Stephen for blasphemy. They refused to accept the possibility that Jesus had been the Messiah and they had missed Him. This is the significance of circumcision in the New Testament. The transition from the outward sign of physical circumcision to the inward circumcision of the hearts was the cornerstone of the transition from the old covenant to the new. The elimination of the command to circumcise meant the wholesale elimination of the old covenant Law.

## THE LAW AND FAITH

This is very closely connected to the New Testament debate between the Law and faith, which is the central debate between the old covenant and the new covenant. It can be summarized this way: “Are you going to live according to your

ability to upkeep the Law, or are you going to walk in the faith of Abraham, which was accredited to him as righteousness?" In Galatians 3:1–2, Paul addressed this division clearly:

*You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by believing what you heard?*

He was asking the Galatians if they had received the Spirit because they followed the Law or because they believed (had faith). Paul continued:

*Are you so foolish? After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh? Have you experienced so much in vain—if it really was in vain? So again I ask, does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you by the works of the law, or by your believing what you heard? (Galatians 3:3–5).*

Here he asked whether God's miracles among them resulted from the Law or from faith. The obvious answer here is *faith*. This is important. Many people get upset when a well-known minister who is doing miracles ends up falling into some sort of sin or financial corruption. They say things like, "How could God do miracles in his ministry when that sin was going on?" Or they say, "It must not have been God doing those miracles, because there was secret sin in his life." Both of those statements are incorrect. Miracles happen because of faith, not



because of the Law. What that means is that a person can be a total mess, but because that person has a strong, outrageous faith, miracles happen through that person. This happens despite the fact that that person is emotionally unhealthy, immature, and struggling with sin. Samson is a good example of this. In fact, many of the Old Testament heroes were used by God powerfully despite their personal issues. In the New Testament, Peter was healing people with his shadow, but he was still a racist. Until God changed his heart, Peter had a very deep-seated racism that affected how he treated Gentiles. Yet because of his faith in Jesus, extraordinary miracles happened in his ministry. The point is, faith causes miracles, not works or righteousness through Law-keeping.

Many believers have this false perception that miracles are a sign of a person's righteousness, and when they see miracles happening through someone, they assume that person must be an incredible Christian with impeccable character. The truth is, miracles will happen for whoever believes, whoever has faith.

In Galatians 3:6-7, Paul continued by talking about Abraham, the father of faith: *"So also Abraham 'believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.' Understand, then, that those who have faith are children of Abraham."* In other words, Abraham became righteous through having faith, not through following the Law, which did not even exist at that time. When we live according to faith, instead of the Law, we are children of Abraham. Verse 8 continues, *"Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: 'All nations will be blessed through you.'"* All nations were not blessed through

the Law, but all nations are blessed through the faith of Abraham. As a result of faith, *“Those who rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith”* (Gal. 3:9). If we have faith, we are blessed just like Abraham was blessed, not based on our works but based on our faith.

By contrast, the Law brings a curse. *“For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse, as it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law’”* (Gal. 3:10). Those who depend on the Law will be cursed, but those who depend on faith are blessed! Paul stated this so unmistakably: *“Clearly no one who relies on the law is justified before God”* (Gal. 3:11). Not only are those under the Law cursed, but they also are not justified. Paul summed up his comparison between the Law and faith like this:

*The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, it says, “The person who does these things will live by them.” Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole.” He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit (Galatians 3:12–14).*

In other words, Christ removed the curse of the Law so that we can be blessed with Abraham. Not only did Christ justify us, but He also released the blessing to us. By removing the curse of the Law of Moses, He opened the door for us to

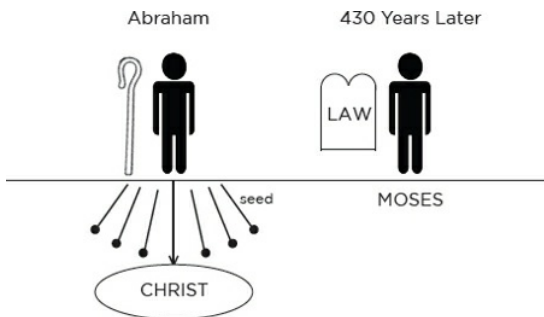
inherit the blessing of the faith of Abraham. The blessing we receive is the blessing of Abraham, which is to bless all the nations of the earth, not the obedience-based blessing of the Law. The blessings of Deuteronomy 28 were limited to those who were circumcised and followed the Law within the vassal covenant. Jesus did not offer us that miniscule blessing; He removed the curse hanging over the command to obey and opened the door to blessing through faith. After that comparison, Paul continued with an example from everyday life during that time period: “...*Just as no one can set aside or add to a human covenant that has been duly established, so it is in this case.*” To his original readers, this would have been perfectly understandable, but it is not as clear for us, all these years later. What Paul was referring to was the understanding of covenant as being unchangeable. Once a covenant had been duly established, it would not be changed. We see this in Paul’s commentary on the Abrahamic covenant:

*The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. Scripture does not say “and to seeds,” meaning many people, but “and to your seed,” meaning one person, who is Christ (Galatians 3:16).*

Abraham was promised certain promises, and these promises did not include “his seeds” (his physical descendants, Israel) but “his seed” (Christ). Thus, the promise to Abraham was not for a nation of descendants but for his seed, Christ. He continued:

*What I mean is this: The law, introduced 430 years later, does not set aside the covenant previously*

*established by God and thus do away with the promise. For if the inheritance depends on the law, then it no longer depends on the promise; but God in his grace gave it to Abraham through a promise (Galatians 3:17–18).*



The Law did not do away with the promises made to Abraham. It did not invalidate or replace the promises to Abraham. It simply showed up as a separate covenant. This means, as Paul said, the Law did not fulfill or bring about the promise to Abraham. Instead, the promise predated the Law and was based on faith. Next, Paul addressed the purpose of the Law:

*Why, then, was the law given at all? It was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come. The law was given through*

*angels and entrusted to a mediator. A mediator, however, implies more than one party; but God is one. Is the law, therefore, opposed to the promises of God? Absolutely not! For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law (Galatians 3:19–21).*

While a great deal could be said on these verses, Paul's point here was to contrast Law and faith. He was saying the Law was not given to make them righteous. If the Law could have imparted life, it would have made them righteous, but that was not possible. The Law was not added to bring righteousness but as a result of transgression. These are two very different purposes. Thus, in the years from Moses to Jesus, the Israelites lived under the shadow of the Law, looking forward toward the time when the promise to Abraham (prior to the Law) would be fulfilled. The promise of a seed, the Christ, finally showed up down the timeline with Jesus and was fulfilled.

Paul continued:

*But Scripture has locked up everything under the control of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe. Before the coming of this faith, we were held in custody under the law, locked up until the faith that was to come would be revealed. So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith. Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian (Galatians 3:22–25).*

The most revealing translation of verse 22 is the Weymouth Literal Translation: *“But Scripture has shown that all mankind are the prisoners of sin, in order that the promised blessing, which depends on faith in Jesus Christ, may be given to those who believe”* (Gal. 3:22). In other words, during the time from the Law until Jesus, the Israelites were under a guardian or under the custody of the Law. Literally, they were prisoners under the Law. Some people use these verses to teach that *the Law leads us to Christ*, because of the word *guardian*, but that is not what is meant here. The sense is of a prison guard. The Law kept them under guard until the promised seed came; until then, they were *“locked up,”* as it says in verse 22.

Paul described the end result this way:

*So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise* (Galatians 3:26–29).

In other words, those who belong to Christ, who is Abraham’s seed, are also Abraham’s seed, which makes them heirs according to the promise. We are no longer slaves but children of God and, therefore, heirs of the same promise as the Son of God. Paul’s summary made this clear:

*What I am saying is that as long as an heir is underage, he is no different from a slave, although he*

*owns the whole estate. The heir is subject to guardians and trustees until the time set by his father. So also, when we were underage, we were in slavery under the elemental spiritual forces of the world. But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship. Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." So you are no longer a slave, but God's child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir (Galatians 4:1–7).*

In these verses, it is also important to note that Christ was born under the Law (see Gal. 4:4). In other words, the Law was still in operation; it did not end at His birth. Instead, He lived and ministered under the Law until the Law received its deathblow from the cross. Through the cross, Jesus freed the Israelites from the Law; He removed them from the Mosaic old covenant system. He told them, "You are no longer slaves but children of God who can now inherit the promises of Abraham. In this way, Christ came and freed us from the Law so we can live and be made righteous, like Abraham, by faith. Paul laid out this same contrast between the Law and faith in Romans 4, as well.

Some people have struggled to accept this reality because of James 2, which is what nearly caused the early Church to remove the Book of James from the canon. They saw it as conflicting with the clear message of Galatians 3–4 and Romans 4. For this reason, we must consider this passage before

finishing our discussion of the debate between the Law and faith. James 2 reads:

*What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds. You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder. You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called God's friend. You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone. In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead (James 2:14–26).*



James' declaration, "*A person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone,*" has bothered many people. Others have embraced it, which is why the debate between the Law (works) and faith continues. Today, much of this debate is focused on the question of works versus grace. Those on the grace side say all the good Christian works we have grown up doing are not necessary, because the gospel is all about grace and what we have already received in Christ. In fact, the gospel is not grace. Grace is a part of it, because it is the empowerment that comes with the gospel. But the gospel message is the new covenant, of which grace is just one part.

The confusion over these issues stems from a type of "one-lens" way of thinking, where whole groups and movements pick out one aspect of the gospel and make it their focus, to the degree that they miss out on other aspects of new covenant life. For example, some people have become so lopsided in their focus on grace that they never do any good works. True, works will never make you righteous, but true faith has the fruit of good works. That is what James was saying in this passage. He was seeing Christians who claimed to live by faith but did not help their brothers and sisters in need, and he was saying that is wrong. He was not saying that the Law (works) makes us righteous but that if we have faith it will be evident because faith bears the fruit of good works. Our good deeds, born of our faith, are the proof we have faith. The two go hand-in-hand, and when we focus on one to the exclusion of the other, we become terribly lopsided and miss the essence of the new covenant message.

In summary, it is very good to move away from the Law and

toward faith. That is the new covenant message of freedom. And when we move toward faith, God's grace empowers us to walk in faith, which empowers us to bear the fruit of that faith, which is good works. The modern Grace Movement has reminded many people of the importance of grace in our lives, but by over-emphasizing grace, it has also under-emphasized faith, the faith of Abraham that makes us children of God. As James so clearly states, that faith, if it is real, will bear fruit. We cannot have faith without fruit, and grace is the empowerment that causes us to walk out the fruit of our faith. The biblical division is not between the Law and grace but between the Law and faith. If we are walking in the faith of Abraham and believing the promised seed (Jesus) has come and freed us from the Law, we should have evidence of that faith flowing out of our lives. If we are truly children of God, we will have evidence of it in our lives because, like Jesus, we will do the same thing our Father does. We will bear the family traits.

## **REVIEW TEST QUESTIONS**

1. It was important that Jesus was in the order of Melchizedek, because Melchizedek was greater than whom?
3. Each one of the covenants came with a sign. List the corresponding signs for the following three covenants: Noah, Abraham, and Moses.
4. Trusting in the sign instead of the covenant and relationship with God is like a married couple who trusts in their wedding

\_\_\_\_\_, rather than their relationship.

5. Stephen quoted back to Deuteronomy 30 verse *what*?
6. Miracles happen because of f\_\_\_\_\_.
7. What was the prison guard from the time of Moses until Jesus came?

<sup>49</sup> Significant passages on the circumcision debate include Romans 2:25–3:1; 4:11; 1 Corinthians 7:19; Galatians 2:12; 5:6–12; 6:11–15; Ephesians 2:11; Philippians 3:3; Colossians 2:11; Titus 1:10. The length of this list of references demonstrates just how big of a debate it was.

## fourteen



# ATONEMENT THEORY

In this chapter and the next, we will address a major theological cornerstone called the *atonement*. Simply defined, atonement means to bring two parties back into relationship with one another. When Christian theology refers to the atonement, it is referring to what happened at the cross. A multitude of views on the atonement exist because Christian thinkers have been examining it for two thousand years. The Old Testament contains several shadows of the atonement that happened in Christ. We will not be focusing on the Old Testament types of atonement, but we do need to understand them in order to comprehend the reality in Christ. Because we

have already covered the Old Testament covenants, we will focus on the new covenant in this chapter, while occasionally looking back to the Old Testament shadows.

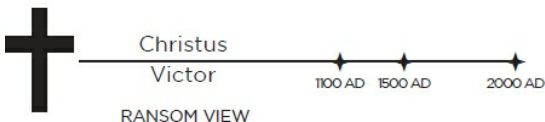
## THREE VIEWS OF THE ATONEMENT

We will approach the subject historically, looking at the major historical views of the atonement from the cross through the present day.

# 1. Christus Victor Theory

From the cross until AD 1100, only one view of the atonement existed, which is termed ***Christus Victor***, which is Latin for “Christ the Victor.” Another name for this belief is the ransom view. *Christus Victor* is the official name, but the ransom view is also used in reference to this view.

## AT ONE MENT



According to *Christus Victor*, God gave authority over the earth to Adam and Eve. However, the devil tricked Adam and

Eve into giving their authority to him. As a result, the devil had authority over the earth. To remedy this, King Jesus came and took the keys back from the devil and then gave them back to humanity. This is the *Christus Victor* concept, that as a human, as “another Adam” who is sinless, Jesus came to take back the authority over earth that Adam and Eve had lost. He went through the temptations and trials and was put to death, but then He came out of the grave. When He came out, He brought with Him all the captives, with the keys (the authority), and emptied the grave. In other words, He took over, took back everything the enemy had stolen from Adam and Eve, and gave it back to humankind. This is seen in Luke 22, at the Last Supper, where Jesus said to His disciples, “*I confer on you a Kingdom just as my Father conferred one on me*” (Luke 22:29). Likewise, when He said to Peter, “*I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven*” (Matt. 16:19), He was proclaiming His intention to give the Kingdom back to them. This is the basic *Christus Victor* view held by the Church for the first 1,100 years of its history and believed by all of the early Church fathers.

## 2. Satisfaction Theory

In the AD 1100s, a man named Anselm was the Bishop of Canterbury, which was a highly esteemed position in the Church, and he derived a new theory about what happened at the cross, which is known as the **Satisfaction Theory**. Rather than the focus being on getting back humanity’s authority, the focus was on the fact that human sin had dishonored God,

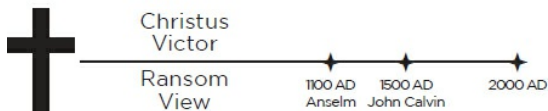
creating a big wall between people and God. In other words, according to this theory, sin was the focus of the atonement, not the need to regain humanity's authority and identity. Thus, Jesus came to die for sin, because human sin had dishonored God. This is taken from Romans 6:23, where it says "*the wages of sin is death.*" Thus, sin, as a wage, had become so piled up that someone (Jesus) needed to come and satisfy God's side of justice. Someone had to come pay back the debt of sin, because God is a just God.

When Anselm presented this concept in AD 1100, he did not say someone needed to be punished. He said God had been dishonored and someone had to honor Him again, but because none of our works were good enough to honor Him, Jesus came to earth and lived the human life perfectly in order to honor God.

### 3. Penal Substitution Theory

In the 1500s, John Calvin added a third theory on the atonement. He said sin dishonored God, and sin deserved punishment. This theory, known as **Penal Substitution**, changed the understanding of what happened at the cross quite a bit.

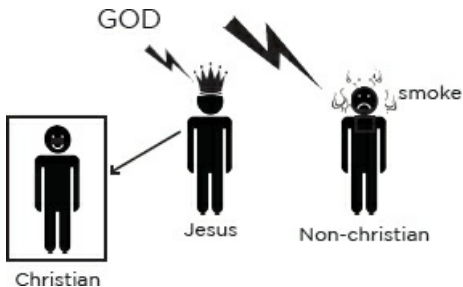
## AT ONE MENT



According to John Calvin, when Jesus died, He stood in for humanity. Humans deserve to be punished because of sin, and God should be sending judgment toward us, but instead He sent it upon Jesus. Jesus stood in our place and took our punishment so that we could go free. In other words, the focus of this view is sin's demand for justice.

Although this theory did not exist during the first 1,500 years of Christianity, today it is widespread, and many Christians believe it is the “normal” view of the atonement—that Jesus needed to come and be punished in our place. Along with this, Calvin also taught the idea of limited atonement, which we covered in Chapter 4. Simply put, limited atonement says Jesus took the punishment for Christians (the elect) but not for the rest of humanity, which means they are receiving judgment. This is what the following diagram illustrates. The Christian is protected from God's judgment by a Jesus bubble, but the non-Christian is being punished. The elect are covered by Jesus, but those who are not among the elect are not protected from judgment.





It is easy to undermine this idea simply based on First John 2:2, which says, *“He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.”* Because of this verse, even a lot of Calvinists have rejected the idea of limited atonement. Even the type and shadow of the atonement doesn’t fit with limited atonement. On the Day of Atonement, the lamb was killed for *all* of Israel, good Israelites and bad Israelites alike. Everyone in Israel received the benefit of the sacrifice.

## FORGIVENESS OR PUNISHMENT

This brings up a very important question that shows the difference between the original view (*Christus Victor*) and the newer views (Satisfaction Theory and Penal Substitution): *Is sin forgiven or punished?*

GOD

Is sin forgiven  
OR  
Is sin punished?



ADAM & EVE

Some people want to say it is both, but it must be one or the other. If a person owes a mortgage to the bank, that person has two options for how to own the house. Either that person can pay off the mortgage, or the bank can forgive the debt. If the person pays it, then that is not the same as having it forgiven. The same is true related to the debate between punishment and forgiveness. Either our sins were paid for, by Jesus taking the punishment we deserved, or they were forgiven, with no punishment.

Since the 1100s, the emphasis has primarily switched from the earlier concept of forgiveness to the concept of punishment. This is especially true since the formalization of Calvinism in the 1500s. Thus, the Church has adopted the concept of a courtroom scene where an angry Father God is judge and demands payment for the debt of sin, and Jesus steps in, as the perfect man, and says, “I will die in their place to pay for their sins.” This concept of the courtroom, which historians refer to as “the legalization of Christianity,” was invented by John Calvin, who had a background in law. Because of his legal mindset, Calvin saw the Father as a judge instead of a father, and he perceived the gospel message through a legal lens instead of a relational lens.<sup>50</sup> This was the

origin of Penal Substitution.

Closely connected to this idea is the idea of an angry God. If sin has to be punished, it follows that God must be very angry that His holy Law was continually being violated. Thus, the years of humanity's sinful defiance of God had built up a great deal of wrath, which eventually culminated at the cross, where Jesus suffered the wrath of God in our place. As those who benefit from Jesus' suffering, we should be sad He suffered the wrath of God but also thankful He took our place. He stood between us and the angry, judging Father and took the punishment we deserved. This is especially easy for people to accept if they have an angry father in the natural, because it fits with their experience of what a father is like. Even for those who have good earthly fathers, the concept of an angry God causes them to emotionally distance themselves from God. Thus, they can read a story like the Prodigal Son (see Luke 15) and think, *That does not connect with me. I connect with the son, but is that really what the Father is like?* In this way, the image of God as an angry judge serves as a lens that colors the way people read and understand the Bible. They see relationship with Him as hanging on Jesus' suffering in our place. Jesus paid the penalty so we can have relationship with the just and angry God.

In fact, this teaching is also very connected to the Grace Movement. Some of their teachers are so pro-grace that they teach the penal substitution perspective.<sup>51</sup> In other words, God the Father poured out all of His wrath on Jesus on the cross, which means God has no wrath toward us. He took it all out on Jesus, and therefore, He is never upset with us. This is

the logical conclusion that is the foundation of the Grace Movement. The problem with it, of course, is that when we read the New Testament we discover that *there is more wrath*. The subject of God's wrath comes up repeatedly in the New Testament, which does not make sense if God took out all of His wrath on Jesus on the cross. Instead, if we look back at the gospel accounts and ask, "Where do we see God pouring out wrath on the cross?" the answer is, we don't. The New Testament does not connect wrath to the cross. *The wrath of God was not present or involved in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ in any way.*

That is a big statement, but it is provable, as we will see throughout the remainder of this chapter. However, eliminating wrath does not necessarily answer the question of whether sin is forgiven or punished. Technically, God could punish without wrath, without the emotion. So we cannot use the elimination of wrath to prove God did not punish sin. However, in Scripture, as we will see, it is evident we are forgiven, not punished. We all had a debt of sin, but instead of punishing Jesus in our place, the Father chose to simply forgive our debt with no substitutionary repayment. We will see this is true through examining the types and shadows of atonement that Jesus came to fulfill.

## THE TYPES AND SHADOWS

What is missing from most modern thought on the atonement is a proper starting place. Many scholars only go back to the historical views of the atonement in the Church,

trying to determine who was most logically right. Was it Calvin? Anselm? The early Church fathers? They debate between these views that started after the cross rather than going back to the types and shadows that led to the cross. If we want to properly understand the atonement, this is the real question we must ask: What are the types and shadows pointing to—punishment or forgiveness?

The Old Testament contains three main types and shadows of the atonement:

1. Abraham Offering Isaac
2. The Passover Lamb
3. The Atonement Sacrifice or Atonement Lamb.

These three pictures were given to the Jews as types and shadows, so that when AD 30 arrived, and they were standing at the foot of the cross, they would know how to understand what had just happened.

## **1. Abraham Offering Isaac**

In the story of Abraham and Isaac, we see three main characters. Isaac went with his father and was bound. Abraham was about to sacrifice Isaac. Then the angel stopped him, showing him a ram to sacrifice instead. According to Galatians 4:21–31, Isaac, as the promised seed and the son of promise, was a picture of the new covenant and Jesus. The other son,

Ishmael, was the type of the old covenant. Likewise, Hebrews 11:17–19 talks about how Abraham was willing to sacrifice his son, believing that if he died God would raise him from the dead. Clearly, this is a parallel of the Father and Son. Thus, we can see that Isaac (not the ram) was the type and shadow of Jesus in this story. The ram is not an integral part of the story.

Now we must consider the dynamics of this situation and why it happened. As a type and shadow of the atonement, what does it tell us about the nature of the atonement? First, it is important to note, as we discussed in Chapter 9, that God asked Abraham to sacrifice Isaac in order to test him. It was not because God was angry with Abraham or because Abraham owed Him a debt. In fact, at the end of the story, Abraham was declared righteous by faith, and he had the promised seed, Isaac, as well as all the covenantal promises. In other words, Isaac was not dying in someone's place to pay off a debt. Instead, Abraham was being tested, as God's covenant partner, and God was also proving to Abraham that He was different from other gods (who did require child sacrifices). Thus, the sacrifice of Isaac was a *covenantal offering*. In that day, this was a normal part of showing allegiance to a god, who would demand the life of one's firstborn as proof that one was really the god's covenant partner. So, in keeping with the norms of Abraham's day, God asked him to sacrifice his son to test his allegiance. However, He interrupted the sacrifice and provided a substitute ram in Isaac's place. In other words, He was declaring that He is not like the other gods, and He is against child sacrifice.

In summary, in this first type and shadow of the atonement,

we have two important lessons. First, sin was not being punished, and Isaac was not standing in as a substitute sacrifice for Abraham. Second, it related to the approving of Abraham and Isaac's covenant relationship with God.

## 2. The Passover

The next type and shadow of the atonement is the Passover. In the diagram below, God is on one side, and Moses and Israel are on the other, with the big dark cloud between them representing the angel of death. Beneath the cloud is the Passover Lamb, who is the type of Jesus in this story. We see this clearly in the New Testament, as in Paul's statement: *"Get rid of the old yeast, so that you may be a new unleavened batch—as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed"* (1 Cor. 5:7). Jesus also made this clear to His disciples when He used the Passover meal to prophesy His death and resurrection in what became the Eucharist or Holy Communion (see Luke 22:19–20). Jesus was the Passover Lamb.

GOD

Big dark cloud

MOSES  
ISRAEL



Jesus is the  
Passover  
Lamb

Another important player in this story, not shown in the diagram, was Egypt. Israel was enslaved in Egypt, and through Moses, God had just unleashed nine plagues upon Egypt. The angel of death was the tenth and final plague in which all the firstborn children and animals died. However, God made provision for the Israelites so that their firstborns would not die. To cause the angel of death of “pass over” them, the Israelite families had to kill a lamb, put the blood by the door, and eat the meat together in a *covenant meal*. We see the importance of the meal in the command to those with small families to join together with others so they had enough people to eat the meal. The point of all this was to show that those who had the blood were in relationship with God. Those who did not have the blood did not have relationship with Him. He was marking the Israelites as His people through the covenant meal, and the blood at the doorway was a sign that death would not touch them, that God would protect them. What we do not see here is wrath or justice or vengeance. The lamb died to enable the covenant meal, which showed the relationship the people had with God.



When people try to force substitution into the picture, the lamb is said to replace the firstborn child. Instead, what we find here is the ancient rite called a covenant meal. God's relationship with the Israelites had nothing to do with punishment. Instead, He was rescuing them from slavery and protecting them during the plagues brought upon their oppressors. God's wrath toward the Israelites, as mentioned previously, did not come into play until Exodus 20 and the initiation of the kinship covenant. God didn't tell Israel, "I am very offended with you, so you better kill a Passover lamb and smear its blood on your doorposts; otherwise, I will kill you!" God wasn't aiming His wrath at Israel, and the Passover lamb didn't turn His wrath away. Just as with the first picture of the atonement, the Passover does not relate to punishment of sin but to covenant relationship.

### **3. The Atonement Lamb**

Third is the Atonement Lamb, explained in Leviticus 16. Under their kinship covenant with Him, God gave Israel these guidelines for atonement. The high priest, Aaron at the time, was to sacrifice a bull as a sin offering to cover his own sin. Then he was to take two lambs, one as a sacrificial lamb and one as the scapegoat. The high priest would then slit the throat of the sacrificial lamb and drain its blood. The high priest was then to take this blood into the holy of holies, to the ark of the covenant, and sprinkle this blood on the lid of the ark of the covenant, which would atone for Israel's sin over the previous year. In other words, it was a once-a-year day of atonement

sacrifice. Afterward, when Aaron left the holy of holies, his hands would still have blood on them from the first lamb. So, he was to put his hands on the head of the scapegoat lamb and declare the rest of the sin of Israel onto that lamb. Then the lamb would be taken into the wilderness and set free. Both of these offerings, the sacrificial offering and the scapegoat offering, took place on the day of atonement. In this way, one lamb was the covenant sacrifice that covered the sin of the people, while the other lamb carried away the sin of the people. They were two different pictures.<sup>52</sup>

We have several things going on here. First, Hebrews 10 shows us that Jesus fulfilled two of the roles in this type and shadow of the atonement. He is the high priest, but unlike Aaron, He did not need to be cleansed by the blood of a bull before He could enter the holy place. Not only is He the great high priest, but He is also the atonement lamb. So, as the high priest who did not need to be cleansed by a bull, He took His own blood, as the lamb who was slain, into the heavenly tabernacle and put His blood on top of the ark of the covenant in heaven (see Rev. 15). Jesus is very different from Aaron, in that He is perfect and able to perform both roles as priest and lamb.

Second, the lamb was not a substitute for human sacrifice. In other words, the meaning was not: Aaron should die, but the lamb will take his place. In fact, the lamb was not even a sacrifice for Aaron; it was the sin offering of the bull that cleansed Aaron so he could carry the blood of the lamb into the holy of holies. The idea of a substitutionary sacrifice simply finds no place in this picture. Instead, what we have

here is a covenantal sacrifice. The sacrifice provided forgiveness of sins, not punishment for sins. No punishment or wrath was put on the lamb. They did not beat or torture the lamb; they simply slit its throat. Thus, we see that Jesus, as the great high priest and the sacrificial lamb, was offered as a covenantal sacrifice to restore relationship between God and humanity.

When an atonement lamb was put to death once a year, it was a renewal ceremony, restoring and renewing the relationship between Israel and God. It was never about the animal being killed in their place. Instead, it was the re-sealing of the covenant they had been breaking for a whole year. It was a renewal, a re-establishment, a coming back together. Thus, the blood, the sign of God's relationship with Israel, was sprinkled on the ark of the covenant, which held the Ten Commandments (the covenant agreement they had violated all year long). When Aaron entered the holy of holies, he put the blood on the ark in faith toward the reality of the coming Messiah in the future. They did this in faith, believing God would forgive them. In response to their faith, He received the sacrifice and forgave their sins. In this way, the blood covered their sin and enabled restoration of the relationship to take place between the two covenant partners.

Many people think the atonement means Jesus was paying the debt of our sin. However, this completely contradicts the types and shadows of the atonement in the Old Testament. Israel never could pay the debt of their sin. As covenant partners with God, they could and should have been destroyed, except for the pardon God continued to extend to

them year after year. The sacrifice of the lamb did not serve to satisfy God's wrath toward their sin. Instead, the sacrifice of the lamb was an act of faith in God and His promise to forgive them. Within the temporary covenant Israel had asked for, God created a way for them to make this sacrifice in faith and receive forgiveness based on what Jesus would do in the future. The Israelites could perform the type and shadow of the atonement, coming in faith to Him as their covenant partner, and receive God's forgiveness every year. In this way, God continually forgave in response to Israel's faith as demonstrated on the day of atonement until eventually His Son stepped in as the perfect sacrificial lamb whose sacrifice enables God to forgive permanently.

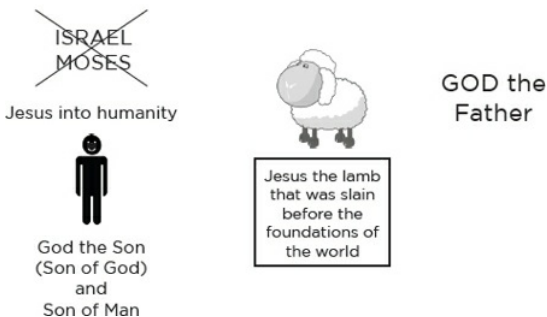
Jesus did not just fulfill the type and shadow of the old covenant. The type and shadow was implanted in the old covenant, which the people called for—the old covenant that veiled God and misrepresented His heart. Even inside that awful system, God implanted a type and shadow—the day of atonement—that would point to His Son. Thus, the cross itself, the death of Jesus as the covenantal lamb, was the establishment of the new covenant. Jesus became Isaac, the Passover Lamb, and the Atonement Lamb of a new covenant. His blood was shed to seal a completely new deal, in which He has fulfilled the promises to David and Abraham and destroyed the old covenant. Hebrews 8:13 states this clearly: *“By calling this covenant ‘new,’ he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and outdated will soon disappear.”* He took away the old covenant and put the new covenant in its place.

## GOD ON BOTH SIDES OF THE COVENANT

Let's consider this another way. God the Father has always been on one side of the covenant. On the other side of the old covenant were Moses and Israel. Now, on the other side of the new covenant is Jesus. When Israel and Moses were on the other side, they could never upkeep their end of the covenantal agreement. They were constantly renewing the covenant on the day of atonement, receiving forgiveness for their failure again and again. Still, Israel always failed. So, under the new covenant, Jesus came down into humanity and stood on the other side of the covenant, as God the Father's covenant partner. In other words, now God is on both sides of the covenant deal. He could not just do that as God; He had to do it as a human as well. So, Jesus is both God and man, which is a well-established doctrine of the Church, called the hypo-static union. Jesus is both fully God and fully man. As the God-man, Jesus stands on one side of the covenant as God and man (Son of God/Son of man) so that He will perfectly upkeep this side of the covenant deal.

Jesus is the high priest of all of humanity, not just Israel. Not only that, but Jesus is also the perfect lamb, the sacrificial lamb in the middle of the covenant. Thus, the two parties come together—God the Father on one side and God the Son on the other. And Jesus is also the sacrificial lamb who seals the new covenant. This is how He can be the high priest who takes His own blood into the heavenly tabernacle and places it on the mercy seat, permanently cleansing and providing forgiveness for all of humanity (see Heb. 9).

## God on both sides of Covenant



First John 2:2 declares, *“He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.”* In other words, *Jesus stood in the place of humanity, and He is now forgiving all of humanity—past, present, and future. This has confused some people, causing them to become Universalists, to believe everyone goes to heaven. However, the catch is this: Jesus has forgiven everyone’s sins, but we need to receive that forgiveness in order to be reconciled to God.*

This is the point: God—on both sides of this covenant—has done everything He can to reconcile the world to Himself. He made a perfect covenant within the Trinity to make this possible. The new covenant is not between the Church and God in the way that the old covenant was between Israel and

God. The new covenant is between the Father and the Son. That is why the Son cannot simply be a good prophet or a man who never sinned. He is literally the incarnation of God! He is standing on both sides of the deal, as an eternal being, to create an eternal, perfect covenant with Himself. Here we clearly see the cross was not about the wrath of God, and the Father was not at odds with the Son but in partnership with Him. Second Corinthians 5:18–19 gives us further insight into what was happening between the Father and Son:

*All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them....*

God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ. God the Father was on one side of the equation, and God the Son was on the other side of the equation. In this verse, we see that the Father actually entered *into* the Son. God Himself is *in* Christ reconciling the *whole world* to Himself. In other words, the Father did not abandon the Son or abuse the Son with His wrath. The Father was fully *in* the Son, and together, Father and Son reconciled the world to Himself. Colossians 2:9 echoes this when it says that in Christ dwells the fullness of the Godhead bodily. Jesus carried within Him the fullness of the Holy Spirit, the fullness of Himself as the second person of the Trinity, and the fullness of the Father. That's the Godhead in Jesus' human earth suit! They were all in it together.

With this new covenant in place, humanity is now either “in

Christ” or still living “in Adam.” Those are the only two options now. If we are “in Christ,” we receive all the blessings of the new covenant. This is what Ephesians 1:3 means: *“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.”* We receive all the spiritual blessings in the heavenly places because we are in Christ. When we become “in Him,” we are united with Him, and two become one. *“But whoever is united with the Lord is one with him in spirit”* (1 Cor. 6:17). As His bride, we receive everything that is His. A merging takes place, and now we receive all the blessings of the new covenant. By contrast, those who are still in Adam live under the fallen reality.

## SOME OBJECTIONS

Two passages in the Bible, in particular, have sometimes made it difficult for people to accept the *Christus Victor* view, but that is simply because these passages have been wrongly understood according to a Calvinist lens. Here we will look at these two passages briefly to show how they actually support the *Christus Victor* theory.

The first troubling passage is Jesus’ quote of Psalm 22 while on the cross: *“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”* (Matt. 27:46). This has often been taught as a judgment in which Jesus suffered full detachment from the Father while the sin of humanity was placed on Him. Because the Father could not look on sin, He turned away from the Son, and the Son experienced complete disconnection in a way He had



never experienced before. It is a horrible idea. Thankfully, that was not at all what happened. When Jesus cried out, “*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*,” He was quoting the first line of Psalm 22, which is a messianic psalm. To the Jews of Jesus’ day, to quote one line of a psalm was to quote the entire psalm.<sup>53</sup> That was their understanding, and they would have known what the rest of the psalm said because they would have had it memorized. In this way, it was a sort of shorthand. This means Jesus was referring to the entirety of Psalm 22, not just the first line. When we read the psalm, we discover that it does not teach separation between the Father and Son but, instead, *Christus Victor*.

Psalm 22 begins with the famous line, “*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*” (Ps. 22:1), after which it recounts Jesus’ painful experience of being betrayed and despised and crucified. However, separation from the Father was not part of His experience, as we see in verse 24: “*For he has not despised or scorned the suffering of the afflicted one; he has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help.*” The psalm actually leads to the opposite conclusion from what most people get by reading just the first line. Beginning in verse 27, the psalm clearly espouses the *Christus Victor* view:

*All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations will bow down before him, for dominion belongs to the Lord and he rules over the nations. All the rich of the earth will feast and worship; all who go down to the dust will kneel before him—those who cannot keep themselves alive. Posterity will serve him; future generations will*

*be told about the Lord. They will proclaim his righteousness, declaring to a people yet unborn: He has done it! (Psalm 22:27–31).*

This explains why early believers could read this and interpret it as *Christus Victor*, while later believers, who were much more removed from the original context, could end up with a separation view. When the Jews and believers present at the crucifixion, as well as the early believers who read about it later, heard Jesus quote Psalm 22:1, they knew He was equating His experience on the cross with the storyline of Psalm 22.

The second troubling passage is Isaiah 53, where it talks about Jesus as the suffering servant. What we must first understand about Isaiah 53 is that it has been manipulated in the translation throughout the years based on the changing atonement theories. This means that most of the modern translations of this passage have been heavily influenced by Calvinistic thinking. This is not just true of this passage but of the Bible as a whole; however, it is particularly relevant in this passage. Because our modern Bibles all have a Calvinist influence, we need to go back much farther to get at what the text was really saying. The best option for this is the Septuagint LXX, which was the translation Jesus would have read, produced around 200–300 BC. It was the standard Greek Bible of the day.

If we study the LXX and some of the literal translations of Isaiah 53, we will end up with a very different conclusion than the one we get from our modern translations. Essentially the main difference is that the modern translations seem to fit best

with a penal substitution view, where the Father is pouring out wrath upon Jesus; whereas the better translations show that Jesus took sin upon Himself as if it was a plague, and then the Father cleansed Him of the plague of sin:

*...he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed (Isaiah 53:5 NIV).*

*...he became sick because of our sins; the pedagogy of our peace was upon him, with his bruises we ourselves were healed (Isaiah 53:5 LXX).<sup>54</sup>*

The big difference between these translations is found in the fact that sin plagued Him and we were healed. This was not about pouring out wrath upon the Son; it was about providing healing to humanity's sin-sickness. Then in Isaiah 53:6, we read: *"The suffering that brought us peace was on him. By his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all."*<sup>55</sup> That is the atonement part of the story—not that God has beaten him to death out of anger, wrath, and punishment. Instead, the suffering, iniquity, transgression, and all of that was laid onto Jesus as the atonement lamb. That is very different from the idea of Jesus being punished by God for our sins.

Looking ahead, in verse 8 we read:

*For the transgression of my people **he was punished** (Isaiah 53:8).*

*By the transgression of My people **he is plagued*** (Isaiah 53:8 YLT).

Here we have two different words, *for* and *by*. The NIV says, “*for the transgression of my people he was punished*,” but *for* is an inaccurate translation. The word *for* suggests substitution, meaning that we should have been punished, but He stepped in and was punished *for* us. The better translation is what the YLT says, *by* the transgression, not *for* the transgression. And instead of *punished*, the YLT says *plagued*, as in with a disease. In other words, the plague refers to what it was like for Him when—as the perfect, healthy, sinless lamb—the disease (sin) of Israel was put on Him. By their transgression He was plagued.

The passage continues:

*Yet it was the LORD's will to **crush him** and cause him to **suffer**...* (Isaiah 53:10).

*And the Lord desires to purify him of the plague...*  
(Isaiah 53:10 LXX).<sup>56</sup>

Two verses earlier it says a disease or plague was put upon Jesus, and now here it says the Lord is pleased to purify Him of the plague. To restate it, in this passage sin is pictured as a disease that humanity has, and the Atonement Lamb, Jesus the suffering servant, stepped in and took the disease on Himself—carrying our sins, burdens, sorrows, and all of it like a plague to the cross. Through His death and resurrection, He took this plague into the grave, and when He came out of the grave, He

left all of it in the grave. As a result, He released a new creation and a new race out of a second Adam. We get a very different picture from this passage when we translate it without the lens of the modern atonement theories that put the Father and Son at odds with each other.

## THE RANSOM CONCEPT

Another issue that has sometimes surfaced with the *Christus Victor* view is an over-emphasis on the ransom element. As mentioned earlier, this view is sometimes called the ransom theory or the ransom view, because in Mark 10:45 it says, “*The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*” The implications of the word *ransom* caused confusion for some people, because they got stuck on the question, “Who got the money?” Since Jesus died to defeat the enemy, does that mean He paid a ransom to the devil? This takes us back to the original picture of God, humanity, and the devil, in which humanity was subjected to the devil until Jesus came to get the keys back from the enemy and return them to humanity. Some of the early Church fathers took this too literally in the wrong direction and said, “Jesus’ death was a ransom given to the devil to buy back humanity.” Obviously, this idea does not sit right, which is why people eventually started looking for different ideas to explain the atonement. The ransom had started to have too much emphasis, rather than the *Christus Victor* side of the theory. Essentially, that is why Anselm developed the Satisfaction Theory, because it de-emphasized the devil. It was a response to the ransom view, which over-emphasized the devil.

A book from 1931, *Christus Victor*, by Gustaf Aulen, a Swedish Lutheran Theologian, gives us an important key to understanding the ransom element of *Christus Victor*. Gustaf Aulen helped theology in a major way by taking the Church back to the first 1,100 years and examining the early Church fathers, what they said, and what they believed. His book covers the progression from the early Church to Anselm of Canterbury, explaining the satisfaction view and why it changed. Then he looked at Calvin and the changes he made to the view of atonement. Finally, he explained why we are where we are (in our views of the atonement) and advocated a return to the *Christus Victor* view. Also, he highlighted several different things Jesus' death freed us from. The original *Christus Victor* view, with its emphasis upon the ransom concept, focused too much on the devil, saying God sent Jesus to rescue us from the devil, who had taken our authority, in order to give authority back to us and cast the devil out of this world. The key Gustaf Aulen brought out is that Jesus came to free us from sin, the flesh, death, the devil, and lastly, the Law. In other words, it was not *just* the devil. At one point, Aulen pointed out that the apostle Paul actually argued the *Christus Victor* view, but instead of emphasizing Christ's victory over the devil, Paul emphasized Christ's victory over the Law. In other words, what Jesus did at the cross established a new covenant of victory that replaced an old covenant of death.<sup>57</sup>

*Christus Victor* in the apostle Paul's writings is about the Law, because Jesus came and fulfilled the Law, becoming the victor and establishing a new covenant. It is not about a ransom given to the devil. Instead, Christ came and took on the curse of the old covenant, dying as a new covenant sacrifice to

replace it: Thus, He is the ransom that freed us from the old covenant. The ransom wasn't given to the devil. It was the payment of the debt owed to the old covenant. His death created a new covenant of forgiveness. At the same time, He *was* a ransom, not given to the devil to rescue the kidnapped human race but to rescue His own people who were living under a guardian (the Law). So, the guardian (the Law) received the ransom. Most people do not know where to put the ransom piece of this atonement puzzle, but Gustaf Aulen gave us a clue, though he did not fully recognize it himself, since he did not have the same emphasis on the covenants. But when we read Scripture according to the major covenants, it makes sense that the ransom would be paid to the Law.

In summary, the one view of the atonement that fits the biblical pictures is that Jesus fulfilled the types and shadows by becoming a covenant sacrifice to make a new covenant. Much of what the Church has believed in recent years regarding the atonement is wrong:

1. Jesus did *not* die in our place as a substitute.
2. Jesus did *not* pay the “penalty” for our sin.
3. Jesus did *not* receive the wrath of God.

Instead, what happened at the cross was the establishment of the new covenant of forgiveness and the removal of the old covenant and the old system. He caused it to become obsolete and outdated, and He removed it in order to introduce and establish the new covenant. Thus, Jesus died to establish a new covenant of forgiveness, to ransom us from the Law, to

become cursed for us, and to cancel our indebtedness to the old covenant.

## REVIEW TEST QUESTIONS

1. Inside Christianity, when believers use the word *atonement*, they are generally referring back to *what*?
2. Limited atonement is easily refuted by what scripture?
3. Is sin forgiven or punished? What example illustrates why it cannot be both?
4. List the three main types and shadows of Jesus' death.
5. The lamb was a covenantal sacrifice that restores *what*?
6. The new covenant is between \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.

## KEYTERMS

Christus Victor	Penal Substitution
Satisfaction Theory	

## RELATED MATERIALS

Gustaf Aulen, *Christus Victor*.



James Beilby and Paul R. Eddy, Eds., *The Nature of the Atonement: Four Views*.

Kevin Conner, *The Tabernacle of Moses*.

<sup>50</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, III, xi, 2.

<sup>51</sup> Prince, *Destined to Reign*, 49–60.

<sup>52</sup> Kevin Conner's book, *The Tabernacle of Moses*, goes into this process in much greater detail. While he does have some Calvinistic leanings, the symbolic messages he covers are excellent.

<sup>53</sup> Kruger, 58–62.

<sup>54</sup> Jersak and Hardin, 191.

<sup>55</sup> According to *Barnes' Notes on the Bible*, "The word does not of necessity denote punishment, though it is often used in that sense....Here it cannot properly mean punishment—for there is no punishment where there is no guilt, and the Redeemer had done no sin; but it means that he took upon himself the sufferings which would secure the peace of those for whom he died—those which, if they could have been endured by themselves, would have effected their peace with God. The word peace means evidently their peace with God; reconciliation with their Creator." The full commentary is available at [Biblehub.com](http://Biblehub.com).

<sup>56</sup> Jersak and Hardin, 196.

<sup>57</sup> Aulen, *Christus Victor*, chapter 4, section 2.

## fifteen



# COMMON QUESTIONS ABOUT ATONEMENT

In the last chapter, we examined the basic theories of the atonement and the Old Testament types and shadows of the atonement, concluding that the *Christus Victor* view best fits the biblical picture of the atonement. In this chapter, we will address some further questions about the *Christus Victor* view of the atonement and its implications.

### WHY DID CHRIST HAVE TO SUFFER?

If Jesus was not being punished for our sins, why did He have to be so horribly beaten and die such a brutal death? Many Christians have explained this as the wrath of God being

poured out on Jesus on the cross, but as we have already seen, the wrath of God was not present at the cross, and Jesus was not being punished. Further, none of the Old Testament types of the atonement (Isaac, the Passover Lamb, or the Atonement Lamb) were beaten, whipped, or mocked. None of them had a bag put over their heads while being punched repeatedly and called names. None of them had their hair pulled out or wore crowns of thorns. None of them were killed with a slow and excruciating form of torture. Instead, the lambs were killed very quickly and humanely by a simple slit of the throat. This lack of consistency between the types and the fulfillment should cause us to ask some questions.

To find the answers to these questions, we must first consider this reality: If Jesus had died in the same way the sheep had, we would still be forgiven. According to the types, it was the death of the lamb and the shed blood that caused the forgiveness of sins. In other words, He did not have to be beaten to achieve forgiveness for us. He could have simply had His throat slit, and He would have fulfilled the types and shadows perfectly, resulting in the forgiveness of sin. In this way, Jesus did not quite fit the types and shadows perfectly. He added something more to the picture. The horrible torture He endured was for the purpose of purchasing what we might call, in modern terms, our “benefits package.” In other words, He was purchasing all the benefits of the new covenant; He did not only get us permanent forgiveness but also other wonderful realities, like healing. This is why Isaiah 53:5 says that *“by his wounds we are healed.”*

The old covenant system of atonement simply guaranteed

forgiveness of sins. It did not include healing, though God did sometimes heal people because of His nature as Jehovah Rapha, the Lord our Healer. Healing was an additional blessing people could have through faithfulness to God. Yet in the new covenant, God decided to do it differently, and He placed healing *within* the covenant agreement, so now healing is as much a part of our covenant “package” as forgiveness.

In Isaiah 53 it says He carried our shame, grief, and sorrows. Hebrews 2:9–10 says Jesus suffered in order to bring “*many sons and daughters to glory*.” Here we see an exchange taking place. He took our shame and gave us glory. In John 17, Jesus prayed His disciples would be glorified even as the Father had glorified Him. In the new covenant, Jesus took away our shame and gave us His glory. He also tasted death in order to give us life, and He became cursed in order to release blessing (see Gal. 3; Eph. 1:3). While under the old covenant system people were either blessed or cursed based on their performance, in the new covenant system we are blessed before we do anything because of what Christ did for us. We cannot be cursed by God under the new covenant, because there is no curse; there is only forgiveness. This is a significant difference. So many Christians have mixed these two covenants together, thinking they are new covenant believers, yet still living performance-oriented lives. People who are performance-oriented believe they will be blessed when they do well. The new covenant reality is that we are already blessed and we do good works because we are new creations. We are able to live righteously because we are righteous. However, many people sabotage this reality in their lives because they are still trying to live in the performance-based

old covenant, and they do not understand the glorious truth of the new creation.

The truth is, from the moment we accept Jesus' gift of the new covenant, we *are* new creations. This is a present reality. Now, as new creations, we get to learn how to walk in our new reality. That is our growth process. From day one we are new creations who have His holiness and are blameless, righteous, sanctified, justified, and glorified. But on day one, we have no idea how to walk those realities out. That is the process! We are learning to walk out who and what we are. This is what Philippians 3:16 means: *"That we may live up to all that which we have attained."*

In Second Corinthians 8:9, we see that in His suffering Jesus made an exchange on our behalf: *"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor; so that you through his poverty might become rich."* Part of the new covenant package is that Jesus lowered Himself in order to make an *exchange*. He provided healing in exchange for sickness, prosperity for poverty, blessing for cursing, and joy for grief and sorrow. He bound up the broken-hearted and set the captives free. All these exchanges can take place because He entered into those places of suffering and shame. Instead of substitution, we see an exchange. The incarnation meant Jesus entered into *all* of human experience. Through that incarnation, He made these exchanges. This was the purpose of Jesus' suffering at the cross.

When we do not experience this exchange in our lives, it is

because we are believing lies. Any experience that is less than what the covenant declares is ours is not from God. Jesus carried shame so we would not. He carried sickness so we would not. Actually, it is wrong for us to carry something He carried for us. In the new covenant, being a good and faithful covenant partner means receiving all He gave us and giving Him all He came to take. We get to give Him our shame, sickness, sorrow, and so forth, and in exchange, we receive from Him the benefits of the covenant.<sup>58</sup>

## WHYDID JESUS COME BACK TO LIFE?

As we discussed in Chapter 12, regarding the Davidic covenant, the purpose for Jesus' resurrection was to introduce the new creation. Because of His death, we would be forgiven, even if He had not resurrected. However, we would not be a new creation. This is why Jesus is called the "first fruits" of righteousness; through His resurrection, He gave us a new nature that enables us to live righteously. When Jesus died on the cross, He released forgiveness for who we were as old creations. When He came out of the grave, He made us into something completely new. If He had not done so, we would still be trapped in our old sinful nature. Thankfully, through His resurrection, Jesus has made us partakers of the divine nature (see 2 Pet. 1:4).

Through His resurrection, He also cleansed our consciences. Under the old covenant system, even though the people's sins were forgiven on the day of atonement, their consciences continued to be guilty, and the offering served as

a reminder of sin (see Heb. 10:1–4). By contrast, under the new covenant, our consciences are actually cleansed, and we are released into freedom.

## HOW CAN A GOD WHO FORGIVES SIN BE RIGHTEOUS?

If God forgave sin (instead of punishing it), how can He still be righteous? For many people, the idea of forgiveness seems to contradict God's identity as a righteous God. It does not seem like justice happened. The first step to understanding how this can be true is to understand that God did not simply decide to forgive people; He actually created a new covenant of forgiveness. This covenant was necessary so that forgiveness of sin would not violate God's identity as a just and righteous God. Some people view forgiveness as a sort of magic wand, but God's new covenant forgiveness is also coupled with the new creation, which exchanges our sinful humanity for the divine nature. Thus, it is not just forgiveness but empowerment for righteousness. He created a new system that enabled Him to both forgive and to recreate. This new covenant was necessary for permanent forgiveness to be possible.

What this means is that by forgiving God was not overlooking or disobeying the Law, because He created a new law in the new covenant that allowed for forgiveness. What makes any ruler or judge righteous in any land is a commitment to following the law of that land. That is exactly what God has done in the new covenant. He forgave sin by changing the law and establishing a new covenant. Hebrews 7:12 says, "*For*

*when the priesthood is changed, the law must be changed also.*" The old Law has changed, and the law we are under is the new covenant of forgiveness. This means, for God to be a righteous judge, He *must* forgive. If He tried to apply the old covenant to us, *He would be unrighteous*, because we are not under the old covenant Law. God lives inside the covenant He establishes, and He will be faithful to it, because He is righteous and always operates within the covenant He is in. Operating in the new covenant He has with us looks like forgiveness, blessing, prosperity, health, and glory.

## WHYDID GOD CALLFOR ANIMALSACRIFICE?

When we are looking at the atonement in the big picture, including the Old Testament types and shadows, some people wonder why God instituted animal sacrifice. This question primarily springs from the idea behind the word *propitiation*, which is used four times in the New Testament, depending on the translation (see Rom. 3:25; Heb. 2:17; 1 John 2:2; 4:10). The Greek word often translated as propitiation is *hilasmos*.<sup>59</sup> In the first century, the common understanding of this word was bringing a gift to an angry king or god to placate or appease him. This, obviously, fits well with the Calvinist understanding and has contributed greatly to our misunderstanding of the atonement and the nature of God. In the pagan cultures of the first century (and earlier history), people would bring grain, animal, or even child sacrifices to their particular god to appease his or her anger. This was *not* the concept attached to Old Testament animal sacrifice, yet when the Old Testament was translated into Greek, this word *hilasmos* was the only



word available to express the Hebrew concept of atonement, even though the cultural connotation of the word was very different. So, when the seventy scholars translated the Septuagint LXX, they used the best word they could find, but because they were translating into a language based on pagan culture, the word did not accurately express the Hebrew meaning. It does not accurately describe the shadow of atonement in the Old Testament or the reality at the cross.

Appeasement has never been part of the biblical concept of atonement, not even in the old covenant animal sacrifices. Through the animal sacrifices, the Israelites were not attempting to “pay off” God and abate His anger and judgment for another year. The idea that a goat or bull would be sufficient payment for human sin is almost comical. Clearly, such sacrifices did not in any way repay the Israelites’ debt of sin. Instead, the concept behind animal sacrifice was a covenant meal.

To the modern reader, the presence of so much blood and sacrifice in the Old Testament can make God seem like a blood-thirsty God. After all, we live in a very sterilized culture where most of us never kill the meat we eat or even see it in a form that resembles an animal. We are very disconnected from that, but it was a very immediate and normal part of life for the Israelites (as it is in some places today). The ancient world was agricultural. Their existence revolved around growing plants and raising livestock. Thus, when a guest visited, the proper way to greatly honor that guest would be to take the best of the livestock—a lamb, goat, or sheep, for example—and slaughter it for a meal. This sacrificing of an animal honored the

guest and facilitated relationship between the two parties.

This was the context in which God asked the Israelites to sacrifice animals. These covenant sacrifices were not about appeasing an angry God who needed blood. Instead, it was their way of honoring God and renewing the covenant relationship between them. It was like God said to them, "I am your covenant partner. You are the other partner in this relationship. When we get together on the Day of Atonement, we need to have a covenant meal together. So, you are going to kill an animal and put the blood over the ark of the covenant, because inside the ark are the stone tablets that bring death. The blood sprinkled there will represent a renewal of our relationship and our covenant meal together, and as a result, I will forgive your sins over the past year." As we discussed previously, God could forgive their sins based on the faith manifested in killing the lamb on the day of atonement. This faith reached forward toward the messiah, who would come to circumcise their hearts. Even under the old covenant system, they were saved by faith. They were not saved because the lamb's blood was special but because by shedding the lamb's blood they showed they believed God was their covenant partner who would forgive them. Through the sacrifice, they were coming together to restore and renew the relationship even though the people had been wandering all year long. In the same way, God did not institute the feasts to perpetuate bloodshed but to enable relationship with His people.

WHAT ABOUT THE SCAPEGOAT?

The day of atonement, which was a type and shadow of the atonement fulfilled in Christ, involved two lambs. One, as we have already discussed, was killed, and its blood was sprinkled on the ark of the covenant. The other, the scapegoat, was released to carry away the sins of the people into the wilderness, where it was assumed it would be devoured by wild beasts. Literally, the original word means “the goat of departure.”<sup>60</sup> The Israelites would put the blood (symbolic of the sin) on the head of that lamb, and the lamb would carry it away. The first lamb was a type of Christ. However, scholars debate where the second lamb fits in the picture. How was the type of the scapegoat fulfilled in the new covenant? A lot of people have tried to say Jesus is both lambs, but that interpretation does not fit the biblical picture. At no place in the New Testament does it refer to Jesus as the scapegoat. This is a theological problem scholars continue to wrestle with.

However, we can find a clue to an answer by taking a closer look at the idea of *wrath*. On the timeline below, Genesis 1 is the beginning of time. Exodus 22, where the wrath of God is first mentioned, is a little farther along on the timeline. The cross is located near the end of the timeline in AD 30, followed by the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70.



As mentioned previously, God doesn't express what makes Him wrathful until Exodus 22, with the institution of the Mosaic covenant. As Paul said, in Romans 4:15, "*The law brings wrath.*" From Exodus 22 to the cross in AD 30, the wrath of God continued. As we know, the wrath of God was not poured out on Jesus at the cross. The cross established a new reality, an Option 2, which is forgiveness. The new covenant is Option 2.



However, because the wrath of God was not poured out at the cross, the old covenant continued for a little while longer. The cross established a new covenant, but the old covenant continued until AD Hebrews 8:13 refers to this: "*By calling this covenant 'new,' he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and outdated will soon disappear.*" In other words, when Jesus established the new covenant on the cross, He made the old covenant obsolete, but it had not yet disappeared. At the time of the writing of Hebrews, the old covenant still existed, but God had no interaction with it and was not honoring it as a real covenant any longer. Those who chose to remain under the old covenant were no longer His covenant people, and He had given them over to destruction,

which was coming in AD 70.

This is why the New Testament contains so many mentions of the wrath of God after the cross. The writers were referring to the “wrath to come”—the end of the old covenant system in the destruction of Jerusalem, when all the priests were killed and the genealogical records of the priestly lineage were burned. The Jews could never reestablish the priesthood without the genealogical records, which meant they could *never* set the system back up. The temple was torn down stone by stone, and the religious system of the Jews was outlawed, so they could no longer offer animal sacrifices in the Roman Empire. Not only that, but in the utter destruction of Jerusalem, over 1.1 million Jews were killed. This was a *massive* turning point in covenantal history, but it happened just outside of the time period when Scripture was being written. So Scripture does not cover AD 70 (except prophetically), because it was written before AD 70. All the New Testament references to the coming wrath speak of this coming destruction of Jerusalem and the old covenant.

In Matthew 23, when Jesus prophesied the coming destruction of Jerusalem, He made a very interesting statement:

*And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berekiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. Truly I tell you, all this will come on this generation (Matthew 23:35–36).*

Here, Jesus was declaring the blood of the sins of past generations would be placed on this one generation. Not long after, when Jesus was on trial, Pilate realized his attempts to save Jesus from the Jews' demands for crucifixion were futile. He washed His hands of it, declaring, *"I am innocent of this man's blood.... It is your responsibility"* (Matt. 27:24). In response, all the Jews answered, *"His blood is on us and on our children!"* (Matt. 27:25). From these verses it seems very likely that Jerusalem, in the first century, was the scapegoat, the goat of departure upon whom the sins were placed. Jesus, as the first lamb, created a new covenant in AD 30, and Jerusalem was the second lamb, who departed into the wilderness (apart from the new covenant with God) and was eventually killed by the beast (Rome) in AD 70. This is a striking parallel to the picture in Revelation 17 of the harlot who has blasphemy written on her, is in the wilderness, and is eventually killed by the beast.

In this way, it seems the blood of Jesus, as well as the blood of the old covenant rule and Law, was placed on the head of the old covenant people. In AD 70, when God destroyed and removed the old covenant, He was not acting in anger toward individuals, but those who clung to the sinking ship of the old covenant went down with it. Some people respond to this idea by asking how a loving God could do such a thing. The simple answer is, He did not want to but was obligated to by the old covenant system. He was obligated until it was finally removed (see Deut. 32; Rev. 15:3). The judgment song of Moses had to be fulfilled. Thus, everything from the old covenant fell on one generation. God was not taking vengeance on those who killed Jesus, in a vindictive

way, but destroying the old covenant. He called the Jews to embrace His new covenant and waited forty years (from Jesus' death to the destruction of Jerusalem) because He *"is patient...not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance"* (2 Pet. 3:9). Jesus had prophesied that the destruction would come upon *"this generation"* (Matt. 23:36), which in biblical terminology meant forty years. Thus, while God could have brought destruction at any point in those forty years, He chose to wait until the last moment so that more of the Jews could be saved and avoid the destruction. Only at the very end of the generation did He finally destroy the old covenant world and system, as well as those who continued to cling to it.

Assuming that the Book of Revelation was written before the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70,<sup>61</sup> we can see in Revelation 15:1 how all of this relates to God's wrath: *"I saw in heaven another great and marvelous sign: seven angels with the seven last plagues—last, because with them God's wrath is completed."* Here it clearly says God's wrath was completed, that the destruction of Jerusalem was the final outpouring of God's wrath, never to be repeated. This makes sense, because if *"the law brings wrath"* (Rom. 4:15), then it follows that when the Law was destroyed, wrath also ended. Thus, when Jerusalem and the old covenant system went out into the wilderness, as the scapegoat, and were eventually destroyed by the beast, they carried away the sins of all the past generations associated with the Law. Upon them, the wrath of God was poured out completely and finally, never to be renewed again. When the old covenant was destroyed, wrath was destroyed with it, which means no wrath is connected to

the new covenant system. So not only do we live in the covenant of forgiveness, but we live in the covenant without wrath.

## WHEN DID THE OLD COVENANT ACTUALLY END?

When we talk about the atonement from a *Christus Victor* perspective, one of the logical questions is, “When did the old covenant actually end?” We know Jesus’ death established the new covenant, but the end of the old covenant is not as clear, especially if God was not pouring out His wrath at the cross. The answer to the previous question is connected to this question as well, because as we saw, between Jesus’ death in AD 30 and the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 was a crossover period, during which time both covenants existed, though the old was breathing its dying breaths. This forty-year period is the backdrop for the writing of the New Testament and the history of the early Church recorded in it. This reality explains all the debates between believers regarding elements of the old covenant. They were trying to figure out what this switch from the old to the new covenant looked like and how it was applied practically. Thus, they debated circumcision, the authority of women, the position of gentiles, whether or not certain cleanliness and diet laws still needed to be followed, and so forth. This period of transition lasted for forty years, which is a significant biblical number often connected with a transition from something bad into something good. For example:

1. Saul was king of Israel for forty years before David



became king (see Acts 13:21). Because of Saul's rebellious heart, God rejected him as king at the beginning of the forty years. In that same year, the prophet Samuel anointed David as the future king chosen by God. Yet it took forty years from that time until David actually took the throne. This parallels what happened with the old and new covenants.

2. The Israelites had to wander in the wilderness for forty years, after which they entered into the Promised Land. During those forty years, the faithless generation had to die off so that the younger generation could enter into the promise.
3. Then in Galatians 4, Paul compared the old covenant to Hagar and Ishmael and the new covenant to Sarah and Isaac. In the story of Abraham, these two sons (symbolic of the covenants) co-existed for a period. Ishmael was thirteen when Isaac was born, and the older child mocked the younger until Sarah called for him to be sent away. In the same way, the old covenant (the Pharisees, Sanhedrin, and temple system) persecuted the new covenant until the old was destroyed. Paul drew this parallel in Galatians 4, and it is an accurate picture of the transition between the two.

Many Christians do not recognize this transitional period between the two covenants but, instead, assume there is a clean line when one stopped and the other started. Some even try to say the old covenant ended at the end of the Old Testament (with Malachi). This is clearly wrong, since Jesus

was born under the Law (see Gal. 4:4), and it was His death, not His birth, that introduced the new covenant. Another theory people have about the end of the old covenant is that it ended with John the Baptist, since Jesus referred to him as the greatest of the prophets but the least in the Kingdom. Others suggest the Mount of Transfiguration as the time when the old covenant ended, because Moses (the Law) and Elijah (the prophets) appear with Jesus. None of these ideas fit with the text of the New Testament. The Law was clearly still present. Yes, these were significant events leading toward the transition point, but they were not the actual transition.

Lastly, many other people have adopted a view of the break between the old and new covenants that some scholars call the Pauline gospel. They say, because Jesus was born under the Law (see Gal. 4:4), He operated completely under the old covenant and even His preaching and teaching were old covenant. They place the dividing line between the old and new covenant at the cross and say we only need to pay attention to what happened *after* the cross. This is why it is called the Pauline gospel, because it relies solely on the writings of Paul and the other apostles after the cross. This is a dangerous position because it excludes Christ from the gospel. Certainly, Jesus was fulfilling parts of the old covenant, as well as quoting certain parts of the old covenant to show the real meaning behind certain laws. But to say that Jesus was an old covenant preacher is to completely miss the transition of the covenants. One of the main problems with saying the dividing line is the cross is the fact that old covenant issues continued to appear after the cross. This creates a lot of dilemmas for people who think the old covenant ended with the cross,

because the New Testament is full of old covenant–type stories, like Ananias and Sapphira (see Acts 5), the death of King Herod (see Acts 12), and the Book of Revelation.

The bottom line is, no clean dividing line exists, and when people try to find one, they end up needing to overlook certain parts of the Scripture to make their theory work. That is not what we want to do. Instead of a clean dividing line, what we see in the New Testament is this forty-year crossover period, where people were learning how to walk out the new covenant. This is why the early Church faced so many theological and practical challenges; they were learning what the transition from the old to the new looked like. Thus, the New Testament records for us the process of the transition into freedom. When we understand that the old and new covenants were both in operation during the New Testament, we can begin to understand what was going on in the passages that are often so troubling.

Perhaps the most prominent troubling passage in the New Testament is the story of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5. People think, because it happened after the cross, that forgiveness should have ruled the day, not judgment. However, since we know both covenants were in operation, we know that is not necessarily true. To understand the story of Ananias and Sapphira, we need to look back to the time when James and John wanted to call down fire on Samaria (see Luke 9:54–56). In response, Jesus rebuked them, saying, “*You do not know what kind of spirit you are of*” (Luke 9:55 NASB). He did not say they were not able to do it. The disciples asked this question with Elijah in mind, remembering how he had called down fire

on several different occasions to kill soldiers who were looking for him. In other words, they were trying to apply a concept from the old covenant. This is why Jesus talked about the spirit they were of. He was referring to the spirit of the old covenant, and He was saying they were not going to operate in that spirit.

The point is, the disciples had the power to operate inside the old covenant, which explains how Peter had the power to release death over Ananias and Sapphira. In other words, Peter was acting in the wrong spirit in Acts 5. He was acting according to the old covenant of judgment, not the new covenant of forgiveness. This was not the only instance of that in Peter's life. Most notably, Peter remained a racist for years after the advent of the new covenant, as evidenced in his reluctance to preach to gentiles (see Acts 10) and Paul's rebuke in Galatians 2. Despite his racism and other old covenant mindsets, Peter had incredible authority and power, and when he saw the sin of Ananias and Sapphira, he declared death over them, and they died. The fact that he had that power does not mean his actions expressed the heart of God. Nowhere in Acts does it say Peter's actions were right or God was the one who killed them. Acts is simply the record of what happened; that does not mean everything in it was the will of God. This view on Ananias and Sapphira is becoming more and more common, and it makes even more sense when we see it in light of the transitional period between the covenants. In a very real sense, Peter was keeping a foot in both covenants. Later, Paul addressed this, and as the transition progressed, the Church learned more and more to walk fully in the new covenant.

Now, on the other side of AD 70, we should not have any old covenant mixed in with our new. During the crossover period, a lot of old covenant thinking continued that should not be an issue now. We should not replicate the mistakes of the early Church just because those mistakes are recorded in Scripture. For example, the fact that the martyrs in Revelation prayed imprecatory prayers (cursing and calling for judgment against their enemies) does not mean we should do the same. In the new covenant, we do not have the right to release judgment on people. However, during that unique crossover period between the covenants, Christians did pray for judgment against the old covenant system that was persecuting them. Now that the old covenant is gone and we are fully in the new covenant, this sort of thing is uncalled for.

All the debates regarding different elements of the old covenant ended in AD 70, because the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple forever ended old covenant Judaism. Because the Jewish religion hinged on the temple and the priesthood, the destruction of those elements meant a permanent change in Judaism. They could no longer offer sacrifices, which meant they could not fulfill the old covenant Law. Their whole world had been destroyed, and quite literally, the old covenant died, because it was impossible to keep the Law any longer. This was the beginning of rabbinic Judaism, or modern Judaism, which is centered instead on the synagogue and the rabbi.<sup>62</sup>

## WHAT PART DO WE HAVE IN JESUS' DEATH?

Many people present the gospel as, "Jesus died so you

don't have to." In other words, they present it as a substitution. But that is *completely* wrong, because when He died, *we* died with Him. Second Corinthians 5:14–15 makes this very clear:

*For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that **one died for all, and therefore all died.** And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.*

In other words, we are united with Him in His death. Instead of substitution, it is identification. When He died, we died. The passage continues:

*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be a sin offering for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:17–21).*

Through dying with Christ, we are also raised up with Him into new life as the new creation. The new has come, and the

old has gone. This is also stated very clearly in Romans 6:

*Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—because anyone who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him (Romans 6:3–8).*

Once again, it is clear Jesus did not take our place but that we died with Him, not physically but through identification. When we accept Jesus as our savior, a union happens in which we spiritually go to the grave and are resurrected with Him. As a result, we are united with Him in His resurrection life and can now live as new creations.

One of the most famous verses about this is Galatians 2:20:

*I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*

The second half of this can sound like substitution if we

skip over the first part, but it is clear from the whole verse that Jesus did not die so we would not have to; He died so we could die and be raised with Him spiritually into new life. The power Jesus has over sin and death He has given to us, because we came out of the grave with Him. Not only were we forgiven, but we also received the power of grace. As Paul said in Romans 5:17, “...*those who receive God’s abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ!*” Through identifying with His death and resurrection, we receive God’s abundant grace to live righteously. This is very different than the substitution story many churches tell, but it is what the Bible teaches. It is also how the early Church, for many centuries, understood the atonement.

Clement of Alexandria, one of the early Church fathers, described the atonement this way: “The Logos of God had become man so that you might learn from a man how a man may become God.”<sup>63</sup> Similarly, the third century theologian, Origen, wrote, “From Christ began the union of the Divine with the human nature in order that the human, by communion with the Divine, might rise and also become Divine.”<sup>64</sup> Athanasius, a significant father within the Eastern Orthodox Church, had a grasp of the incarnation and an understanding of God apart from the Platonism that muddled Augustine’s thinking. About the incarnation, he wrote, “The Word was made man so that we might be made God.”<sup>65</sup>

Quotes like these can sound scary to a lot of people. It sounds too much, perhaps, like claiming to be God. However, our participation in the divine nature is really important to our



identity as the Bride of Christ, because Christ needs to marry an equal. This, of course, does not mean we become God. The Trinity, the Godhead, is uncreated divinity, self-existing, eternal, always omnipresent and omnipotent. The Godhead is unique and will never be replicated. However, as the Bride of Christ, we become “created divinity.” God incarnated to help humans become incarnate. Thus, He does not leave us in our sin but raises us up and gives us the power to reign in life. He enables us to be seated in Christ in the heavenly places at the right hand of the Father. In this way, we can become a worthy Bride of Christ.

Peter taught about our created divinity when he wrote:

*Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them **you may participate in the divine nature**, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires (2 Peter 1:4).*

In Colossians 2:9, Paul wrote, “*For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form.*” Then, in Ephesians 3:17–19, he added that we, like Christ, may be filled with all the fullness of God:

*So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that **you may be filled to the***

***measure of all the fullness of God.***

In this way, we become partakers of the divine nature. This is the full meaning of the new creation. It is so much more than simply being able to live above sin. By revelation and knowledge of His love (a revelation that surpasses knowledge), we can be filled with the fullness of God. This is incredible. This is why Paul would rebuke the Corinthians by saying, “Stop acting like mere humans” (see 1 Cor. 3:3). Later in the same letter, he rebuked them again by saying, “*Do you not know we will judge angels?*” (1 Cor. 6:3). He was rebuking them for not understanding who they really were, for not comprehending the level to which they had been raised through the new creation. No longer were they mere humans.

Many people are fearful of this idea because of the imbalance and heresy that has at times risen around it. It is always important to clarify. *We are not God*. But He has made us partakers of His divine nature. He has implanted in us, and in the same way that Jesus is God incarnate, we are to become incarnations of God in this earth. Because of the incarnation, God lives in us. We are His temples, His presence-carriers on the earth, because we died *with* Christ and were raised *with* Him into divine life.

## **REVIEW TEST QUESTIONS**

1. True or False: All of the Bible is applicable today.  
Example: It's possible for you to have a “Job

experience.”

2. Most people who reject the gospel do so because they are being given a \_\_\_\_\_ of old and new covenant.
3. Since the wrath of God was not a part of the crucifixion and the suffering Jesus endured did not occur with the lambs in the types and shadows, why did Jesus get that horrible beating?
4. True or False: Jesus did not have to be resurrected for you to be forgiven.
5. The “benefits package” includes: Jesus takes your sickness and gives you \_\_\_\_\_; He takes your shame and gives you \_\_\_\_\_; He takes your curses and releases \_\_\_\_\_; and He became poor so that through His poverty you will become \_\_\_\_\_.
6. Although there is not substitution, there is a great e\_\_\_\_\_; the incarnation was not simply Christmas morning; it was Jesus entering into \_\_\_\_\_ we experience.
7. Covenant sacrifices are not about appeasing a blood-thirsty God but about a c\_\_\_\_\_ m\_\_\_\_\_ together and renewal of r\_\_\_\_\_. This is also why the feasts were instituted.
8. Romans 3:25; First John 2:2; First John 4:10; and Hebrews 2:17 are four references in the New Testament

where we will find what theological word for atonement?

## RELATED MATERIAL

Brad Jersak and Michael Hardin, Eds., *Stricken by God?: Nonviolent Identification and the Victory of Christ*.

<sup>58</sup> Related to this idea of exchange is an excellent book, *Stricken by God?: Nonviolent Identification and the Victory of Christ*, edited by Brad Jersak and Michael Hardin. It is a compilation of writings from many incredible scholars who challenge and tear apart substitution, Penal Substitution, and related concepts.

<sup>59</sup> *Strong's Concordance*, Greek #2434, 2435.

<sup>60</sup> *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance*, Hebrew #5799.

<sup>61</sup> For a more thorough explanation of this, see Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*.

<sup>62</sup> The book, *History of the Jewish Nation: After the Destruction of Jerusalem Under Titus*, by Alfred Edersheim, is a very insightful look at the changes that took place as a result of AD 70 and the decisive end of the old covenant.

<sup>63</sup> Jersak and Hardin, *Stricken by God?*, 49.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.



## PART THREE

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# BETTER COVENANT THEOLOGY



sixteen



## **ANNOUNCING BETTER COVENANT THEOLOGY**

Now that we have looked at the transition from the old covenant to the new covenant and how it affects the way we believe, we need to consider the implications of this new covenant-based belief system. Because so much of the Church continues to try to live in both the old and the new covenants, living and thinking purely according to the new covenant is a significant change from the norm.

THE NEW COVENANT CANON

The first thing to consider is the role of the New Testament. As we discussed in the last chapter, the forty years between Jesus' death and the destruction of Jerusalem were a crossover period during which both covenants continued to exist. Recalling the five-covenant approach we discussed earlier in this book, in which each covenant is surrounded by a canon, we can see that the entire New Testament, written in that forty-year crossover period, is the canon of the new covenant. It tells the history leading up to the establishment of the covenant and records the way the first recipients of the covenant (the New Testament believers) learned to walk out their new relationship with God. It also prophesied the coming end of the old covenant, but it does not include the record of that end, which happened after the entire New Testament canon was written.

The New Testament is the canon of the new covenant. As the canon of the new covenant, it contains what we need to know about the covenant it surrounds. Through it, we should be able to accurately understand what the new covenant is about and how to live in it. Thus, the New Testament is the foundation of an accurate theology based on the new covenant.

## THE PROBLEM WITH EXISTING THEOLOGIES

Of course, as mentioned in Chapter 5, several theological filters inform the way that many read and understand the New Testament. The three we examined are: dispensational theology, covenant theology, and new covenant theology.

Without repeating all that was mentioned in Chapter 5, we will give a brief review here.

# 1. Dispensational Theology

Dispensationalists divide up the Bible in this way. They see the Old Testament, from Moses until Jesus, as the Age of Law. Likewise, from the cross until now and into our immediate future is the Age of Grace. As a result, they end up with a great debate between Law and grace. However, as we discussed in Chapter 13, the debate in Scripture is between Law and faith.

# 2. Covenant Theology

Covenant theology de-emphasizes the difference between the old and new covenants. It tries to link them together in such a way that the new covenant is a “renewed” covenant rather than a brand new covenant. That is the fatal flaw of covenant theology, because the New Testament makes it clear that the new covenant is *not like the old* (see Heb. 8:9).

One of the most significant movements that has risen out of covenant theology is the **Messianic Movement**. It is dependent upon covenant theology, because covenant theology says there is no disconnect between the old covenant and the new. This is important, because once people see the disconnect between the two, they cannot go back to



the old and drag parts of the old covenant into the new—for example, reinstating Jewish feasts and holidays, the Sabbath, and various rules from the old covenant. Messianic believers will say, “That’s part of us, too.” But the New Testament makes it clear that a huge chasm exists between the two covenants. In this way, covenant theology keeps people living in both the law of the spirit and life *and* the law of death. They will live with a foot in each covenant, half alive.

Another movement based on covenant theology is called **Theonomy**, or Theonomics. The concept is that we, as God’s new covenant people, need to set up the kingdom of God on the earth in exactly the same way Moses set up the Law in the civil government of Israel. In other words, theonomics advocates for a new covenant civil law for our world, in which we implement all the laws of Deuteronomy into our modern society. Without covenant theology, Theonomics can be set aside, because we realize the old covenant did not come out of God’s heart. It would misrepresent Him to try to bring back the old covenant Law in modern government, because that covenant actually veiled who He really is.

Covenant theology has also divided the old covenant Law into three parts: civil, ceremonial, and moral, saying the first two are no longer applicable, but the moral law is. This, however, was not how the old covenant worked. No one divided the Law like this, because the understanding was that if a person broke one part of the Law that person had broken all of the Law. No one in the old covenant divided it. Scripture makes it very clear that we cannot pick and choose from the Law; either we keep it all or we throw it all away. This is one of

the major flaws of covenant theology, yet it has infiltrated much of the thinking of the Church. This is why many people think they should not get a tattoo (or do any other number of things) based on the Law in Deuteronomy.

### 3. New Covenant Theology

New covenant theology says Jesus essentially came as a new Moses; Jesus is the new lawgiver. As a result, new covenant theologians have scoured the letters of the New Testament looking for all of the rules of the new covenant. Instead of finding a mere 613 laws, as in the old covenant, they have identified 1,050 new covenant rules. Here again, the problem is that they miss the fact that the new covenant is nothing like the old covenant (see Heb. 8:9). It is not a law-based covenant but something entirely different.

These are the three major theological views of the Bible, yet each has major flaws when held up against the Bible. Thus, in the next section, we will introduce something we have been hinting at throughout the book—a simple view called **Better Covenant Theology**.

#### THE PILLARS OF BETTER COVENANT THEOLOGY

The name for this belief system is based on Hebrews 8:6, which says, *“But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as He is also the mediator of a better*

*covenant, which has been enacted on better promises.*” Following are the ten pillars or essential points of Better Covenant Theology. The reasoning behind most of these has already been explained in previous chapters; the explanation for numbers eight and ten will come in the following chapters. For the purpose of defining this theological system, here they are together in a comprehensive list that shows the underpinnings of Better Covenant Theology.

1. Jesus’ birth fulfilled the Abrahamic Covenant.
2. Jesus’ death created the new covenant.
3. The new covenant is between the Father and the Son.
4. Jesus’ ascension and enthronement in heaven fulfill the Davidic kingdom promises.
5. The destruction of AD 70 removed the old covenant permanently and fulfilled Hebrews 8:13.
6. Between the cross and AD 70 existed a forty-year covenant transition for the Church.
7. During the transition period, the old covenant and the new covenant co-existed.
8. The *end of the age* and the *last days* were first century references to the last days of the old covenant and the end of the old covenant age.
9. No application of the Mosaic kinship/vassal covenants

remains; the feasts, Sabbaths, civil laws, ceremonial laws, and moral laws are done away with.

10. The law of the new covenant is: “Love one another as I have loved you.”

These ten are the defining characteristics of Better Covenant Theology. This is the big picture; if we understand this, it starts to make the whole Bible make sense. We see the timeline, the transitions, and why it seems like God looks different at certain times in history. This belief system is the culmination of all we have been studying in this book.

## THE LAW OF LOVE

The culmination of these beliefs is point ten, the new testament law of love, based on Jesus’ statement to His disciples, “*A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another*” (John 13:34). To get a proper understanding of this command to love, we need to first understand two groups who existed during the first century—the **Judaizers** and the **Antinomians**. Judaizers were the first century covenant theologians; they wanted to drag the old covenant into the new covenant. Paul wrote the entire Book of Galatians in response to the error of the Judaizers, and he battled their false teaching everywhere he went. The polar opposite to the Judaizers were the Antinomians, who said there is no law. *Anti* means “against,” and *nomian* means “law.” They were literally against any laws. They believed grace meant that they could sin as much as they wanted. Paul wrote against this view in Romans.

The position of Better Covenant Theology is neither of these, and it is not a middle ground, either. It is something else entirely, because the law of Christ does not fit with either of these ideas. It is not the old covenant Law, and it is not a rejection of law. It is a completely separate ideal called the law of Christ. When we say the law of Christ is love, that is an accurate summary, but it is just a summary. People can hear that and end up with a lot of different interpretations, some of which can lead to very immoral decisions. The question at the bottom of all of this is, Who defines what *love* is? In other words, the law of love can seem very subjective.

For that reason, here we will clarify what the new covenant law of love looks like according to the New Testament. To start, we will look at what is typically called the great commandment. In Matthew 22, a lawyer approached Jesus and asked Him, *“Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?”* (Matt. 22:36). In other words, he was asking Jesus to tell him the greatest commandment in the old covenant. Jesus responded:

*“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets (Matthew 22:37–40).*

Here, it is important to note that Jesus did not say, “This is My rule for you.” He simply summarized the old covenant in two commandments, which we see by His statement, *“On these*

*two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.”*  
It is a summary of the old, not a new covenant commandment.

Once we understand that, we can look at John 13:34–35, where Jesus said to His disciples:

*A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.*

His command was not “love your neighbor as yourself” but “love others as I love you.” In other words, He was telling them to love others in the same way that He loves them. Jesus loves all people equally, perfectly, and unconditionally. This is the standard, the new command we are to follow. If we search the word *command* in the *Strong’s Concordance*, what we will find is that this command is the only command Jesus gave. For example, later in John He said, “*My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you*” (John 15:12), and, “*This is my command: Love each other*” (John 15:17).

When Jesus gave His disciples what we now call the Great Commission, He told them to teach new disciples “*to obey everything I have commanded you*” (Matt. 28:20). The disciples were not told to “teach them everything I ever did or said,” but to “teach them to obey everything I have commanded.” The only thing commanded was to love as Christ had loved them!

We see another mention of Jesus’ command to love in

John's second letter, where he wrote:

*And now, dear lady, I am not writing you a new command but one we have had from the beginning. I ask that we love one another. And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands. As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love (2 John 1:5–6).*

Likewise, in First John 3:23, it says, *“And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us.”* Just prior to this, in verse 16, John gave a definition of love: *“This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters”* (1 John 3:16). In other words, Jesus is the definition of love; we are commanded to love like He loves. This, in fact, is the proof John gives of our salvation: *“We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love each other. Anyone who does not love remains in death”* (John 3:14). We are truly Christians if we love like Jesus loved. Jesus made the same statement when He said, *“By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another”* (John 13:35). Living in Christ-like love is the evidence of our faith. Because we have been united with Him, love flows out of us in the same way it flowed out of Him.

Paul also affirmed this in First Timothy 1:5: *“The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.”* Later in the same letter, Paul continued this reasoning by saying:

*But you, man of God, flee from all this, and **pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness.** Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses. In the sight of God, who gives life to everything, and of Christ Jesus, who while testifying before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, **I charge you to keep this command without spot or blame until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ,** which God will bring about in his own time—God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever. Amen (1 Timothy 6:11–16).*

The command Paul was referring to, as laid out in verse 11, is an expanded version of the law of love: “*pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness.*” It is essentially the same as Jesus’ command to love, which is what we find over and over in the New Testament. The command always goes back to love.

Paul made a contrast in First Corinthians 7 between the old commands and the new that illustrates this so well. In talking to the Church about circumcision, he said:

*This is the rule I lay down in all the churches. Was a man already circumcised when he was called? He should not become uncircumcised. Was a man*



*uncircumcised when he was called? He should not be circumcised. Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. Keeping God's commands is what counts (1 Corinthians 7:17–19).*

His mention of circumcision is a reference to the old covenant Law, where the covenant sign was circumcision. The new covenant sign is *“By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another”* (John 13:35). Living in Christ-like love is the sign we are in Christ, walking in the new covenant. Paul's point was that the old Law no longer matters; what matters is keeping the new covenant commands of God (the law of Christ). Paul specifically mentioned this law when he said, *“Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ”* (Gal. 6:2). We fulfill the law of Christ by loving others. Here, Paul gave a specific application of that kind of love—carrying each other's burdens.

Paul also mentioned the law of Christ in First Corinthians 9:21, where he said, *“To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law.”* Paul was saying that when he was around gentiles (people without the Law), he became like them, not because he did not have a law but because his law was the law of Christ, which includes freedom to minister to gentiles in a way they can relate to. He was free of the Law (the old covenant) but not free of all law, because he was under the law of Christ—the law of love.

In the biblical passages about the new covenant

commands, sometimes it uses the word in the singular and sometimes in the plural. The reason for this is that the basic command, to *love like Jesus*, is fleshed out in many periphery commands that all fall under the great command of love, which is the law of Christ. So, throughout the New Testament, Paul and the other apostles fleshed out what the command of Christ looked like by adding more specific commands that give practical legs to the law of love.

For example, Paul wrote, *“In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel”* (1 Cor. 9:14). In doing so, he was showing that one way in which we fulfill the law of love is by financially caring for those whom the Lord has given as gifts to the body to equip and serve. In other words, giving money to support ministers of the gospel is part of the law of love. Likewise, gender equality is part of the law of love, as evidenced by Paul’s rebuke of the Corinthians for their treatment of women as “lesser.” He closed his argument by saying, *“If anyone thinks they are a prophet or otherwise gifted by the Spirit, let them acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord’s command”* (1 Cor. 14:37). By using the word *command* here, Paul was equating gender equality with the law of love. Another example is race equality, which Paul laid out in Ephesians 2:14–16:

*For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself **one new humanity** out of the two, thus*

*making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.*

Some people teach that this is still in the future, but the passage clearly says Jesus has already done it. He has already created the one new humanity and, thereby, outlawed racism with the law of love. Where the old covenant Law brought division between racial groups and genders, the new law of Christ brings equality. It means we get to love everyone equally.

The law of Christ is the broad law of love, which has many different manifestations. Another way we could say it is that the law of Christ is the law of the Spirit and the law of freedom. Paul showed us the connection of the new covenant to the Spirit when he wrote: *“He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life”* (2 Cor. 3:6). The actual nature of the new law is that it is Spirit; it is not written in letter and in stone. It gives life, not death. Similarly, in Romans 7:6 it says, *“But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code.”* In other words, the law of the Spirit is not a written code of rules. In Galatians 6:15, Paul also said, *“Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is the new creation.”* In the new covenant and the new creation, we are not guided by a list of rules but by the nature of Christ living within us and the law of love. Paul sometimes referred to this lifestyle as living by the Spirit: *“Since we live by the Spirit, let*

*us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other*" (Gal. 5:25–26). Instead of living according to a list of rules, we live by walking in step with the Spirit. This is why, *"If you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law"* (Gal. 5:18). When we are led by the Spirit, we are following the law of Christ, which is summed up in what Peter referred to as *"the sacred command"* (2 Pet. 2:21)—the command to love as Christ loves. This is the core of the new covenant, which is the covenant of life and forgiveness, not death and judgment.

One question people often ask, when shown the new covenant reality of the law of love and forgiveness, is: What happens when we sin? Clearly, though we are not under the old covenant Law, we are under the law of Christ, which still commands us to live in a certain way (to love as He loves). Since God has already permanently forgiven us at the cross, what is the ramification of sinful choices in our lives? The wrath of God no longer exists, which means we do not make Him angry. We are pre-forgiven and eternally loved, meaning that He will always forgive anything we may do. However, when we sin, *we can still grieve the Holy Spirit*, which Paul discussed in Ephesians 4. When we chose to sin, we are not living up to our identity as new creations in Christ, and we are not loving others as we should. This grieves the Holy Spirit, because He knows our potential, and He is hurt when His children hurt one another. It is not an issue of His forgiveness or love being removed; it is an issue of walking in the light and living in our identity. Part of staying in step with the Holy Spirit is walking in vulnerability and transparency, living with an open heart. When we do this, we will be less and less likely to

grieve the Holy Spirit with our actions and attitudes.

## THE FIVE REALMS

Now that we have established exactly what Better Covenant Theology is, we will spend the remainder of this chapter looking at how this revelation is going to transform the Church into a more mature Bride of Christ. To do so, we will consider reality from the perspective of five realms. Every person on earth lives in one of these five realms, and inside each of these realms is a progression, because people are designed to move from one to the next through their lives.

# **1. The World Realm**

This is the starting point. Those who live in the world are not believers. They do not know or walk with the Lord.

# **2. The Church Realm**

When people become believers in Jesus, they enter the Church realm. In the Church realm they learn fellowship, communion, baptism, and the basics of the gospel message. Some people live their whole lives in the Church realm, with a very basic understanding of the gospel.

### **3. The Supernatural Realm**

Other people in the Church realm begin to realize there must be something more, and they transition into the supernatural realm. Perhaps they start watching Sid Roth, Patricia King, iBethel.tv, or any other well-known charismatic ministry, and they connect with something supernatural that stirs a hunger in them. They realize, “I can’t just sit in church; there has to be something more.” As a result, they go after the supernatural realm. I have noticed that typically the period of transition needed from the Church realm into the supernatural realm works like this. For every ten years a person has spent in the Church realm, that person will need one to two years of adjustment to the supernatural realm. Eventually, after the transitional period, the supernatural becomes part of normal life, part of church life. Thus, people add the supernatural to their church experience.

### **4. The Kingdom Realm**

Once people have fully acclimated to the supernatural realm, they are designed to move into another realm called the Kingdom realm. This is what happens when people start to say, “We are healing people in the church, but I want to see my city transformed. I want to see my neighborhood, family, business, local government, and all of those things transformed.” That is moving beyond just the supernatural to think about expanding

the Kingdom. Lance Wallnau's seven mountains concept connects with this realm, as well as the teachings coming out of Bethel Church in Redding, California.<sup>66</sup> In the Kingdom realm, people are thinking, *This is about more than just my local group or church healing people at the front on a Sunday morning. We need to reach our neighborhood. We need to be involved in the larger picture.* So, the Kingdom realm is larger than the supernatural realm, and the supernatural realm is larger than the Church realm. Each realm expands a person's experience and perspective as the person progresses.

## 5. The New Covenant Realm

Finally, we have the new covenant realm, *which is the current reformation in the Church.* Over the last half century, the Church has come to a healthier and more biblical view of Kingdom expansion and what it means to bring heaven to earth. This is very important. But the new covenant realm is another step in the direction we are headed. Part of what people miss if they do not live in the new covenant realm is knowing the heart of God the Father toward them. One of the most obvious evidences is the way people who live in any of the previous three realms tend to respond to tragedy or natural disaster. When a terrible event happens, these people do not know whether it was caused by God, the devil, or human sin. They ask, "Was it judgment, wrath, or something else?" The reason they do not understand this is because they do not understand that God acts in accordance with the covenant He is in. Because they do not understand the progression of the

covenants, they do not know how to differentiate between the way God acted within the old covenant versus the new.

This is why people make foolish statements like, “God works in mysterious ways.” That is not true. He does not work in mysterious ways, and He is not mysterious. In fact, when the New Testament talks about mystery, it is speaking of the mystery of unveiling Christ, which is now no longer a mystery, since it has been unveiled. What was once mysterious is now revealed to us in the new covenant:

*As it is written: “What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived”—the things God has prepared for those who love him—these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:9–10).*

The first part of this passage is a quotation from Isaiah 64:4, from the old covenant. Paul was telling us that now what was hidden has been revealed by the Spirit. God is not hiding it from us anymore. Because God *always* acts in accordance with the covenant He is in, we can know what He will do. And we can also know what He will *not* do! That is our new covenant relationship with God. If we know we have this type of relationship with Him, then we will know our hearts, and we will know His heart. Then, when something tragic happens, we can know His heart and position on the event, because we are connected with His heart. All of those questions are answered by understanding the covenant we are in.

Conversely, a lack of understanding of the previous



covenants can veil who God is. If we do not understand the old covenant, it becomes a veil that inhibits us from see His heart and knowing what He is like. Instead, we look at the old Mosaic covenant and live in fear of that covenant even though we are not under that covenant. The important fact people miss, which we have mentioned before, is that the old covenant did not come out of God's heart; it came because the people called for it. The people called for it, and God accommodated them, even though the covenant they asked for was horrible. The old covenant was always a temporary covenant, and God promised from the very beginning to destroy and replace it with the circumcision of the heart, which is the new covenant. Thus, the new covenant realm helps us understand how the King feels about us. So many Christians are trying to advance the Kingdom, but they don't even know the heart of the King toward them.

These five realms are important to understand when we are communicating with others so we can determine which realm they are in. Those who are in the Kingdom realm are the easiest for the new covenant realm to connect with and understand. Their position is closest, and they will often understand and embrace the progression quickly—certainly much faster than someone in the Church realm. As we begin to communicate with others all we have learned about the new covenant, it is important to first understand where they are at. If we can get this framework into our thinking, it will help us know how to best communicate with each individual.

Of all the higher realms, the new covenant realm can probably communicate best with the world realm. In Acts, the

gospel is presented as the gospel of the new covenant. For example, the word *minister* appears seven times in the New Testament in connection with the gospel. In six of the places, it says “minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ.” That is both very straightforward and incredibly vague. Second Corinthians 3:6 says, “*The Holy Spirit has made us competent as ministers of the New Covenant.*” This begs the question, “What is the gospel we preach?” What message are we ministers of? The gospel we preach is the gospel of the Kingdom. And as we learned previously, the gospel of the Kingdom is the fulfillment of the promises to David of a kingdom, of a throne. So the new covenant *is* the gospel of the Kingdom. They are synonymous. The gospel of the new covenant is also the gospel of the faith of Abraham, which is fulfilled in the seed, Jesus. The new covenant fulfills both the kingdom of David and the seed of Abraham. In other words, the new covenant *is* the gospel we present to people.

However, through the years, the Church has lost sight of the message of the new covenant and presented the entire Bible as the Word and will of God. This is how people start to believe everything in the Bible is applicable to everyone. That is not true, because some of what is in the Bible is under the old covenant, in which no one currently lives. We can read and learn from these passages, but they are not applicable to us in the way they were to their original audience. As Paul said, “*These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the culmination of the ages has come*” (1 Cor. 10:11). So we can learn from their examples, but we do not apply the Law or the old covenant situation to our lives. Some people have tried to say the Bible is a flat book

and everything applies in the same way; it is all the will of God. This is *very far from the truth* of the new covenant presented in the New Testament. This is the reason why the new covenant realm has the potential to be best at evangelizing the world realm, because in the new covenant realm people do not mix the old and new covenants in their presentation.

Many people reject the gospel because the message they receive from the Church is a mixture of the old and new covenants, and they cannot palate it. An undiluted new covenant message causes mass acceleration of conversions and changed lives. Unfortunately, we have this mixture, which has been a problem since the early Church. In fact, Paul spent most of his ministry fighting mixture in the gospel message, particularly from the Judiazers, who were trying to drag the new covenant people back into the old covenant. All of Hebrews and Galatians and large portions of his other letters address this issue. The same issue of mixture between the old and new covenants exists today, and it has filtered into so many different areas of thinking in the Church. This is why the new covenant realm is so important. The reformation God is bringing to the Church will deal with all of this old covenant thinking and establish people's minds in new covenant thinking. It will demolish fear, end-time paranoia, legalism, gender inequality, racism, and all other areas of lack in the Church. This is where the worldwide Church is heading. This is what the Holy Spirit is doing in our day.

## REVIEW TEST QUESTIONS

1. Is throwing out the old covenant the same as throwing out the Old Testament? Yes or No.
2. Name the three covenant systems the author does not agree with.
3. Based on Hebrews 8:6, what is the name of this new theological understanding?
4. What is the law of the new covenant?
5. Name these two groups of people from the first century:
  1. those who want to drag the old covenant into the new;
  2. those who said there is no law and everything is okay, so we can sin all we want.
6. Matthew 22:34–40; John 13:34, 15:12, 15:17; Matthew 28:20b; First Timothy 1:5; and First Corinthians 7:17b–19 are all references that give us a picture of how to obey the law of Christ (per Galatians 6:2 and First Corinthians 9:21). This command says to do *what*?
7. What five realms do we need to understand?
8. As a rule of thumb, for every ten years one has spent in the Church realm, how many years does it take to acclimate to the supernatural realm?
9. True or False: God acts in mysterious ways.
10. If you look up the word *minister* in the New Testament, there are seven uses, six of which are similar. Where in

the Bible can we find the one that is different?

## KEYTERMS

Messianic Movement	Judaizers
Theonomy	Antinomians
Better Covenant Theology	

## RELATED MATERIAL

Alfred Edersheim, *History of the Jewish Nation: After the Destruction of Jerusalem Under Titus*.

<sup>66</sup> Johnson, 92–108.

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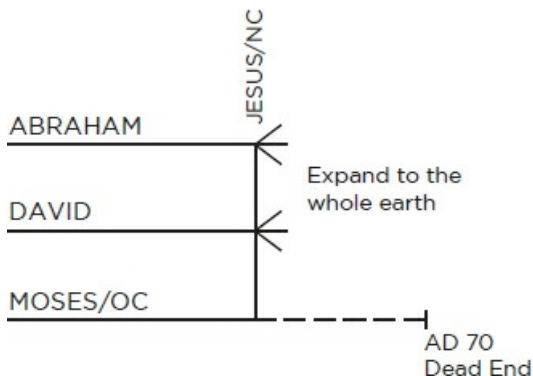


# HEBREWS: THE COVENANT TRANSITION

In this chapter, we will examine the covenant transition from the Book of Hebrews. More than any other New Testament book, Hebrews connects us to what was going on in the old covenant system and the change that took place with the installment of the new covenant system. Unfortunately, many Christians have not paid much attention to Hebrews, often because they do not understand the importance of the covenants, and much of Hebrews is, therefore, baffling to them. For many, it has ended up being as mysterious as the Book of

Revelation. However, if we understand Hebrews, we will understand Revelation. They go together very well, even though they are written very differently. We do not even know for sure who wrote Hebrews, but there is a lot of carryover in the content of the two books. One of the main topics of both is the transition period leading up to the full establishment of the new covenant and the destruction of the old covenant.

The following diagram gives us a picture of the covenant transition.



As we have discussed previously, the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants were fulfilled in Jesus and expanded to impact the whole earth. But the Mosaic covenant (also known as the old covenant) was different. Instead of continuing on

within the new covenant, the Mosaic covenant came to a crash ending. Thus, in the diagram, when the Mosaic covenant line intersects with the advent of the new covenant, it continues on a short distance and then stops. It comes to a dead end in AD 70.

## THE MAJOR THEMES

It is important to understand that the Book of Hebrews was written around AD 65, just a few years before the destruction of Jerusalem. At that time, the Christians addressed in this letter were retreating back to the old covenant. This was the background to the letter, as we see in Hebrews 6:4–8:

*It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age and who have fallen away, to be brought back to repentance. To their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace. Land that drinks in the rain often falling on it and that produces a crop useful to those for whom it is farmed receives the blessing of God. But land that produces thorns and thistles is worthless and is in danger of being cursed. In the end it will be burned.*

Many people have taken this passage out of its original context and used it in a very condemning, judgmental manner. But once we put it back in its place, it then makes sense. We



cannot apply this to ourselves, and this phrase tells us why: *“who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age....”* This is a time indicator showing the author was referring to a reality prior to the coming age, which would be fully established in AD 70. In other words, because this was written in the transition period, looking forward to the full establishment of the new covenant, it cannot be applied to us, because we do not live in that transition period between the covenants. The coming age referred to here is not heaven or the afterlife. The *age to come*, according to Jewish thinking, referred to the then common belief in two ages—the old age and the new (or coming) age. The old age was the Mosaic old covenant, and they looked ahead to a day when the new age would be established in the Messianic Kingdom. This is the age the author referred to, not the afterlife. Living in that time period, where the old covenant was still active, the author was looking forward to the coming age when the old covenant would be abolished. Thus, the author was talking about those who had put their foot across the line and tasted what it was like on the other side of AD 70 and then retreated from it.

He added to this: *“To their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace.”* When Jesus was physically crucified, it happened because the Jews rejected Him as the Messiah. Many of the people referred to in this passage would have been part of the original rejection of Jesus in AD 30. By rejecting Him again, they were re-identifying themselves with the old system that had literally killed Jesus in AD 30. In that way, they were metaphorically “re-crucifying” Jesus. Living two thousand years later, it is

impossible for us to identify again with the old system, because we do not live in that time period. However, some people have interpreted this passage to refer to every time a person sins. That is clearly not the contextual meaning here.

The main danger for the Church at that time in history, just prior to AD 70, was the temptation to retreat back and reattach to the temple system that was about to be destroyed. Because of this, the author of Hebrews focused on three main themes:

1. They were living in the last days, and the old covenant was about to pass away.
2. The atonement was about *Christus Victor*.
3. Jesus and the new covenant are better than the old covenant.

Some people who do not understand the significance of the biblical covenants argue that Hebrews is simply about interpreting types and shadows. These people try to keep one foot in the old covenant and one in the new. While it is true that Hebrews talks about the types and shadows, the larger reality is the superiority of the new covenant and Jesus. This was the author's message, with the purpose of discouraging people from turning back to the old covenant.

## AN OUTLINE OF HEBREWS

Hebrews has 13 chapters, so to get the full picture of the book, we need to consider it in outline form. First, the book can

be divided into three large sections:

1. **Hebrews 1–7: Jesus is better.**
2. **Hebrews 8–10: The new covenant is better.**
3. **Hebrews 11–13: Faith is our response.**

Now, here is a more detailed outline of the chapters within each of these three main sections:

**1. Hebrews 1–7: Jesus is better.**

- a. Hebrews 1–2: Jesus the God-man is greater than angels.
- b. Hebrews 3–4:13: Jesus the apostle is greater than Moses.
- c. Hebrews 4:14–6:12: Jesus the high priest is better than Aaron.
- d. Hebrews 6:13–7: Jesus is better than Melchizedek.

**2. Hebrews 8–10: The new covenant is better.**

- a. Hebrews 8: The new covenant is based on better promises.
- b. Hebrews 9:1–10: The new covenant has a better sanctuary.

- c. Hebrews 9:11–28: The new covenant has a better sacrifice.
- d. Hebrews 10:1–18: The new covenant has better results.

### **3. Hebrews 11–13: Faith is our response.**

- a. Hebrews 10:19–39: Faith is the natural response to the “better things” of the new covenant, and we connect with it through faith.
- b. Hebrews 11: Adam, Noah, Enoch, and many others give us examples of connecting by faith.
- c. Hebrews 12: Faith is the basis of a better relationship.
- d. Hebrews 13: Faith is a better manner of life.

With this structure in place, we can examine those sections with greater clarity regarding the big picture and what the writer of Hebrews was trying to prove. In the remainder of this chapter, we will highlight a few of the major points related to the transition in covenants.

## **CHRISTUS VICTOR**

One of the most significant messages of Hebrews is the affirmation of the *Christus Victor* view of the atonement. We see this beginning in Hebrews 2, which is about Jesus’ superiority to the angels. In this context, it says:

*It is not to angels that he has subjected the world to come, about which we are speaking. But there is a place where someone has testified: "What is mankind that you are mindful of them, a son of man that you care for him? You made them a little lower than the angels; you crowned them with glory and honor and put everything under their feet." In putting everything under them, God left nothing that is not subject to them. Yet at present we do not see everything subject to them. But we do see Jesus, who was made lower than the angels for a little while, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone (Hebrews 2:5-9).*

This passage is all about *Christus Victor*. It outlines how God subjected everything in creation to humanity, but they lost that authority. In response to this, Jesus came as a man, suffered death, and was resurrected with glory and honor; in other words, He regained the authority over the earth that humanity had lost. Jesus did not die as a victim, but when He died, He actually was exalted. He came out victorious.

It's important to note verse 8, where it says, "*Yet at present we do not see everything subject to them.*" The reality is, Christ is the victor; however, not all of us are living in victory yet. This does not mean victory is off-limits or outside our grasp. Instead, it points to the reality of our ongoing struggle with the enemy. The battle continues, and some things still need to be put under our feet. Some people have so strongly adopted the *Christus Victor* view that they live in denial of the

realities of their lives. Yes, Jesus is the victor, but we are still learning to walk in that victory here on earth. This is why debt, sickness, and emotional and relational issues still exist in so many people's lives. In His victory, He has provided victory for us. He has seated us with Him in heavenly places and made us children of God (see Heb. 2:10–11). Yet, not everything has been subjected; it is in process. And we are an active part of that process.

We are still participating in the ongoing walking out of the new covenant. He is the victor; He can sit down at the Father's right hand! But we still have work to do. We need to bring our lives into alignment with His victory. This is not about works but about participating in expanding the effect of Christ's victory on earth.

Looking down to verse 14, we see *Christus Victor* again:

*Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants. For this reason he had to be made like them, fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people (Hebrews 2:14–17).*

Here the author highlights the incarnation, in which God

becomes human in order to be able to stand on both sides of the covenant. This is how the Father made a covenant with the Son, who was both fully God and fully human. Through the incarnation, Christ came inside of humanity to win the victory and regain for humanity the rulership we lost in the Garden in Eden. This picture of the incarnation and the *Christus Victor* view of the atonement show up again and again in Hebrews.

## THE UNSHAKABLE KINGDOM

Now we will consider another significant message of the book—the unshakable Kingdom. To do this, we will start in Hebrews 12:

*You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm; to a trumpet blast or to such a voice speaking words that those who heard it begged that no further word be spoken to them, because they could not bear what was commanded: “If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned to death.” The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, “I am trembling with fear” (Hebrews 12:18–21).*

Here, beginning with a negative, the author described the scene of Mount Sinai in Exodus 19–20, where the Israelites were scared and, as a result, rejected God’s covenant offer. The author was contrasting the new covenant to the old covenant of Exodus, saying, “This old covenant mountain of gloom and fear is not what you have come to.” Instead:

*You have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, [Jesus] whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the Judge of all, to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel (Hebrews 12:22–24).*

The word *better* appears over and over in Hebrews, and here it is used to describe, “*the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.*” The blood of Abel refers to Cain’s murder of his brother Abel and God’s statement, “*Your brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground*” (Gen. 4:10). The implication is that Abel’s blood spoke a word of judgment, condemnation, justice, revenge, or vindication. By contrast, in the new covenant we come “*to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.*” The blood of Jesus speaks a better word—*forgiveness*. Jesus’ blood speaks about forgiveness, not condemnation. Because of this, the author of Hebrews said:

*See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks. If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we, if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven? At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, “Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.” The words “once more” indicate the*



*removing of what can be shaken—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our “God is a consuming fire” (Hebrews 12:25–29).*

His conclusion to the contrast between the fearful Mount Sinai of Exodus 19 (the old covenant and Jerusalem) and the joyful Mount Zion (the new covenant and heavenly Jerusalem) is that once more God will “shake everything,” and afterward, only the unshakable will remain. This is a picture of the destruction of the old covenant and Jerusalem, after which all that is left to the people of God is the unshakable Kingdom of God. In other words, this is another picture of the forty-year transition when both covenants (mountains) co-existed, and it ends with a prophecy of the destruction of the old, shakable covenant so that only the new and permanent covenant would remain.<sup>67</sup>

This shaking would include “*not only the earth but also the heavens,*” which is a phrase used to refer to the temple throughout the New Testament. The temple had three main compartments—the holy of holies, the inner court, and the outer court. The holy of holies, containing the ark of the covenant and the veil covered with cherubim, was a picture of heaven. The inner court, or the holy place, represented the earth. Finally, the outer court, which had the bronze laver (a large bowl of water for ritual cleansing), represented the sea. This was the picture of the temple understood in the world at that time, as recorded by Josephus, Maimonides, and others.<sup>68</sup>

This illuminates Jesus' statement in Matthew 5 that "*until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished*" (Matt. 5:18). It is obvious that Jesus could not have been referring to the literal end of the world, because after AD 70 it was literally impossible to keep every aspect of the Law, since the priesthood and temple no longer existed. Therefore, the Law disappeared when "heaven and earth"—the temple system—disappeared. Knowing the history of this phrase helps us understand what Jesus was actually referring to. Jesus picked up the same concept later in Matthew 24, where He prophesied the destruction of the temple. Near the end of the discussion, He said, "*Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away*" (Matt. 24:35). In other words, the temple and the old covenant system inextricably linked to it would pass away, but His words and the new covenant would endure forever. The people listening to Him in that day would have understood exactly what He meant when He said that.

In this way, Hebrews 12 makes a contrast between the two mountains and cities (as pictures of the two covenants) and concludes with a prophecy of the destruction of the one and the permanence of the other. A similar contrast happens in Galatians 4, where Paul discussed two cities and two women (as pictures of the two covenants). The contrast is so similar that it is worth looking at here:

*Tell me, you who want to be under the law, are you not aware of what the law says? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and*

*the other by the free woman. His son by the slave woman was born according to the flesh, but his son by the free woman was born as the result of a divine promise. These things are being taken figuratively: The women represent two covenants. One covenant is from Mount Sinai and bears children who are to be slaves: This is Hagar. Now Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the **present city of Jerusalem, because she is in slavery with her children** (Galatians 4:21–25).*

On one side we have the images of the earthly city of Jerusalem, Mount Sinai, and Hagar the slave woman who bore Ishmael. This is the old covenant Law, the Law that brings slavery. Then Paul described the other side of the comparison, the heavenly Jerusalem, the new covenant, Sarah, the mother of the promised Isaac:

*But the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother. For it is written: “Be glad, barren woman, you who never bore a child; shout for joy and cry aloud, you who were never in labor; because more are the children of the desolate woman than of her who has a husband.” Now you, brothers and sisters, like Isaac, are children of promise. At that time the son born according to the flesh persecuted the son born by the power of the Spirit. **It is the same now** (Galatians 4:26–29).*

Ishmael, who was thirteen years old when Isaac was born, taunted and persecuted young Isaac; in the same way, the old

covenant persecuted the new covenant during the forty-year crossover between AD 30 and 70. Here is Paul's conclusion:

*But what does Scripture say? "Get rid of the slave woman and her son, for the slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman's son." Therefore, brothers and sisters, we are not children of the slave woman, but of the free woman (Galatians 4:30–31).*

In other words, the two covenants were not compatible, and the old covenant needed to be abolished. It needed to be cast out like the slave woman and her son. Interestingly, the Book of Revelation also contains two women (the whore and the bride), two cities (earthly and heavenly Jerusalem), and two covenants. These contrasts in Hebrews, Galatians, and Revelation are so significant to our understanding of the transition between the two covenants and why the destruction of the old was necessary, while the new remains forever unshakable.

## THE AGE TO COME AND THE LAST DAYS

A significant part of the description in Hebrews of the transitional period is wrapped up in two very misunderstood phrases: *the age to come* and *the last days*. We discussed the first one briefly at the beginning of the chapter. Here we will look at both of these more closely in order to debunk the common myth that these phrases refer to the end of the world.

The commentator William Barclay wrote about the Jewish

concept of two ages:

The Jews divided all time into two ages. There was this present age. This present age is wholly bad; it is beyond redemption; it cannot be reformed; for it there can be nothing but total destruction and obliteration. The Jews, therefore, waited for the end of things as they are. There was the age, which is to come. [So now this is the other age, which is to come.] The age, which is to come, was to be wholly good and righteous; it was to be the golden age of God; in it there would be peace, prosperity, and righteousness; and in it God's chosen people would at last be vindicated, and would receive the place that was theirs by right.<sup>69</sup>

Even before Jesus came, the Jewish worldview said they were living in an age of darkness that could not be salvaged, and therefore, they fixed their hope on a future age to come when everything would be amazingly better. Understanding this can help us understand why the New Testament writers used this phrase so often. They were communicating to the Jews of their day using a concept they understood and that held powerful implications.

Similarly, the phrase *last days* referred to the transition period preceding the destruction of Jerusalem. Thus, Hebrews begins:

*In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom*

*he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe (Hebrews 1:1–2).*

Here, the phrase is used in a comparative sense, contrasting the past to “these last days” (the author’s present day). The comparison is simple. In the past, God spoke through various prophets under the old covenant, but now He has spoken through His Son and given us a new covenant. This is the author’s introduction to the entire book’s premise—the new is better than the old. In these last days, we have received the upgrade, the everlasting Kingdom.

The transition period is the only time in history or in the future that can be referred to as the last days, because it was literally the last days of the Mosaic covenant. It was the last days of that world, or age. We cannot apply the term *last days* to our future, because no New Testament writer would have understood or intended what they wrote in that context. *The New Testament was written as the canon of the new covenant; it was not written to predict our future.* However, included in the canon was material on the old covenant’s end and the new covenant’s full establishment. These predictions were for their immediate future, not for thousands of years down the road. Further, the term *last days* cannot refer to our future, because we live in a Kingdom that will never be shaken. It is an eternal Kingdom with an eternal covenant.

Of course, as we learned in Hebrews 2, everything is not presently the way it should be; everything is not yet under our feet. Ephesians 1:9 talks about joining together everything in heaven and on the earth under the rulership of Christ. This will

happen in our future, as the Kingdom continues to grow and grow and grow until the world ends. However, this is not the same as what is referred to as the *last days*, which was a specific phrase always used to indicate the last days of the old covenant world. This is consistently true of every use of this phrase in the Bible. In First John 2:18, it says, “...*This is how we know it is the last hour.*” This is a present tense statement! For John and his contemporaries, it was the last hour. He did not say, “The last hour will come at some point in the future.” Likewise, in Second Thessalonians 2:7, Paul said, “*The secret power of lawlessness is already at work.*” Nowhere does it indicate this power would continue for more than two thousand years. Instead, it was a reality for a very short period of history, during the crossover between the old and new covenants, that culminated in the destruction of Jerusalem.

## THE IMPENDING TRANSITION

To the New Testament writers (and original readers), the sense of impending transition was clear. They knew the end of the old covenant was in sight. Hebrews 8:13 is one of the most obvious indicators of this transition: “*By calling this covenant “new,” he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and outdated **will soon disappear.***” At that time, the old covenant was obsolete and outdated, but it had not yet fully disappeared. It lingered until its death and final removal in AD 70. This idea is echoed over and over throughout the New Testament letters. We will look at just a few examples.

Paul, in Second Corinthians 3:10–11, spoke about the glory

of the new covenant being greater than the glory of the old covenant. Many translations have not translated this verse well, because they have used the wrong verb tense. The Young's Literal Translation has translated it more accurately with the present tense:

*or also even that which hath been glorious, hath not been glorious—in this respect, because of the superior glory; for if that which is being made useless [is] through glory, much more that which is remaining [is] in glory (2 Corinthians 3:10–11 YLT).*

In other words, he was indicating that, at that time, the glory of the old covenant was still fading away. It had not yet completely faded. During those forty years, the glory of the old covenant was passing away. However, the unending glory of the new is far greater.

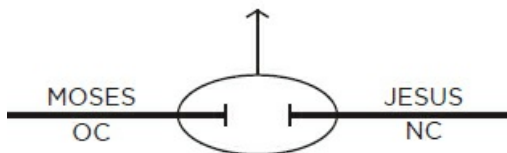
Likewise, in Hebrews 9:26 it says:

*Otherwise Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But he has appeared **once for all at the culmination of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself.***

In this phrase, *the culmination of the ages*, the author gives us a picture of the age of Moses and the old covenant on one side, with the age of Jesus and the new covenant on the other. Between them, at the place where the two ages meet, is the culmination of the ages.



## CULMINATION OF THE AGES



At the culmination of the ages, the transition happens. The fading old covenant forever disappears, and the rising new covenant is fully established.

We find another proof of the transition in Hebrews 10:8–9:

*First he said, “Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them”—though they were offered in accordance with the law. Then he said, “Here I am, I have come to do your will.” **He sets aside the first to establish the second.***

The last sentence makes it so clear. Jesus set aside the first and established the second. Later in the same chapter, it says:

*And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more **as you see the Day approaching** (Hebrews 10:24–25).*

The capitalized word *Day* means the author was talking about a very specific day. In other words, he was talking about how they should live in light of the coming destruction of Jerusalem and the old covenant system. In light of that reality, he was telling people not to allow themselves to become isolated. They must keep meeting together, because a very real danger was just around the corner, and they needed to be prepared to heed the signs in order to escape the judgment coming on Jerusalem. They lived, in that era, in a place of constant turmoil, war, rebellion, and revolt. Thus, they needed to be in community in order to figure out, together, when it was truly time to leave Jerusalem. We know the Christians heeded this warning, because history tells they all escaped when they saw the armies surrounding Jerusalem. Eusebius, the first Church historian (AD 300s), recorded that no Christians died in the destruction of Jerusalem.<sup>70</sup> Since Hebrews was written only about five years before the destruction of Jerusalem, it was an important reminder to the believers at that time of the coming transition.

Hebrews 13:14 echoes this reality when it says: *“For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come.”* This is a clear forecast of the impending destruction of Jerusalem and the transition between the covenants, which would result in the final establishment of *“the city that is to come,”* which is the heavenly Jerusalem. Of course, they were already part of the new covenant world and the heavenly Jerusalem, but it was about to be fully unveiled as the only thing that remains after everything else had been shaken. In these passages we see the constant backdrop throughout the Book of Hebrews regarding the *last days* and

the transition between the covenants. That was the period they lived in, just prior to AD 70. Our reality is now much different; we now live fully in the new covenant, and the old covenant has been completely removed.

## MELCHIZEDEK

Another very important theme in the Book of Hebrews is the often mysterious character of Melchizedek. We have looked at him briefly in Chapters 9 and 13. Here we will examine Melchizedek's significance in light of the transition between the covenants.

As stated previously, Melchizedek is only mentioned three times in Scripture—Genesis 14; Psalm 110; and Hebrews 6–7. Psalm 110, which says Jesus will be “*a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek*” (Ps. 110:4), is quoted in the New Testament more than any other psalm. What is important to realize is that Jesus was not qualified to be a high priest, because He was not a Levite. He did not come from the priestly tribe of Israel. This is the significance of Melchizedek, as Hebrews shows us. Jesus became a priest in the order of Melchizedek, not in the order of Aaron. Implied in this is the fact that He is superior to Aaron, since Melchizedek was superior to Abraham, who was the father of the Israelites. Melchizedek predated and superseded the Levitical priesthood. Though Jesus was not a Levite, He could become the great high priest because of His association with Melchizedek. This is also important because, as mentioned previously, it was not God's idea to have just a tribe of priests. He wanted the entire

nation to be priests unto Him; thus, if Jesus had been a priest in the order of Aaron, He would have come under a flawed priesthood. Instead, He hearkened back to the original priesthood of Melchizedek, which had aligned with God's design.

When Abram encountered Melchizedek, he was both a king and a priest, and Abram decided to give him 10 percent of his spoils from war. This raises a lot of questions. First, how was it possible that he was both a king and priest? The answer is found in the historical reality that the male head of every household was considered the priest of that household. Melchizedek, therefore, must have been the patriarch of his family. This was what made him a priest. The second question that arises from this puzzling scenario is why Abram, who had only just become a follower of God (two chapters previous), would give 10 percent of his spoils of war to a seemingly random priest. The answer must be that it was not random. In fact, the only way that this makes sense is if Melchizedek was actually related to Abram and, therefore, as the oldest male member of his family, he was also the priest. Otherwise, Abram would have been tithing to a pagan priest from some other family line. Heaven forbid! Amazingly, in a world of paganism, this Melchizedek was a priest of the Most High God; he served the same God as Abram. Who could this relative of Abram be? Some scholars believe Melchizedek was actually Shem, the son of Noah, from whom the Israelites descended.<sup>71</sup>

In the Genesis 5 genealogy from Noah to Abram, we find that Shem was twelve generations older than Abram. This may seem to make the possibility of the two of them meeting

impossible; yet if we compare how long Shem lived to how long Abraham lived, we discover that Shem actually outlived Abraham by thirty-five years! Shem was twelve generations older than Abram and had lived through the flood. He knew the same God Abram knew, because he had seen that God preserve his family in the flood. Considering this, why does the Bible refer to Shem as Melchizedek? The answer is simple. Shem was his name; Melchizedek was his title. The Jews would have understood this and known to whom Abram gave his money. We can see this in Hebrews 7:2, which says: *"To whom also Abraham presented a tenth part of all—being first, as his name signifies, King of righteousness, and secondly King of Salem, that is, King of peace"* (WNT). He was the King of Salem (which means peace), and his people gave him the title, King of Righteousness, which is translated as Melchizedek. Thus, Melchizedek was his title, not his name.

Some people have difficulty accepting this idea because of the next verse in Hebrews 7, which says, *"Without father or mother; without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, resembling the Son of God, he remains a priest forever"* (Heb. 7:3). They use this verse to say Melchizedek must have been an appearance of the pre-incarnate Christ or even an alien. However, this verse does not mean what we, two thousand years later, think it means. Instead, it is making a contrast between Melchizedek and the Levitical priesthood. The Levitical priests were mandated to start their ministries at age thirty and retire at fifty. Also, they were required to carry with them at all times their genealogical records to prove who their parents were and their legitimacy as Levite priests. This was standard procedure during the time of Jesus. So, when the

writer of Hebrews said Melchizedek was “*without father or mother; without genealogy,*” he was saying Melchizedek predated the Levitical priesthood and was not part of it. He did not have papers proving himself a Levite. This was to legitimize Jesus’ similar lack of papers and proof of His priesthood. He did not abide by the Levite’s rules but by the rules of the Melchizedek priesthood.

Likewise, the statement, “*without beginning of days or end of life, resembling the Son of God, he remains a priest forever,*” created another contrast to the Levites, who were limited to a rigid period of service as priests. Melchizedek did not begin his ministry at thirty and end at fifty, and neither did Jesus. Instead, Melchizedek’s ministry lasted much longer than twenty years, and Jesus, following in Melchizedek’s order, is established as the Great High Priest forever. In other words, this verse is not saying Melchizedek was eternal but simply comparing the length of his priesthood to the rigid requirements of the Levitical priesthood.

The author of Hebrews points all this out to indicate that Jesus did not have to submit to the requirements of the Levitical priesthood. In verse 14, it says: “*For it is clear that our Lord descended from Judah, and in regard to that tribe Moses said nothing about priests.*” This would have been the question in the Jewish mind in the first century: “How can Jesus be a priest if He is from the tribe of Judah?” Thus, the author of Hebrews made this great effort to prove that Jesus’ priesthood supersedes the Levitical one by being in the order of Melchizedek—without mother or father or genealogy, without beginning or end of ministry.

This information brings so much clarity to a passage that has confused so many. Abram honored Shem (the king called Melchizedek) as the oldest member and priest of his family by giving him this tenth offering. What is most amazing is that this man, who would be held up as the precursor to the coming King of Righteousness (Jesus), brought out to Abram bread and wine, the communion elements. In the timeline of history, this event was thousands of years prior to Jesus' Last Supper with His disciples, yet it mirrors the great sacrifice Jesus would make as the Great High Priest in the order of Melchizedek. Truly, Melchizedek provides an incredible picture of the coming Christ, who became both the Great High Priest and the King of Righteousness who reigns forever over the city of peace (the heavenly Jerusalem). This is the significance of Melchizedek.

This is important for us to understand because of the connection between the priesthood and the covenant. Hebrews 7:12 makes this clear: *"For when the priesthood is changed, the law must be changed also."* In other words, if Jesus was a priest in the order of Levi, the old covenant could not have been abolished. However, He was of the order of a different priesthood with a different covenant. *Jesus started a whole new priesthood system*, connected to the Melchizedek priesthood, which did not have the Law. Thus, because the priesthood had changed, the Law must change also. In this way, Jesus' connection to Melchizedek shows the necessity of the ending of the old covenant and the eternal establishment of the new. This verse clearly proves the old covenant cannot continue with the new. Likewise, in Romans 7:1–4, Paul talked about being married to the Law, saying that when we die in Christ, we are no longer attached to the old covenant Law but

are free to marry another. In other words, when we come into the new covenant, our connection to the old covenant is eliminated. We have ended that marriage through death, and now we are free to be united with Christ.

This is the amazing reality hidden in the picture of Melchizedek. The priesthood of Jesus far surpasses the Levitical priesthood, and with it, Jesus has established a new covenant. Compared to the old Levitical priesthood, Jesus saves forever, lives forever, is a priest forever, and cleanses forever.

## **REVIEW TEST QUESTIONS**

1. If you understand Hebrews, you'll also probably understand what other book of the Bible, as there is a lot of carry over in the content?
2. If the covenants were trains on tracks, the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants picked up extra blessings and kept going when they hit the new covenant created at the cross. But what happened to the Mosaic?
3. Who was the author of the Book of Hebrews, and when was it written?
4. The letter of Hebrews has a structure that can simply be divided into three sections. Name the three sections that correspond with Hebrews 1–7, 8–10, and 11–13.



6. What did the blood of Abel speak, and what is the better word that the blood of Jesus speaks?
7. When something is shaken in the Bible, it is usually the destruction of a *what*? When the shaking comes, only that which cannot be shaken will remain. What is unshakeable?
8. The heavens, the earth, and the sea will pass away. This was understood to mean *what* was going to pass away?
9. Since the *last days* does not have to do with the end of the world, what does the New Testament write about? When were the last days?

## RELATED MATERIAL

Alfred Edersheim, *History of the Jewish Nation: After the Destruction of Jerusalem Under Titus*.

<sup>67</sup> When a “shaking” was referred to in the Old Testament, it was a picture of the destruction of a city. See the author’s book, *Raptureless*, for examples of this. Thus, in this passage, what is shaken is Jerusalem and the old covenant system, and the only thing that remains is the new covenant Kingdom, which is unshakable.

<sup>68</sup> Welton, *Raptureless*, 129–131.

<sup>69</sup> Barclay, *The Revelation of John*, Vol. 1, 3–4.

<sup>70</sup> Eusebius, *The Church History*, Vol 3, chapter 5, section 3.

<sup>71</sup> Hahn, *Kinship by Covenant*, 132.

eighteen



# **DANIEL 9: A DEMONSTRATION OF GOD'S NEW COVENANT LOVE**

In futurist eschatology, parts of the Book of Daniel are connected with the Book of Revelation, as if they speak of exactly the same events in our future. However, this is incorrect. Daniel and Revelation do not automatically go together, and they are certainly not about events in our future.

As we learned earlier in this book, it violates the historical-contextual hermeneutic to simply pull out chapters from books like Daniel and Ezekiel and attach them to the storyline of Revelation. Yet people do it regularly in their attempts to predict so-called endtime events.

## THE KINGDOM NOW

Often this happens because people fail to understand the Kingdom as a present reality. We have looked at this some in previous chapters, and it is especially important to understand in light of our discussion of Daniel 9 in this chapter. Here we will consider two main views in relation to the new covenant: the dispensationalist view and the dual covenant view, both of which push off a full establishment of the new covenant to sometime in the future.

First, we will look at the dispensationalist view. Hebrews 13:20 refers to the new covenant as “*the eternal covenant*,” yet dispensationalists do not believe the new covenant is eternal, because they believe the Church was not part of God’s original plan. According to them, God never prophesied the Church in the Old Testament, because the Church is a result of the first century Jews’ rejection of Jesus as their Messiah. It was God’s “plan B” when He had to turn to the gentiles. According to this view, God set aside the new covenant in order to relate to the gentile Church, so what we live under is not the real new covenant, because we are not Jewish.<sup>72</sup> Thus, we are waiting until the day when the Church is raptured out of the way so God can establish His new covenant with His “real”

people, the Jewish people by race. This belief that the Church is plan B and God still holds Jews in a higher regard (making gentiles second-class Christians) is a form of Christian racism that is completely alien to the Scripture.

Second, a similar belief system, called the dual covenant system, teaches that God still honors His covenant with Abraham through the Jewish people, on one side, while on the other side He has made a new covenant through the Messiah with the gentiles. Thus, the dual covenant system sees two covenants in operation, one for the Jews and one for the gentiles.<sup>73</sup> This, however, divides up who receives what parts of the covenant when, in truth, Abraham and David looked ahead to the day when both of their covenants would be fulfilled and expanded to impact the entire world in the new covenant. Within Abraham's covenant, we see God's true heart, which is to bless *all people*. Thus, a system that divides is essentially returning to the old covenant divisions between natural Israel and those who were pagan and gentile. That system does not represent God's heart.

Some take these ideas so far that they believe the old covenant will literally be re-established in Jerusalem after the rapture—including animal sacrifice, a priesthood, red heifers, and all the regalia. They believe God will again honor the old covenant for a seven-year period, during which the antichrist will become the “abomination of desolation” and violate the rebuilt temple. Then, at the end of that seven-year period, God will establish the new covenant with the Jews.

The truth is, we are already in an eternal new covenant (see

Heb. 13:20). We are not waiting for it to appear in the future. We are not waiting for the promises to Abraham or David to be fulfilled, because *they already have been fulfilled* (as we have discussed at length in earlier chapters of this book).

We are not waiting for anything. The last time people had to “wait on God” was in Acts 2. Then the Holy Spirit came, and as a result, we are no longer waiting. Now, it is God who is waiting on His Church. We are not waiting on Him, because we already *have* Him. We do not need to feel disconnected, because His Spirit lives within us, and we have an eternal covenant with Him. In other words, we have the Kingdom *now*. Simply defined, *Kingdom now* is a phrase used to say that Jesus, the King, brought the Kingdom, and it has been growing ever since He left us as the ambassadors. It is our job to work toward expanding the Kingdom, not to sit around and wait for Him to someday bring the Kingdom. He made us ambassadors of the Kingdom to bring heaven into the earth.

In Matthew 13:31–33, Jesus compared the Kingdom to leaven put into dough and how it works its way through the whole piece. He also compared it to the smallest seed in the garden, the mustard seed, which grows into a bush, turns into a tree, and then becomes the largest tree in the garden. In this way, the Kingdom ever expands. Even just statistically, we see proof of this in history. In AD 100, one out of every 360 people was a Christian. Now, in the 2010s, it is approximately one out of every three people.<sup>74</sup> The Kingdom is expanding, not just in numbers but in influence as well.

One of the arguments regularly given by people who

believe we do not yet live in the Kingdom is: “We are still waiting for the promises of Abraham (or David or Moses) to be fulfilled.” They believe the old covenant cannot be completely gone, because we are waiting for promises to be fulfilled. However, an often overlooked verse in Joshua makes it clear that we are not waiting for any of the old covenant promises to be fulfilled:

*So the Lord gave Israel all the land he had sworn to give their ancestors, and they took possession of it and settled there. The Lord gave them rest on every side, just as he had sworn to their ancestors. Not one of their enemies withstood them; the Lord gave all their enemies into their hands. Not one of all the Lord's good promises to Israel failed; every one was fulfilled (Joshua 21:43–45).*

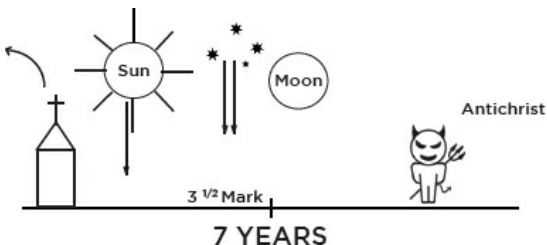
Every one of the land promises and other promises associated with the nation of Israel was fulfilled in the lifetime of the generation that entered the Promised Land. And as we examined earlier, the promises to Abraham and David of a future heir and king were fulfilled in Christ. In other words, we are not waiting for any old covenant promises to be fulfilled, because they already have been.

## POPULAR ENDTIMES BELIEFS

Unfortunately, many Christians believe we are waiting for the fulfillment of certain Old Testament promises, and that belief has shaped their eschatology. Instead of embracing the Kingdom now, they have pushed off the Kingdom to a future

age that will follow the “endtimes.” This eschatological perspective is commonly called futurism. This view is reinforced by misinterpretations of various portions of Scripture, including Daniel 9. To appreciate the significance of the correct interpretation of Daniel 9, we will first look at the common futurist endtime understanding, in which the events of Daniel 9 are grafted into the timeline of the Book of Revelation and applied to the distant future.

The following timeline shows the basic futurist view of the seven-year period they call the great tribulation.



First on the timeline is the rapture of the true Church, leaving no real Christians on the earth. Afterward, the sun, moon, and stars are all supposed to fall to the earth and do some damage. The mark at three-and-a-half years is significant, because prior to it the temple will be rebuilt in Jerusalem. During this new temple period, for three-and-a-half years, animal sacrifice and the old covenant will be reinstituted and honored by God.<sup>75</sup> According to this belief, the temple must be



rebuilt before the rise of the final figure on the timeline—the antichrist, an evil man filled with demons who will bring terror to the earth. At the halfway mark, the antichrist will come and sit down in the new temple, which is the abomination that causes desolation. Because of the antichrist, God will release His wrath in an unprecedented measure on the entire earth. Finally, at the end of this tribulation, Jesus will return and land in Jerusalem, where He will sit on a throne for one thousand years as the king who finally fulfills the Davidic covenant promises. According to futurists, all of these climactic events will happen in the future over a period of seven years.

This is the common futurist understanding, yet it largely contradicts a proper understanding of the biblical covenants, as outlined in the New Testament. Chapters 12 and 13 describe the way in which Jesus fully fulfilled the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants. In those chapters, we clearly saw we have no need of a future fulfillment of covenant promises that have already been fulfilled!

Here we will focus on just one aspect of futurism—the seven-year tribulation. It is the foundation of the timeline upon which the whole theory sits, yet no seven-year period is mentioned in Revelation or anywhere in the Gospels (including the Olivet Discourse in Luke 21, Mark 13, and Matthew 24). *In fact, it is not mentioned at all in the entire New Testament.* This is why, until the advent of John Nelson Darby's eschatology in the 1800s, those in the Church who believed in a future tribulation believed it would be only three-and-a-half years, because that is the number recorded in Revelation. Clearly, this is a pretty important missing piece in modern

futurist belief. So, where do the futurists find their idea of a seven-year tribulation? They find it in Daniel 9.

Due to the influence of futurist books like *The Late Great Planet Earth* by Hal Lindsey, which was a mega-bestseller in the 1970s, futurism has become the dominant eschatology in modern Christianity. This eschatology influences how people read and understand the rest of the Bible. Because so many Christians have not understood the covenants or how to properly study the Bible, the modern Church has embraced into its foundation both futurism and dispensationalism. As a result, though many believers have embraced the supernatural realm, they cannot enter the Kingdom realm because dispensationalists believe everything is getting worse and we are headed toward the great apostasy. Ingrained in this system is a type of fatalism that promotes evangelism and church growth but ultimately does not expect to impact society, because the Kingdom will not come until after the endtimes.

All this is based on a wrong understanding of Daniel 9, which has led to a belief in a seven-year tribulation and all that follows. However, Daniel 9 actually prophesied the coming of the Messiah. This was the historical understanding of Daniel 9 prior to the advent of Darbyism, and as we look at the text, we will see how incredibly well it fits.

## THE HISTORICAL UNDERSTANDING OF DANIEL 9

Daniel was a captive Israelite in Babylon following the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem. While a captive, he read from the Book of Jeremiah, in which Jeremiah had prophesied

that judgment was coming. This prophecy was fulfilled in the Babylonian invasion. In Jeremiah's prophecy, Daniel also saw that the Israelites would be in captivity for seventy years. Therefore, he began to pray about the nearing end of the seventy years of captivity, asking God to release Israel from captivity so they could return to their nation and land. This prayer was later answered, as recorded in the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah. While Daniel was praying, he had an angelic encounter:

*While I was speaking and praying, confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel and making my request to the Lord my God for his holy hill—while I was still in prayer, Gabriel, the man I had seen in the earlier vision, came to me in swift flight about the time of the evening sacrifice (Daniel 9:20–21).*

This angel, Gabriel, gave a prophecy to Daniel:

*Seventy “sevens” are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the Most Holy Place (Daniel 9:24).*

Here Gabriel listed six activities and he said “seventy sevens” had been decreed for them and their holy city to do these six things. He continued:

*Know and understand this: From the time the word goes out to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven*

“sevens,” and sixty-two “sevens”... (Daniel 9:25).

Reading this, without any dispensational thinking, the phrase, *the Anointed One*, should automatically make us think of the Messiah. This is a common way to refer to Him in Scripture, yet Darby actually interpreted this passage to refer to the antichrist instead. That is a monumental switch. Gabriel’s prophecy about the Anointed One continued:

*...the Anointed One, the ruler; comes, there will be seven “sevens,” and sixty-two “sevens.” It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble. After the sixty-two “sevens,” the Anointed One will be put to death and cut off. The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end will come like a flood: War will continue until the end, and desolations have been decreed. He will confirm a covenant with many for one “seven.” In the middle of the “seven” he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And at the temple he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him (Daniel 9:25–27).*

This gives such a clear picture of Jesus, who was put to death and put an end to sacrifice and offering. However, futurists see the ending of the sacrifice and offering (the old covenant) as a bad thing, which means the Anointed One must be the antichrist, who will do this in our future. It is safe to say almost everyone before John Darby believed and understood Daniel 9 to be a prophecy of Jesus Christ! Matthew Henry, a renowned commentator, wrote this of Daniel 9:24–27: “We have

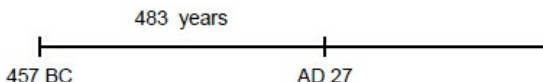
in Daniel 9 the most illustrious prediction of Christ and Gospel grace that exists in all of the Old Testament.” <sup>76</sup> It is amazing how people can turn such a clear prediction of Jesus into a prophecy about the antichrist and the endtimes!

To understand what is really going on in this passage, we will dig deeper. First is the matter of the “seventy sevens.” Scholars in all camps agree this phrase means seventy sets of seven, which is 490 ( $70 \times 7 = 490$ ). These sevens are understood to indicate years. Some translations use the word *weeks* instead of *sevens*; these were not meant literally but were a Jewish prophetic reference to years. Thus, the 490 refers to 490 years. Then, in verse 25, it says, “...*Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven ‘sevens,’ and sixty-two ‘sevens.’*” Here is another equation, in which 62 sevens are added to seven sevens, the result of which is 69 sevens ( $62 + 7 = 69$ ). This means that out of the 70 sevens (490), 69 of those have already happened. Because 69 of the 70 sevens have already happened, that brings us to 483 ( $69 \times 7 = 483$ ). This leaves us with just one seven. *This is agreed upon by all biblical scholars.* This final seven is *the* seven in question. According to futurist thinking, it is where the seven-year tribulation begins.

However, the historical interpretation of this passage is quite different. These 490 years were a timeframe given to Daniel in which certain things would happen. In verse 25, Gabriel clarified that this timeline did not start immediately but only when the command to restore and rebuild Jerusalem went forth. From that command until the time when the Anointed One would come would be 483 years (69 of the 70 sevens).

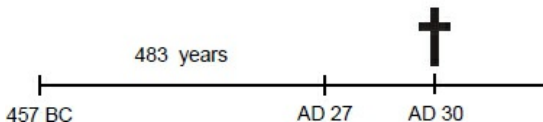
That decree to restore and rebuild was later given in Ezra 7:12–26 by King Artaxerxes in the year 457 BC. So, the timeline started in 457 BC and continued for 490 years. On the timeline, the initial 69 sevens (483 years) bring us to the year AD 27.

## 490 YEARS



Jesus was born in the year 3 BC, which means that in the year AD 27, Jesus was thirty years old. In other words, He began His public ministry at exactly the end of the 483 years, which was when the Anointed One was prophesied to appear on the scene. Jesus' earthly ministry lasted three-and-a-half years, bringing the timeline to AD 30, when he was put to death and when, through His death, He put an end to sacrifice and offering. When Jesus died on the cross, in the eyes of God He had put an end to sacrifice and offering; He had made the old obsolete, outdated, and soon to fade away (see Heb. 8:13).

## 490 YEARS



Verse 25 says, speaking of Jerusalem: *"It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble."* Then, *"After the sixty-two 'sevens,' the Anointed One will be put to death and will have nothing. The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary..."* (Dan. 9:26). The first part of this verse marks Jesus' crucifixion. The second half then begins speaking of another person—the ruler who will come and destroy Jerusalem and the temple. It is important to understand this dividing line in verse 26. After the Anointed One (Jesus) was put to death, the subject logically switches to a different individual. The prophecy about the second individual (the ruler) continues: *"The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end will come like a flood: War will continue until the end, and desolations have been decreed"* (Dan. 9:26). This all speaks of the ruler who would come against the city of Jerusalem. Throughout most of Church history, this has been interpreted as a reference to General Titus, who destroyed the city and the sanctuary in AD 70. Then, in verse 27, the subject switches back to Jesus, saying: *"He will confirm a covenant with many for one 'seven.' In the middle of the 'seven' he will put an end to sacrifice and offering."* This verse looks at the final "seven," during which Jesus confirmed a covenant with many through His earthly ministry. In the middle of those seven years, He put an end to sacrifice and offering through His death. Because we are reading this in English and do not understand the structure of the prophecy, we can miss this back-and-forth between the two characters in the prophecy, but this was understood throughout Church history until Darby, who changed it to be solely about the antichrist.

What we actually have in Daniel 9 is a five-part prophecy about the Messiah and the events surrounding the introduction of the new covenant:

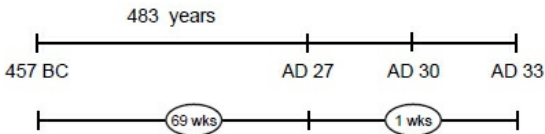
1. **It tells the year of the Messiah's arrival.** It literally predicted the exact year when Jesus appeared on the scene—AD 27.
2. **It tells of the Messiah's death.**
3. **It tells of the end of the old covenant.** This is indicated when it speaks of an “end to sacrifice and offering.” That's the end of the old covenant!
4. **It tells of the confirming of a new covenant.** This is what is meant by the statement, in verse 27: “*He will confirm a covenant with many for one ‘seven.’*” In other words, the Messiah would establish the new covenant.
5. **It tells of the destruction of Jerusalem.**

All five of these appear in these four verses. In brief, 483 years (457 BC to AD 27) led up to Jesus' appearance as the Messiah. The first half of the last seven years was Jesus' earthly ministry, which culminated in AD 30, when Jesus put an end to sacrifice and established the new covenant through His death and resurrection. He did not actually stop them from sacrificing animals, but He did put an end to the old covenant in the eyes of God the Father. Now Jesus is the perfect sacrifice, making the old covenant null and void. After that, another three and a half years remain, bringing the timeline to



AD 33.

## 490 YEARS



Before we consider the last three and a half years, we will look briefly at a reference that Jesus made to this prophecy in Daniel 9:

*Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?" Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times" (Matthew 18:21–22).*

This use of *seventy-seven times* was an allusion to Daniel 9, which was a very well-known and debated prophecy during the first century. The Jews recognized that Daniel's 69 weeks were running out and the Anointed One was about to show up. Thus, everyone was anxiously waiting to see what would happen. This is why that period in history saw such an influx of false messiahs. The general thought was, "*We are completing the end of the Daniel 9 prophecy.*" Thus, Jesus used this prophecy to teach Peter a lesson on forgiveness. When Jesus said that Peter should forgive "*seventy times seven,*" He was alluding to the 490-year grace period the Father

had given (in Daniel 9) for Israel to get their act together. He was not, as is often taught, using a big number to mean infinity. Instead, He was referring to a prophecy everyone knew and was talking about *in order to say that we should be as forgiving as God, who had given Israel 490 years of grace!* In the context here, the point is that Daniel 9 was well-known in the first century. The Jews were on the look-out for the Anointed One, yet they crucified Him because they had not adequately prepared their hearts to receive Him and His new covenant.

## THE LAST THREE AND A HALF YEARS

After Jesus' death and resurrection, according to the Daniel 9 timeline, three and a half years still remained in the 490-year grace period for Israel. Those last three and a half years bring us to the stoning of Stephen in Acts 7:

*When the members of the Sanhedrin heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. "Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul. While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then he fell on*

*his knees and cried out, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” When he had said this, he fell asleep (Acts 7:54–59).*

This marks the end of the 490-year grace period, that season when the Israelites were to prepare for and accept Jesus as their Messiah. With the stoning of Stephen, that window closed. The Father had opened an opportunity for Israel to understand and receive the Messiah even under the old covenant. This is exactly what Stephen explained in his monologue before the Sanhedrin. However, they rejected that message and instead stoned him to death as a heretic. This, of course, does not mean that no Jews were saved after that. It simply means that opportunity for the Jews to see Jesus under the old covenant (before its destruction) had ended. And by stoning Stephen, they had sealed their fate, which Jesus had declared over them in Matthew 23:

*So upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berekiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. Truly I tell you, all this will come on this generation” (Matthew 23:35–36).*

At the end of AD 33, the Jews decisively chose the old covenant and rejected the Messiah. Not long after, the Church began to launch out from Jerusalem to all the surrounding nations and welcome gentiles into the Kingdom. Thus, the end of the 490 years marked a significant paradigm shift. Three chapters later, Peter received the vision in which God told him

not to call unclean what He has called clean (the gentiles). Now the gospel is for everyone. It was, of course, always intended to be for everyone, but it could have been for everyone while involving Israel in a much greater way.

## THE ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION

One last part of Daniel 9 still needs to be explained—*“the abomination that causes desolation”* (Dan. 9:27). Jesus mentioned this part of Daniel 9 specifically in Matthew 24:

*So when you see standing in the holy place “the abomination that causes desolation,” spoken of through the prophet Daniel—let the reader understand—then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains (Matthew 24:15–16).*

Jesus quoted the last verse of Daniel 9 and expected His listeners to understand. Even the writer of the Book of Matthew added, *“let the reader understand.”* In other words, it was not a hard concept, and it referred to something those who heard Jesus would have been able to recognize when they saw it so they could *“flee to the mountains.”* It had to make sense to them, and we know it did, since they did in fact escape Jerusalem by fleeing to the mountains. To understand this fully, we must consider the verses following this as well:

*Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let no one on the housetop go down to take anything out of the house. Let no one in the field go back to get their cloak. How dreadful it will be in those days for*

*pregnant women and nursing mothers! Pray that your flight will not take place in winter or on the Sabbath. For then there will be great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again (Matthew 24:16–21).*

These verses put the abomination of desolation in a historical context:

1. *“Pray that your flight will not take place...on the Sabbath.”* This places the flight in the first century, when it was illegal for a Jew to walk more than three-fourths of a mile on the Sabbath (see Acts 1:12). Thus, if they needed to flee on the Sabbath, it would have been difficult to get very far without being arrested for violating the Sabbath.
2. *“Let no one on the housetop go down...”* This also places the events in an earlier time period, when it was common for people to have houses with flat roofs where people spent a lot of time. Jesus was saying, “If you’re on the roof, do not take the time to go back inside, but flee quickly.”
3. *“How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers!”* This refers to the difficulty of traveling from Jerusalem into the mountains on foot while pregnant or nursing a young baby.
4. *“Let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.”* More than any of the others, this indicates that this was a localized event that only applied to those living

in Judea.

After describing the haste with which they should flee, Jesus told them about the severity of what would happen: *“For then there will be great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again”* (Matt. 24:21). Here we find a huge clue that this event cannot be at the end of the world. If these events were scheduled to happen at the end of human history, Jesus would have had no reason to say *“and never to be equaled again.”* This phrase indicated that history would continue on afterward. Some people have said it must happen at the end of the world, because in their opinion, more recent events in history were worse than the AD 70 destruction. Certainly, if we are going purely by numbers, the destruction of Jerusalem was not the worst event of history. However, Jesus was not saying it would be the worst event ever but that it would be the worst event in the history of the Jews. When we consider not only the suffering and bloodshed of that event but also its ramifications for Judaism, we can without a doubt claim that AD 70 was in fact the worst event in the history of the Jewish people. After the Babylonian destruction, the Jews were able to return and rebuild. But even 1,900 years after the Roman destruction, the Jews still do not have a temple. And even worse, the records of the priesthood were destroyed, so even if they rebuilt the temple, they would not be able to authentically re-establish the priesthood of Levites. Thus, in AD 70, the entire Jewish world and system collapsed in a way that it can never recover from. In summary, beyond the destruction of the city, this is what the Jews suffered:

1. Their temple was destroyed.
2. Their priesthood—8,500 priests—were put to death.
3. 1.1 million Jewish people were killed, many in very horrific ways.
4. The genealogical records were burned up, which meant they could never again set up a legitimate Levitical priesthood.

Thus, Judaism transitioned from Mosaic Judaism to Rabbinic Judaism. The modern version of Judaism is not even connected to the old version, because they are no longer able to gather at the proper temple or offer the required sacrifices. Thus, the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 was truly a world-collapsing event for the Jewish people.

However, so far, this does not tell us exactly what Jesus was referring to when He mentioned the abomination of desolation. In the parallel passage, Luke 21, we find Jesus' identification of the events Daniel called the abomination of desolation:

*When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those in the city get out, and let those in the country not enter the city. For this is the time of punishment in fulfillment of all that has been written. How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! There will be great distress in the land and*

*wrath against this people. They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations (Luke 21:20–24).*

Here Jesus said the “*abomination that causes desolation*” would be the armies surrounding Jerusalem to lay it desolate. The armies that came and destroyed Jerusalem were the abomination that caused the desolation. He was clearly telling them, “When you see the armies, run for the hills.” And that is exactly what the early Christians did. Approximately 1.1 million non-believing Jews stayed in Jerusalem and were killed, while not one Christian remained in Jerusalem. Every single Christian fled to nearby Mount Pella when they saw the Roman armies.<sup>77</sup> This was possible because, according to Josephus, General Cestius first came against Jerusalem, but he suddenly paused and retreated briefly. During that retreat, the Christians in the city quickly fled. Soon after, Cestius returned and resumed his attack. He was eventually relieved by Titus, who leveled the city to the ground.

While the Christians fled, the rest of the Jews stayed in Jerusalem, because they assumed Cestius had left for good. They thought God was on their side, and therefore, they could not lose. They never imagined Jerusalem could be taken, let alone destroyed, and this caused them to rebel against Rome even more. This persistent rebellion eventually caused the Romans to level the city. This contrast between the actions of the Christians and the non-believing Jews is one of the strongest proofs for this interpretation of Matthew 24. Clearly, Jesus warned them about what would happen, and they heeded His warning, followed His command to flee, and were



saved from the destruction. History proves it was an amazingly accurate prophecy about the AD 70 destruction.

Thus, through Jesus' prophecy about the abomination of desolation, we can understand what Daniel 9 means. Jesus was going to come in AD 27 and "*confirm a covenant with many.*" Jesus actually used this exact language in Matthew 26:28: "*This is my blood, which **confirms the covenant** between God and his people. It is poured out as a sacrifice to forgive the sins **of many***" (NLT). He confirmed His covenant for many. Jesus was actually paraphrasing from and intentionally referencing Daniel 9. After confirming the covenant, He put an end to sacrifice through His own death in AD 30. In AD 33, the 490-year window of grace closed, and history began moving toward the climax of the Daniel 9 prophecy in the destruction of the city and sanctuary through the abomination of desolation, which happened in AD 70. From that point forward in history, we now are in an eternal covenant and an unshakable Kingdom.

## AMBASSADORS OF LOVE

A proper understanding of Daniel 9 and the apocalyptic literature in the New Testament will lead us to some very important conclusions:

- Wrath is behind us.
- The old covenant is gone.
- We live in an eternal new covenant, an unshakable

Kingdom.

- The Kingdom is advancing and working its way, like leaven, through the whole loaf.
- The Kingdom of the new covenant has one law: “Love one another as I have loved you.”

These Kingdom realities free us from legalism, racism, sexism, wrath, and the belief in an angry God. Without these trappings of religion, we are brought to the essential command: loving others as Christ does, advancing His Kingdom as ambassadors of love.

With this as our mission, our future as the Church is spelled out in Ephesians 1:9–10:

*He made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment —to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.*

Our future holds the unification of everything in heaven and on earth. Right now, heaven and earth are not in unity, which means we are moving toward unity. Wherever famine, war, political corruption, adultery, abuse, lies, sickness, disease, death, and any other evils exist, they create disunity between heaven and earth. We are here, as Christ’s ambassadors, to establish that unity. That is what we get to work toward: bringing heaven to earth. Contrary to futurist thinking, we are not waiting for more disunity or for earth to become less like

heaven. Instead, heaven is waiting for us to step into the fullness of our identity and powerfully bring heaven on earth. We are inside something now. This is not just a different theology or a different view of the future. We are inside the new covenant, which means we are now living as ambassadors, living that law of love. We can see this law of love so clearly in Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians:

*But, brothers and sisters, when we were orphaned by being separated from you for a short time (in person, not in thought), out of our intense longing we made every effort to see you. For we wanted to come to you—certainly I, Paul, did, again and again—but Satan blocked our way. For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? Indeed, you are our glory and joy.*

*So when we could stand it no longer, we thought it best to be left by ourselves in Athens. We sent Timothy, who is our brother and co-worker in God's service in spreading the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you in your faith, so that no one would be unsettled by these trials. For you know quite well that we are destined for them. In fact, when we were with you, we kept telling you that we would be persecuted. And it turned out that way, as you well know. For this reason, when I could stand it no longer, I sent to find out about your faith. I was afraid that in some way the tempter had tempted you and that our labors might have been in vain (1 Thessalonians 2:17–3:5).*

Here Paul talked about his longing to see the believers at Thessalonica with great passion. We can feel his heartbeat. Though he was not physically with them, his thoughts were with them continually, and he felt orphaned by being separated from them, even just for a short time. Because of his intense longing for them, he made every effort to see them. This was raw-hearted and open love and emotion from Paul. And it is the kind of heart that begins to develop when we live in the new covenant. It will radically change our hearts into soft, full-of-emotion hearts, just like Paul's. In the new covenant, our new hearts do not function like our old ones did. Our old hearts had insecurities, fears, legalism, and all kinds of junk that prevented us from fully loving others. But our new hearts are wired to be intense, to long for connection, and to feel orphaned when separated from close relationships. To some it may seem too extreme, but the truth is, we are called to live with these passionate new covenant hearts of love for people. And in fact, our new covenant hearts are programmed to love like this. It is not hard; it is how we are made to be.

When we keep our hearts open to people and stay connected, even when hurt or disagreement happen, we will be able to live out this new covenant love with great passion. This love is our demonstration of the new covenant. Many of us have already learned to demonstrate the Kingdom through supernatural power and authority. Likewise, our demonstration of the new covenant is a development of family, open hearts, and passionate relationships free from legalism, fear, and insecurity. We can know we are living in the new covenant when people can look each other in the eye and talk about the deepest, most personal issues in their lives because they have

experienced true family. This is how we demonstrate the new covenant.

## REVIEW TEST QUESTIONS

1. When will we live in the eternal covenant and the unshakeable Kingdom?
2. What verse in the Book of Joshua demonstrates that we are no longer waiting for the land promises to be fulfilled?
3. Where is the seven-year period mentioned in the Book of Revelation, and where is it in the Gospels? Cite each and every occurrence in the New Testament of this specific time period.
4. What are the five parts to the Daniel 9 prophecy?
5. Why was AD 70 the worst thing to ever happen to the Jewish people?
6. What was the abomination that caused desolation?

<sup>72</sup> Showers, *There Really Is a Difference*, 103–111. Showers, a devout dispensationalist, explains the difference between the two lenses and demonstrates the logical conclusions of true dispensational thinking.

<sup>73</sup> Hagee, *Final Dawn over Jerusalem*, 108–109. Chapter 3 of Sizer,

*Zion's Christian Soldiers?*, provides helpful insight to the dispensational dual covenant system.

<sup>74</sup> Weigel, "Christian Number-Crunching."

<sup>75</sup> Originally, futurists claimed the temple would be rebuilt on its original site, at the Dome of the Rock, which is also one of the holiest places in Islam. However, because the likelihood of this seems small, in recent years some have suggested the temple actually belongs at a different and less-offensive location.

<sup>76</sup> Henry, *Matthew Henry Commentary*, Daniel 9.

<sup>77</sup> Eusebius, *The Church History*, Vol 3, chapter 5, section 3.

# nineteen



## **MATTHEW 24: THE END OF THE AGE**

In the last chapter, we focused on a proper interpretation of Daniel 9 and how it relates to the new covenant. In this chapter, we will take a close look at Matthew 24 in light of the new covenant.<sup>78</sup>

### **FOUR BASIC ESCHATOLOGY VIEWS**

**Eschatology** is significant, because it shapes how people view the Kingdom and what it means to live in the new

covenant. The central theme of eschatology is the covenant shift from the old covenant to the new covenant. The word *eschatology* is a combination of the word *eschatos* (meaning, “last or last things”) with the suffix *-ology* (meaning, “the study of”). So, *eschatology* is “the study of last things.” Another term often used in the Bible for this concept is *the end of the age*. As we discussed in Chapter 17, the last days are not in our future. However, a very similar term, *the last day*, is in our future. The last days happened in the first century, between AD 30 and AD 70. They were the last days, not of the planet but of the old covenant system. The day when the temple was destroyed was *the last of the last days*. The entire New Testament was written prior to and in anticipation of the culmination of the last days in the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. This belief about the last days, which is a core belief of Better Covenant Theology, differs from many modern views.

To see this, we will first briefly examine each of the four broad views of eschatology: futurism, idealism (or the spiritual view), historicism, and preterism.

**Futurism** is the basic belief that the events described in Scripture’s apocalyptic literature will happen in our future. Within this camp, there are three main divisions related to when the Church will be raptured: pre-tribulation, mid-tribulation, and post-tribulation.

**Idealism**, also known as the spiritual view, sees the Book of Revelation and related passages as allegory. In other words, it is a story in which everything has a symbolic meaning. Thus,



according to this view, the Book of Revelation was not written as a guide for specific individuals within a time period of application. Instead, it is a collection of pictures that always means the same thing to all of us. There will always be beastly systems of world governments, and we can always be encouraged by what we read here to stand firm with the word of our testimony and the blood of the Lamb. This is a newer point of view, approximately one hundred years old.

**Historicism** lays out the events of the Book of Revelation over the last two thousand years and lines it up with different individuals. It stretches the Book of Revelation out over history and assigns different events to different time periods. For example, many past historicists have identified Napoleon Bonaparte as the beast of Revelation 13. This would mean that the material of the first twelve chapters had already happened in prior history, but the chapters following that would be fulfilled in the future until the end of the book and the end of the world. Because this view is hard to support, especially when the so-called beast dies, many blend it with idealism to say that someone like Napoleon represents the spirit or principality of the beast.

**Preterism** gets its name from a Latin word meaning, “to pass.” In other words, it is the view that says the apocalyptic events forecasted in the New Testament have already happened in our past, in AD 70. Thus, it is the opposite of futurism. Within preterism exists two main camps—partial preterism and full preterism, as well as a third that I will refer to as Kik preterism, based on the name of its creator, J. Marcellus Kik.

## CHARISMATICS, COVENANT THEOLOGY, AND ZIONISM

Charismatic Christians are those who have progressed from the Church realm to the supernatural realm and sometimes into the Kingdom realm. Yet, many of them are prevented from progressing into the new covenant realm by the theological lens they ascribe to. We have examined in several places the implications of dispensationalism and covenant theology. Without repeating all that has been said before, here we want to highlight how these two groups relate to the charismatic movement.

First, dispensationalists are typically not charismatics, because dispensationalists believe we live in the Church age, and the Kingdom age (including the supernatural) is in the millennium. For them, all of that is reserved for someday in the future. Dispensationalists also usually believe that when the last of the original apostles died, the age of the apostles ended, and the supernatural gifts ceased until the millennium. Some variation exists on when exactly they believe the gifts ended, but the point is that they do not believe the supernatural gifts exist today. Therefore, it is very hard for a dispensationalist to be a charismatic, because the two beliefs contradict each other.

In contrast to Dispensationalism, there are those who espouse covenant theology; they believe the covenants are a progressive revelation, and each covenant builds on top of the previous covenant. Based on that, the new covenant is essentially a renewal of the old covenant. The problem with this, as we have discussed at length previously, is that it fails to recognize the different types of covenants (grant, kinship,

and vassal) and, therefore, the significant shift between the old covenant and the new. As a result, covenant theologians tend to blend all the covenants together. So, although we live in the new covenant and the old covenant was done away with, they do not believe it was entirely terminated. According to them, we do not have to make sacrifices or go to the temple or obey the civil or dietary laws, but we do still need to keep some of the old covenant Law. Most charismatic Christians belong to this camp. It is the foundation, though it is not named or talked about as such. We see proof of it, however, in the birth of movements like the Messianic Movement, which strives to re-establish parts of the old covenant.

Another background to much of the charismatic movement is a focus on Israel called Zionism. Christian Zionism is a movement unto itself that is closely connected to the charismatic movement. Many people believe Christian Zionism is incredibly positive for the Jewish people. However, what is not often mentioned is the foundational belief in Christian Zionism (which holds futurist eschatology) that we are waiting for certain prophecies in Zechariah to be fulfilled, including the promise that two-thirds of the Israeli people will be destroyed in the future.<sup>79</sup> The emphasis on getting the Jews back to their homeland is based, at least in part, on the belief that their return will initiate the endtimes. Then, they believe, the Church will be raptured, and Israel will be attacked from all sides, and only one-third of them will survive to see Jesus' return to Jerusalem. While some Christians think it is anti-Semitic to not be a Zionist, the opposite is actually true. Christian Zionism, at its core, is anti-Semitic, because it believes toward the eventual destruction of a majority of the Jews. Christian Zionism has

also perpetuated the belief that Jews and gentiles are still separate and that God has separate plans for each.<sup>80</sup> This directly contradicts the new covenant reality explained in Ephesians 2, where it says the wall of separation between Jews and gentiles has been broken down. As a result, we are already “*one new humanity*” in Christ (Eph. 2:15).

This is one of the foundational beliefs of much of charismatic Christianity, causing many charismatics to live in the old covenant with a focus on what they believe to be future endtime events. If we understand the covenant shift that was taking place in the first century, then it becomes easy to understand the topic of eschatology. Yet by holding to covenant theology, it is near impossible to understand eschatology properly. To understand the covenant shift, we will need to examine preterism in greater detail.

## FULL, PARTIAL, AND KIK PRETERISM

**Full preterism** is a very small camp of people, even historically speaking, but their influence has been increasing in the last twenty years. Full preterists claim every single prophecy in the Bible was fulfilled by AD 70, which means nothing is in our future. By contrast, the majority of preterists hold to **partial preterism**, which teaches that most of the biblical prophecies have already been fulfilled, but there are some still in our future, for example: the return of Jesus, the resurrection of the dead, and the final judgment. Some people refer to full preterists as hyper-preterists, which is obviously derogatory. And full preterists sometimes arrogantly refer to

themselves as consistent preterists. But these sorts of loaded terms are not necessary or helpful to academic dialogue.

The belief that Jesus will come back in the future is foundational to partial preterism. This is based, in part, on First Corinthians 13, where it says, “*When the perfect comes, the partial will be done away*” (NASB), talking about the supernatural gifts. In other words, once the perfect comes, we will no longer need to speak in tongues, prophesy, or heal the sick. Most people interpret this “perfect” as the return of Christ, because then those gifts will not be necessary. However, full preterists believe this verse has already been fulfilled, which is why full preterists do not believe in the supernatural gifts. Partial preterism fits much better with the charismatic belief that the gifts of the Spirit are in operation today. Interestingly, many partial preterists are cessationists and do not believe the gifts of the Spirit are for today.

As I mentioned, there is a third form of preterism, which I am referring to as Kik preterism. In 1971, J. Marcellus Kik published his excellent book, *An Eschatology of Victory*. In it, he looks at the history of AD 70 and connects the dots for how it fulfilled, piece-by-piece, Jesus’ prophecy in Matthew 24. This was a monumental work at its time, and it does an excellent job of showing the historical fulfillment of Matthew 24.

The weakness of Kik’s preterism is that he divided the three questions of Matthew 24:3 to be fulfilled in two different time periods.

1. *When will this happen?* (AD 70)

2. *What will be the sign of your coming?*<sup>81</sup> (AD 70)

3. *And of the end of the age?* (Someday in our future)

By interpreting the prophecy of Matthew 24 in this way, Kik showed no understanding of the first century covenant shift that was taking place. Kik essentially took the predictions of Jesus and lined them up with their historical fulfillment, which is helpful, but he did not have any understanding that Jesus was speaking of the end of the old covenant age. Thus, those who follow Kik's method are able to see that Jesus' predictions occurred, but without grasping the true consequence of the covenantal shift.

When people do not recognize the covenantal shift, they are not able to see that *the last days* was a term used for the AD 30–70 transition period. Then the last days gets stretched to fit from the cross of Christ until the return of Christ—as though we are currently in the last days! As a result of Kik preterism, a whole group of Christians believe AD 70 was a fulfillment of Matthew 24, but they do not give it any covenantal significance. Instead, they think the last days have continued from the cross until the present. Acts 2 is one of the passages they use to support this belief:

*This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: "In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will*

*prophesy. I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord. And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Acts 2:16–21).*

They do not realize this passage has been fulfilled, because they interpret it to mean God will pour out His Spirit on every single person on the planet. Thus, they see the last days stretching into the future, toward a time just prior to the end of the world when every person will have the Spirit. Kik preterists hold ardently to the belief that the *end of the age* refers to the end of the world, yet the fact is, the Bible does not mention the end of the world anywhere in anyway. Instead, many verses talk about the earth never ending (see Eccles. 1:4; Ps. 78:69; 104:5). Not only that, but the Greek word for *age* used in the phrase *the end of the age* (see Matt. 24:3) is *aion*, which means “a time period.” By contrast, the phrase *end of the world* would require the use the Greek word *kosmos*, which means “the world, the universe.” Clearly, this belief in the last days or the end of the age as the end of the world is problematic on several levels.

In Better Covenant Theology, we understand Acts 2 refers to the transition from the old covenant, where only a few individuals had the Holy Spirit, to the new covenant, where all believers now have the Spirit. Thus, it does not refer to something that will happen in the future but something Jesus accomplished on the cross. Now all people *can* have the Spirit poured out on them, regardless of age, gender, or position. The

baptism of the Spirit is available to all—which was exactly Peter’s point. It is not about quantity (how many are filled) but about the inclusion of the gentiles (how many *can* be filled). In the new covenant, the Spirit is available to all people in a way that He never was before. The fact that Joel’s prophecy about the last days referred to that specific time between AD 30 and AD 70 is confirmed by the remainder of that prophecy, which goes on to predict events that happened in AD 70. Using the type of apocalyptic language that throughout the Bible referred to the destruction of a city, Joel prophesied:

*I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved (Joel 2:30–32).*

That is what happened in AD 70. These sorts of images are used symbolically throughout the Old Testament, yet so many people want to interpret the same language in the New Testament literally, saying that until all these apocalyptic events happen, the prophecies are unfulfilled. The problem with this, of course, is not only that it violates how the Bible interprets itself, but that it is completely unrealistic. For example, imagine if Revelation 6:12–14 literally happened:

*There was a great earthquake. The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair; the whole moon turned blood red, and the stars in the sky fell to earth, as figs drop from a fig tree when shaken by a strong*



*wind. The heavens receded like a scroll being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place.*

That would quite literally be the end of planet earth. Yet the Book of Revelation continues on for sixteen more chapters. The Jewish people understood this symbolism, but these years later, so many Christians have completely missed it.

## ONLY ONE FULFILLMENT

A common tactic of futurists is to claim that Jesus' predictions of AD 70 were accurate, but they were merely a foreshadowing of the true fulfillment, which will be the end of the world. For a Kik preterist, there is no defense against this reasoning. Yet for a true partial preterist, the rebuttal is easy and obvious. If we understand Matthew 24 and AD 70 in light of the shift from the old covenant to the new covenant, we realize these events can never happen again. Matthew 24 is about the end of the age of the old covenant, and that is something that will never be repeated, because now we live in an eternal covenant that will never be replaced.

Looking back at the context, we can see how clearly Jesus stated the forthcoming destruction. In Matthew 21, after His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, Jesus told several parables about the hardheartedness of the Jews, including the parable of the vineyard (see Matt. 21:33). At the end, He asked, *"Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?"* (Matt. 21:40). The Pharisees answered:

*He will bring those wretches to a wretched end...and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time (Matthew 21:41).*

Thus, they declared their own end. However, just a few verses later, it says, *“When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus’ parables, they knew he was talking about them”* (Matt. 21:45). They clearly understood He was predicting their destruction. This means the disciples would have understood as well. In the next chapter, Jesus continued to declare very harsh destruction over the Jews through the parable of the wedding banquet, which ends with these words: *“The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city”* (Matt. 22:7). Then, in Matthew 23, He pronounced seven woes over the Pharisees. At the end of the chapter, He declared:

*And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berekiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. Truly I tell you, all this will come on this generation (Matthew 23:35–36).*

Immediately afterward, He declared the destruction of the temple in the first two verses of Matthew 24:

*Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its buildings. “Do you see all these things?” he asked.*

*“Truly I tell you, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down” (Matthew 24:1–2).*

At this point, the disciples must have felt overwhelmed and perhaps frightened by the prospect of all Jesus had just said. They knew it related to them and their world in their immediate future, so they asked Jesus when it would happen and what signs would tell them it was near. Clearly, in the context of all Jesus had just said, they were not asking Him about the end of the world but the coming destruction, which would mean the end of the old covenant age.<sup>82</sup> They did not have two events in view, but were simply asking about the one event just predicted.

## THE PARALLELS

In Matthew 24:3 there are three questions—*When is it going to happen? What is the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age?*—whereas the parallel passages in Luke and Mark only contain two questions:

*“Teacher,” they asked, “when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are about to take place?” (Luke 21:7).*

*“Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled?” (Mark 13:4).*

Kik preterists believe that the two questions from Mark and

Luke, as well as the first two questions from Matthew, were fulfilled in AD 70. The unique stance they take is that the third question of Matthew 24:3 is actually about the end of the world. They draw this conclusion because they believe Matthew 24:36–51 prophesies future events not included in Luke 21 and Mark 13. If that is true, then the parables contained in Matthew 24:36–51 should have no parallels in Mark or Luke, yet as we can see in the following chart, parallels do exist:

<b>Matthew 24: three questions</b>	<b>Luke 21: two questions</b>	<b>Mark 13: two questions</b>
Matthew 24:36–41 Days of Noah/Two men in a field	Luke 17:20–36	_____
Matthew 24:42–44 Keep Watch	Luke 21:34–36	Mark 13:32–37
Matthew 24:45–51 Faithful Servant	Luke 12:39–46	Mark 13:34–37

According to Kik, Matthew 24:36–51 stands alone in describing the future coming of Christ and end of the world.<sup>83</sup> However, what Kik missed is that these same three teachings appear in the parallel passages in Luke and Mark, even though Luke and Mark do not record the question about the end of the age and, therefore, are supposed to be fully fulfilled in the past!

In other words, Kik preterism only holds up if one does not examine the parallel accounts of Mark and Luke.

Actually, when we compare the three passages closely, what we see is that the order of the parables and teachings is completely different in each book. Luke for example, recorded these three teachings in three different chapters and in a different order than they appear in Matthew 24. This is helpful to recognize, because it shows us these passages prophesied just one event—AD 70. If just one event is in view, the order does not matter, but if AD 70 *and* a future end of the world were both prophesied, the order would be very important. The lack of a clear dividing line, when comparing all three synoptic gospels, is further proof that Jesus was only talking about one event.

In summary, according to the historical-contextual context, all of Matthew 24 is a prophecy of events that happened in AD 70, which was the end of the age. When we realize this, we then recognize that the whole point of the end of the age was the end of the old covenant. This, if we are honest, must cause us to leave covenant theology behind and realize we cannot keep referring back to a covenant that was obliterated by Christ. As Paul said in Romans 10:4, *“Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.”* Christ is the end; He is the *telos* of the Law in order to bring righteousness to everyone who believes. The end is not something in our future but something Jesus brought for us—the end of the Law.

## FOUR DIFFERENCES

In summary, here is a quick explanation of how Kik preterists differ from partial preterists:

1. Kik preterists stretch out the last days until the end of time, because they do not understand that the last days were the last days of the old covenant.
2. Kik preterists embrace covenant theology and, therefore, do not see the difference between the old covenant and the new covenant.
3. Kik preterists associate *the end of the age* with the end of the world instead of the end of the Mosaic/old covenant age.
4. Kik preterists discard the historical-contextual hermeneutic in favor of covenant theology. Primarily, they are unwilling to properly understand the term, *the end of the age*.

## THREE IMPORTANT TERMS

All this comes back to our interpretation of three Greek words in the New Testament: *age (aion)*, *end (telos)*, and *last (eschatos)*. These three words appear all over the New Testament, and how we understand them will determine how we understand the theme of Scripture. The New Testament writers consistently used these words to say they were in the *last days* and at *the end of the age*—that the old covenant age

was about to end and the new covenant age was beginning. This is a central theme of the New Testament, yet it is completely missed by many modern readers. In Chapter 17, we discussed the use of these phrases to show the crossover period between the covenants and the anticipation in the early believers of the end of the old covenant age. In this chapter, we will look at these terms again, but from a slightly different angle—showing that the early believers did not use them to refer to the end of the world.

## **1. Age (*Aion*)**

As mentioned in Chapter 17, the first century Jewish understanding was that all time is divided into two ages—the present evil age and the glorious age to come. Sadly, though they were looking for it, many of them missed it when it came. This was the grid the New Testament writers were working with, and it would have been understood by their readers. As the famous theologian and writer, N. T. Wright, states:

If Jesus and the early church used the relevant language in the same way as their contemporaries, it is highly unlikely that they would have been referring to the actual end of the world. And it is highly likely that they would have been referring to events within space and time which they interpreted as the coming of the Kingdom.<sup>84</sup>

The Jews of Jesus' day anticipated a time when the current evil age would end and the new age, often called the Messianic

Kingdom, would be established. Clearly, they were not focused on the end of the planet but on the end of the evil age. We see this belief in two ages in many New Testament passages. In Matthew 12:32, Jesus said:

*Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, **either in this age or in the age to come.***

Here, He clearly referred to two ages. We see the same delineation in Mark 10:

*“Truly I tell you,” Jesus replied, “no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much **in this present age:** homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—along with persecutions—**and in the age to come eternal life**” (Mark 10:29–30).*

Likewise, in Ephesians 1:21, Paul wrote about Jesus’ rulership, which is “...*far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only **in the present age but also in the one to come.***” This was Paul’s commentary after the cross but during the transitional period. Thus, he still referred to the evil age as the present age, because the old covenant had not yet been done away with. We see similar references to the evil, present age in many other places (see Luke 20:34; Rom. 12:2 WNT; 1 Cor. 2:6–8; 3:18; 2 Cor. 4:4; Gal. 1:4). These verses clearly present a contrast



between the old (present in the first century) age, which was soon passing away with the old covenant, and the new age, which had arrived in Christ and would soon be fully established. However, Kik preterists drag these verses into the future to the end of the world, meaning that we are currently living in the evil age. Kik preterists are confused, because they think the end of the age and the culmination of the ages will happen in the future. Actually, First Corinthians 10:11 demonstrates just the opposite:

*These things happened to them as examples [speaking of what happened in the Old Testament] and were written down as warnings for us [first century believers], on whom the **culmination of the ages** has come.*

Paul clearly stated that the culmination of the ages had come upon the people of his day. Likewise, in Hebrews 9:26, it says Christ appeared “**at the culmination of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself.**” This happened in the first century. The word translated as “culminated” in these two passages is a version of the Greek word for “end,” *telos*.<sup>85</sup> One of the definitions of this word is “not strictly termination but rather consummation or completion that ushers in a new time, era, or age.” That is what *culmination* means in these two verses. The culmination of the ages completed the old era and ushered in the new era. Clearly, it was a first-century event.

Also, it was an event the disciples expected, as we can see in their question in Matthew 24:3. Like every other Jew during that time, they expected their present age to end. Jesus

addressed this expectation when He told the disciples He would be with them *always and to the very end of the age* (see Matt. 28:20). He was responding to their concern about the approaching end of the age by reassuring them that He would be with them. This statement only makes sense if it referred to something that would happen in their lifetime.

In Matthew 13, Jesus used *the end of the age* to prophesy the events of AD 70, when Jerusalem was burned to the ground:

*...The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels. As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age.... This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 13:39–40, 49–50).*

Many Christians have placed this at the end of the world, but this is not how the disciples heard it. They understood, because it was in the lingo of their day, that the end of the age referred to the end of the old covenant. And they believed it would happen soon. Jesus told them the end of the age would separate the good from the evil, and this happened in AD 70, when the Christians fled to Mount Pella just prior to the city being burned to the ground. In a very real sense, those who had accepted Jesus and His new covenant were separated from those who had not. In other words, Matthew 13 does not apply to the future or the end of the world.

Matthew 13 starts with the parable of the sower. Then, in verse 24, it tells the parable of the seeds. Verses 31–35 talk about how the Kingdom is like a mustard seed and like yeast. Then, starting in verse 36, we find the explanation of the parable of the weeds. Verse 44 begins the parable of the hidden treasure and the pearl. This culminates with the vision of separating and the judgment at the end of the age:

*Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away. This is how it will be at the **end of the age**. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 13:47–50).*

In conclusion to all He had just said, Jesus then asked His disciples, “Have you understood all these things?” and they said yes (Matt. 13:51). In response, Jesus said:

*Therefore, every teacher of the law [old covenant] who has become a disciple in the kingdom of heaven [new covenant] is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old (Matthew 13:52).*

That is the conclusion to everything in Matthew 13. He was telling them that, in that time period, if people came out of the old covenant world and into the new covenant world, they

would be those who could go in and get the examples written for us (see 1 Cor. 10:6, 11) as treasure in the Old Testament and bring them over into the new covenant understanding. In other words, such people would be able to understand both. They would be able to reach back into the Old Testament and grab the treasures out of it.

## 2. End (*Telos*)

Another word in the New Testament related what we are examining is the word *end* (*telos*). What is it the end of? Modern Christians have been prone to interpret many passages as references to the end of the world, but this word is actually contextually connected to the previous phrase, *the end of the age*. For this reason, it can be helpful when we see *end* used like this in the New Testament to insert *of the age*. For example, in Matthew 10:22, it says: “*You will be hated by everyone because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end* [of the age] *will be saved.*” If we really think about what this verse is saying, we realize it cannot be talking about eternal salvation and the end of the world. We receive eternal salvation by accepting Jesus as our Savior, not by enduring till the end of the world. Instead, what Jesus meant was that those who stood firm in their faith and did not return to the old covenant would be saved out of the coming destruction in AD 70. Likewise, Matthew 24:13 says, “*...but the one who stands firm to the end* [of the age] *will be saved.*”

Similarly, Jesus referred to the end of the age when He said, “*You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that*

*you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but **the end** [of the age] is still to come” (Matt. 24:6), and, “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world [oikoumenē<sup>86</sup>] as a testimony to all nations, and then **the end** [of the age] will come” (Matt. 24:14).*

Paul also used this term to refer to the coming judgment of the old covenant system, as we see in Romans 10:4: “*For Christ is **the end** of the law [or end of the age] for righteousness to everyone who believes*” (NASB). The *end of the law* and the *end of the age* were synonymous, because the age of the Law was ending. Likewise, in First Thessalonians 2:15–16, in speaking of those who had crucified Christ and the judgment coming upon them in AD 70, Paul again used this term:

*...They displease God and are hostile to everyone in their effort to keep us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. In this way they always heap up their sins to the limit. The wrath of God has come upon them **at last**.*

Here, the word translated as *last* is the same word often translated as *end*. The literal translation is simply, “to the end.” In other words, the wrath of God was coming upon them until the end of the age and the end of the Law. In contrast to those headed for destruction, Paul promised believers: “*He will also keep you firm to **the end** [of the age], so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ*” (1 Cor. 1:8). He was not promising that God would keep them firm until the end of the world. That would not make sense, since all of his

original readers have been dead for many years, and the world still exists. Instead, Paul was talking about the end of the age, which many of his readers lived to see. Similarly, the author of Hebrews wrote, “*But Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to **the end** [of the age]*” (Heb. 3:6 NKJV). The only end the early believers had in view was the end of the age they were living in. They were focused on seeing the end of the old covenant, not the end of the world.

### 3. Last (*Eschatos*)

The third Greek word, *eschatos*,<sup>87</sup> is translated as “last.” Most often, it appears in the phrase, *the last days*, which appears throughout the New Testament letters. For example, in Second Timothy 3:1, Paul wrote, “*But know this, that in the **last days** perilous times will come....*” Paul was declaring this to Timothy, who would witness those perilous times. He was not making a declaration about a day in the distant future. Those terrible times of the last days are behind us. Likewise, Peter wrote of the last days, “*...scoffers will come in the **last days**, walking according to their own lusts*” (2 Pet. 3:3 NKJV). Futurists read these verses and assume the last days refers to a time in the future; however, as the writer of Hebrews made clear, the time of the *last days* was actually the first century: “*In **these last days** he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe*” (Heb. 1:2).

Similarly, the apostle James wrote to early believers in

danger of being distracted by material wealth in the last days:

*Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth **in the last days** (James 5:3).*

At the end of his rebuke, he said, “*You too, be patient and stand firm, because **the Lord’s coming is near***” (James 5:8). He was speaking of the Lord’s coming in judgment on Jerusalem, not His second coming. His coming in judgment was very near at that time, and in light of that, James warned the early believers that they must not be caught up with material things that could keep them from fleeing Jerusalem when the time came.

In First Peter 1, Peter wrote:

*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed **in the last time** (1 Peter 1:3–5).*

In verse 20, he added: “*He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed **in these last times** for your sake.*” “*These last times*” refers to the day Peter lived in, the first century. Whether in First Peter 1:3–5 or 20, Peter was speaking to his first century audience about their position as

those who lived in the last times.

The apostle John also testified of the immediacy of the last days in his time. He wrote: *“Dear children, **this is the last hour**; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. **This is how we know it is the last hour**”* (1 John 2:18).<sup>88</sup> Likewise, Jude wrote:

*They said to you, “**In the last times** there will be scoffers who will follow their own ungodly desires.” **These are the people who divide you**, who follow mere natural instincts and do not have the Spirit (Jude 18–19).*

In the present tense, Jude described the divisive people who were causing problems in the early Church of the first century. These people, he said, were the ones prophesied to appear in the last days. From these verses, we can see that the early apostles understood the last days to refer to their current time period, the time until the end of the age and the destruction of Jerusalem. This means, for us, the last days are in the past, not in our future.

## MATTHEW 25

A logical question, as we discuss Matthew 24, is “What about Matthew 25?” Matthew 25 talks about the sheep and the goats and the great white throne. According to the partial preterist view, these verses *do* describe events still in our future. Part of the reason for this belief is the fact that Matthew



25 has no parallel in the other Gospels. It stands completely alone. A second reason can be found in the contrast between Matthew 24 and Matthew 25. In Matthew 24:48, the wicked servant told himself, *"My master is staying away a long time,"* and he began to beat his fellow servants and eat and drink with drunkards. But he was wrong; his master came back immediately (just like the judgment in AD 70 was imminent). By contrast, in Matthew 25, it says that *"after a long time"* the master of the servants returned and settled accounts with them. In Matthew 25, the time referred to is actually a long time, whereas in Matthew 24 it was thought to be long but was actually very short. Also, in Matthew 25:5, it says, *"The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep."* This sounds more like Church history than the forty-year window between AD 30 and AD 70, when the Church was actively expecting His return in judgment on Jerusalem. According to Milton Terry, most commentaries actually draw the line at Matthew 25, saying that is where Jesus started talking about the distant future.

## CONCLUDING THOUGHT

Though many leaders use the terminology we have covered in this chapter mistakenly, due to the residue of covenant theology in their belief system, the truth is: We are *not* now living in the last days. *The last days* refers to a horrible time in human history that, thankfully, is two thousand years behind us. Now, we live in the new covenant and the unshakable Kingdom. We are advancing the Kingdom, and as we do, God is *"making everything new"* (Rev. 21:5). We are

still progressing forward toward the time, in the future, when Jesus will arrive on earth, and heaven and earth will fully meet and blend. That event is still in our future, but it is not the culmination of the ages. That culmination happened when the two covenants met in the first century, and the old was made obsolete and destroyed by the new.

## REVIEW TEST QUESTIONS

1. Dispensationalists are typically not charismatics. Why?
2. What is the central theme of *eschatology*?
3. Full preterism believes all prophecy has occurred, but partial preterism believes what three things are still in the future?
4. What three Greek words do we see for *last*, *end*, and *age*?

### Key Terms

eschatology	preterism
futurism	full preterism
idealism	partial preterism
historicism	Kik preterism

# RELATED MATERIAL

J. Marcellus Kik, *An Eschatology of Victory*.

<sup>78</sup> For an in depth study on Matthew 24, see also the author's book, *Raptureless: An Optimistic Guide to the End of the World*, Rev. ed.

<sup>79</sup> “‘In the whole land,’ declares the Lord, ‘two-thirds will be struck down and perish; yet one-third will be left in it’” (Zech. 13:8).

<sup>80</sup> Sizer, 40–73.

<sup>81</sup> The word *coming* here was connected, in Jewish thought, to God coming in judgment upon a city or nation. Logically, they could not have been asking about Christ's second coming, because He had not even died yet, and they had no concept of Him returning. Instead, they were clearly asking when He was going to come in judgment against Jerusalem.

<sup>82</sup> As mentioned previously, the concept of the end of the world is not in Scripture and would have been a completely foreign idea for them.

<sup>83</sup> Kik, *An Eschatology of Victory*, 158–165.

<sup>84</sup> Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 2:321.

<sup>85</sup> *Strong's Concordance*, Greek #4930.

<sup>86</sup> *Strong's Concordance*, Greek #3625: a localized region, not planet earth.

<sup>87</sup> *Strong's Concordance*, Greek #2078.

<sup>88</sup> The term *antichrist* is used only four times in the New Testament—three times in First John and once in Second John. It always and only is a reference to a false teaching in the first century that claimed Jesus had not come in the flesh. This was part of the Gnostic heresy of the first

century. Welton, *Raptureless*, 138–141.

twenty



# **REVELATION: THE END OF THE MOSAIC COVENANT**

The core emphasis of eschatology is the shift from the old covenant to the new covenant. If we want to understand the Book of Revelation, we must recognize this truth.

## **THE CHALLENGE OF REVELATION**

In some ways, the Book of Revelation seems to fit better

with the Old Testament prophetic books than with the New Testament. It is the only book of its kind—apocalyptic literature—in the New Testament. Actually, the typical apocalyptic literature of that day, written by the Greeks and Romans, was never meant to be interpreted. Instead, such writings contained a bunch of symbols without interpretation for the purpose of showing that something horrible, tragic, and epic had taken place. That was the pagan version of apocalyptic literature, which Revelation does not quite fit, because Revelation, which is filled with symbols, was meant to be interpreted and understood.

Many scholars say the Book of Revelation is the most Hebraic book in the New Testament. This is because it is almost twice as long as Hebrews and is overflowing with quotes from the Old Testament. The majority of these quotes are from the Book of Ezekiel, and a significant number also come from Isaiah and Jeremiah. Ezekiel, Isaiah, and Jeremiah all prophesied immediately prior to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians. This is an important correlation, which we will examine more closely later in this chapter.

Because Revelation is so Hebraic, it cannot be properly understood without the backdrop of the Hebrew story and Scripture in the Old Testament. However, many new and young believers become fascinated with this book because it has been sensationalized in the media. Thus, they jump into it with very little knowledge of the other sixty-five books and become entranced by Revelation. The obviously problem with this is that trying to understand Revelation without understanding the other sixty-five books of the Bible leads to confusion and

gullibility to anyone's interpretation. On the opposite end of the spectrum, tremendous Bible teachers over the generations, including leading reformers, have declined to comment on the Book of Revelation because it was so beautiful, deep, profound, and mysterious. They believed any simple comments they might make on the book would do it injustice, so they left it alone.

It is a tragic reality that some of the greatest minds of Christianity have not spoken on Revelation, while novices have become fascinated with it and created strange doctrines completely separate from the context of the book. Some of these doctrines have significantly impacted the popular view of Revelation and the endtimes. This reality has made it increasingly important for us to understand this book properly, within its context.

Throughout this textbook, we have referred to the five covenants and their canons, or the material that surrounds them. The Book of Revelation is part of the new covenant canon, yet many people read it as a separate entity, especially those who see it as being fulfilled progressively over history (historicist) or in the future (futurist). Only when we understand Revelation's intricate connection to the new covenant will we be able to interpret it properly. It is completely illogical for us to assume that, in the midst of a season of great trial and persecution, John would write a book to the early believers containing bizarre symbolism they did not understand about a time in the distant future. Such an idea makes no sense. Instead, John wrote Revelation—one of the longest books in the New Testament—to encourage and

comfort the believers who were experiencing great persecution by showing them what was happening in the Kingdom of God and what would soon happen to relieve their suffering.

It follows then that the early believers would have understood exactly what Revelation meant. They would have been familiar with the symbolism and the Hebrew history, and they would have known what John was prophesying. Otherwise, it could not have been encouraging or comforting to them. Because of our distance in time and culture, we have difficulty understanding it, but to them it made sense. Only when we go back and attempt to read it from their cultural perspective, informed by the Hebrew context and the book's connection to the rest of the new covenant canon, will we be able to begin to properly understand it.

## REVELATION AS A PAINTING

Many people want to approach Revelation with a microscope, analyzing each individual symbol. However, they do this apart from a broader understanding of the book. Instead, we must approach this book as an experienced art critic would approach a painting. The story of Revelation is not about a particular detail, just as the meaning of a painting cannot be found in just one aspect of it. True appreciators of art know they must first back up far enough to understand a piece of art from a distance. This perspective will then enable them to understand the details in light of the overall context. To do this, we must ask a series of questions.



## 1. When was it painted?

If we were looking at a large painting of a battle scene, it would be important for us to know when the painting was painted and what time period and event it was about. Without that understanding, it would be impossible for us to understand many of the details of the painting specific to that period and event.

In the same way, it is crucial to understand when the Book of Revelation was written. There are two main positions on the dating of Revelation. One camp says it was written around AD 65, just prior to the destruction of Jerusalem. The other camp places it later, in AD 96, twenty-six years after Jerusalem's fall. The historical position has, for the most part, been the earlier date. Most of the evidence within Scripture indicates the book was written before the fall of Jerusalem. However, some modern scholars point to a later date because the leader of Rome in AD 96 was Domitian, and the Church historian, Irenaeus, writing around AD 120, seemed to say Revelation was written during Domitian's reign.<sup>89</sup> The problem with Irenaeus is that he has lost some credibility with scholars because he also wrote that Jesus was in ministry from the age of thirty to the age of fifty (instead of three and a half years).<sup>90</sup> That mistake on his part has caused people to question his reliability with dates and numbers. It is also interesting to note a little-known detail highlighted by Frank Viola in his book, *The Untold Story of the New Testament Church*. Domitian was actually emperor for a six-month period in AD 70; then he was again emperor from AD 81–96. This means that, even if Irenaeus wrote accurately, he could have been referring to this earlier time period, which was

prior to the fall of Jerusalem.<sup>91</sup>

Apart from the question of Irenaeus' records, we can find ten solid proofs for dating the writing of Revelation prior to AD 70.<sup>92</sup>

1. The earliest existing version of the New Testament, called the Syriac, includes a sentence right before the Book of Revelation that says: *"Again, the revelation which was upon the holy John, the evangelist from God when he was on the island of Patmos where he was thrown by the Emperor Nero."* Nero ruled the Roman Empire from AD 54–68.
2. Revelation 17:10 says, *"They are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; but when he does come, he must remain for only a little while."* The first five Roman emperors, who had already died, were Julius Caesar, Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, and Claudius. The sixth emperor was Nero, the one who currently ruled. After Nero would come the seventh: *"the other has not yet come; but when he does come, he must remain for only a little while."* Following Nero, who held power for fourteen years, Galba came to the throne and ruled for only six months. In other words, John was referring to the five past Roman emperors, the current emperor (Nero), and the coming one, who John prophesied would reign for a very short time. This is a stunningly accurate prophecy that clearly dates the writing during Nero's reign.

3. Revelation 1:7 says “*those who pierced him*” would see Jesus’ coming. This places these events (and the writing of Revelation) within the life span of those who would have been adults at the time of Jesus crucifixion. Those who literally pierced Him would see Him coming in judgment.<sup>93</sup>
4. Revelation 6–7 speaks about the Jewish persecution of Christians, which is also recorded in the rest of the New Testament and historical records. However, all persecution from the Jews ceased after AD 70, because their entire world had fallen apart.
5. The influence of the Judaizing heretics is mentioned in the letters to the seven churches in Revelation 2–3, and they are rebuked in several places (see Rev. 2:6, 9, 15; 3:9). This dates Revelation prior to AD 70, because the Judaizers essentially vanished after the destruction of the temple. There was no longer any way they could return to the old system.
6. Revelation 11 talks about measuring the temple in Jerusalem, which obviously did not exist after AD 70. If this vision had taken place only twenty-six years after the temple was destroyed, this would have been mentioned. Instead, the writer treated Jerusalem and the temple as if they were still standing.
7. In Revelation 1:1 and 1:3, as well as 22:10 and 22:20, we find internal time indicators that declare “*the time is near;*” it is “*shortly to come to pass,*” “*he is coming*

*quickly,*” and *“behold, he comes speedily.”* John clearly indicated the time of judgment was close. This only fits if the book was written before the destruction of Jerusalem.

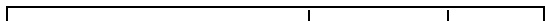
8. One of the early Church fathers, Jerome, wrote down in one of his books that “John the Apostle was seen. And he with difficulty was carried to the church in AD 96 and could only speak a few words to the people.”<sup>94</sup> John was feeble and infirm with age by AD 96. However, in Revelation 10:11, God told John, *“You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, languages and kings.”* This indicated he would live longer and be healthy enough to travel and speak before rulers, which leads us to conclude that Revelation was written much earlier than AD 96.
9. Daniel, who prophesied about events that would happen hundreds of years later, was told, *“...Roll up and seal the words of the scroll until the time of the end” for it is a “long way off”* (Dan. 12:4). By contrast, John was told, *“Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this scroll, because the time is near”* (Rev. 22:10). While Daniel was told to seal it up because it was a long way off (about 500 years), John was told not to seal it up because it was about to come to pass. In other words, the prophecy was about the events of AD 70.
10. The existence of only seven churches in Asia Minor (as seen in Revelation 2–3) indicates a writing date before

the great expansion of Christianity into that region that occurred immediately following the fall of Jerusalem.

Clearly, the overwhelming evidence points toward dating the writing of Revelation prior to AD 70.<sup>95</sup>

## **2. How (with what medium) was the painting painted?**

Now that we know the time period, the next question we have to ask is *how*, or with what medium, was the painting painted? Why did the artist paint the painting this way? In art, there is always a reason behind the medium the artist chooses. Also, different mediums were developed in different time periods, so the combination of time period and medium can tell us quite a bit. When we consider the Book of Revelation in this light, we see that it is obviously different in medium from the rest of the New Testament. The question is, why did John write it that way? The answer to this may not be obvious to us, because many of us do not understand the Old Testament very well, especially the storyline from Solomon to Matthew. Because of this, we do not recognize that in Revelation John was paralleling very closely and clearly the Book of Ezekiel. He used the imagery of Ezekiel (as well as Isaiah and Jeremiah), who wrote about the coming destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 586 BC. Because his subject matter was so similar, John used Ezekiel's imagery and structure to prophesy the next destruction of Jerusalem. When we compare these books, we find that Ezekiel and Revelation are amazingly parallel. Each of these elements occurs in both books:



<b>CONTENT</b>	<b>REVELATION</b>	<b>EZEKIEL</b>
The Throne Vision	4	1
The Book	5	2 – 3
The Four Plagues	6:1 – 8	5
The Slain under the Altar	6:9 – 11	6
The Wrath of God	6:12 – 17	7
The Seal on the Saints' Foreheads	7	9
The Coals from the Altar	8	10
No More Delay	10:1 – 7	12
The Eating of the Book	10:8 – 11	2
The Measuring of the Temple	11:1 – 2	40 – 43
Jerusalem and Sodom	11:8	16
The Cup of Wrath	14	23
The Vine of the Land	14:18 – 20	15
The Great Harlot	17 – 18	16, 23
The Lament over the City	18	27
The Scavengers' Feast	19	39
The First Resurrection	20:4 – 6	37
The Battle with Gog and Magog	20:7 – 9	38 – 39
The New Jerusalem	21	40 – 48

The first century readers would have recognized this parallel and understood the implications. They would have understood that John was prophesying a very similar event to what Ezekiel had prophesied. The only difference was the destroyer (Rome instead of Babylon) and the end result. While Ezekiel prophesied a post-exilic return and a rebuilding of Jerusalem, John did not prophesy either. Instead, he prophesied Jerusalem being replaced by a new heaven, new earth, and new (heavenly) Jerusalem. The early readers would have picked up on this difference, too, and the significant shift being prophesied. The reality of this parallel is confirmed by the historical fact that the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC and the destruction of the temple in AD 70 happened on the same day in the Jewish calendar—the ninth day of Av. The incredible parallel in those two dates and the prophetic irony confirm that these two prophecies contain the same concept—except this time there will be no rebuilding and restoring. Instead of returning to the old covenant, they would transition completely into the new covenant. This is why John wrote the way he did. By using the same structure and imagery as Ezekiel and drawing from Isaiah and Jeremiah, he painted a clear comparison between what had happened before and what was about to happen again.

### **3. Why did the artist choose to paint this painting?**

The third important question we must ask is: Why did the artist choose to paint this painting? What was the purpose?

When it comes to Revelation, we know Jesus had already prophesied AD 70 in His Olivet Discourse, as recorded in Matthew 24, Luke 21, and Mark 13. The early believers already had these books, so what was John's purpose in writing the Book of Revelation thirty-five years later?

We can find an answer to this, first, in the fact that John's Gospel does not include a declaration of AD 70 and the coming destruction. In a sense, then, the Book of Revelation is a parallel to the Olivet Discourse recorded in the other three Gospels. John was a sort of renegade, in that he did not write his Gospel like the other three gospel writers. He took a completely different approach and recorded risky stories (like Jesus' command to eat His flesh and drink His blood) that the other Gospels omit. It makes sense, then, that John would not write the normal Olivet Discourse but the highly symbolic Book of Revelation that paralleled the Old Testament prophets. This fit with John's personality as a writer much more than it would have for any of the other New Testament writers.

Second, when Jesus appeared to John and gave him a vision that paralleled the destruction of Jerusalem in the Old Testament, it also served as an update and encouragement to the Christians who had been believing for the last thirty-five years that Jesus would bring judgment at any moment. He was reminding them to keep watch and encouraging them that it was just around the corner. At this point, many of John's peers had been killed by the Romans, and Revelation served as a sort of last cry and reminder: "It is coming. Do not lose hope! Stand strong and persevere!" It was both John's parallel to the Olivet Discourse and an admonition to the Christians of his time to



keep holding on.

#### **4. Where was the painting painted?**

The next question is: Where was the painting painted? What location does it reference? The location makes a big difference in the historical understanding of the piece. The same is true for Revelation. Discovering what geographic location it was written in and was written about provides an important framework for our interpretation. Many Americans, reading from a futurist perspective, assume Revelation speaks of a worldwide catastrophe. However, the text actually points to a regional event.

Over and over, the text speaks of thirds—a third of the grass, a third of the trees, a third of the earth. Because of mistranslation, it is easy for us to read this in a global context. However, the Greek word often translated as “earth” or “world” would be better translated “land.” The Greek language has two words commonly translated as *earth* in the New Testament: *kosmos*, which means “the whole planet,”<sup>96</sup> and *ge*, which means “a local, inhabited earth” or “the land of a particular nation.”<sup>97</sup> This word *ge* is used sixty-seven times in Revelation, clearly showing us that the book is about a local, inhabited region, not about the entire planet. By contrast, *kosmos* is used only three times in Revelation:

*The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: “The kingdom of the world [kosmos] has become the kingdom of our*

*Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign for ever and ever” (Revelation 11:15).*

*All inhabitants of the earth [ge] will worship the beast—all whose names have not been written in the Lamb’s book of life, the Lamb who was slain from the creation of the world [kosmos] (Revelation 13:8).*

*The inhabitants of the earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the creation of the world [kosmos] will be astonished when they see the beast, because it once was, now is not, and yet will come (Revelation 17:8b).*

Each of these verses uses *kosmos* in reference to the whole planet earth. The remainder of the Book of Revelation refers to the events of a local area. Obviously, there is a huge difference between saying a third of the grass and trees around Israel will be burned and saying a third of the grass and trees of the planet will be burned. When we think of the damage armies do to the landscape, this number seems very logical in a regional context. And that is exactly what happened locally in the land of Israel.

This is important to understand, also, because it explains why other horrific events in history were not prophesied and recorded in the Bible. The reason is because this was a local event specifically connected to the history of the new covenant. Those other historic events were not related to the covenant transition. Revelation is included in the Bible because it tells the story of the destruction of the old covenant

at a specific time and location in our past.

## THE UNVEILING OF CHRIST

Another important aspect of any painting is its name. The same is true of a book. The full name of Revelation is “The Revelation of Jesus Christ.” It is not the book of revelations in general but the revelation of someone specific—Jesus Christ. This should cause us to ask some questions. First, why is this unique from the events of Jesus’ life and death? Was He fully revealed in His birth, ministry, death, and resurrection? Or is a further revelation necessary? Second, if He still needed to be revealed, what was hiding Him?

The ideas in these questions may seem to contradict much of what we have learned in Christianity, but they actually fit well with the New Testament writers, who wrote of an imminent revealing of Jesus Christ. For example, Peter wrote:

*These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor **when Jesus Christ is revealed*** (1 Peter 1:7).

Just a little bit later, he repeated this idea when he said, “*Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you **when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming***” (1 Pet. 1:13). As mentioned previously, *coming* was a first century idiom used throughout Scripture to refer to coming in destruction. Peter was not

talking about Jesus' final coming in this passage but about Jesus' coming in destruction on Jerusalem.

Likewise, in Second Thessalonians 1:6–7, while addressing people under tremendous persecution, Paul wrote:

*God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen **when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven** in blazing fire with his powerful angels.*

That is exactly what happened in AD 70, when the destruction of Jerusalem brought an end to those who were troubling them. Jewish persecution of Christians stopped, and though the Romans did continue to persecute the Christians, the severity of it significantly decreased after the death of Nero in AD 68. All this happened as Paul said it would—“...*when the Lord Jesus is revealed.*” In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul also wrote, “*Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly **wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed***” (1 Cor. 1:7). These are just a few examples of a prominent theme in the New Testament. They were waiting for the full revelation of Jesus in the near future and connected to the destruction of Jerusalem. So, when John named the Book of Revelation, it was a clear statement that the event he prophesied in it was the revealing of Jesus. It was the event they had all been waiting for.

This is connected to the second question—What was hiding (or veiling) Jesus? The answer is in Second Corinthians

3, where Paul talked about the old covenant:

*Now if the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, transitory though it was, will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious? If the ministry that brought condemnation was glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness! For what was glorious has no glory now in comparison with the surpassing glory. **And if what was transitory came with glory, how much greater is the glory of that which lasts** (2 Corinthians 3:7–11).*

The glory of the new covenant is far greater than the glory of the old covenant ever was, and so Paul concluded:

*Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold. We are not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face to prevent the Israelites from seeing the end of what was passing away. But their minds were made dull, **for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away. Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts.** But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, **who with unveiled faces** contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory,*

*which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:12–18).*

In other words, it was the old covenant that veiled Jesus. It veiled Him when He was born, it veiled Him when He died, and it veiled Him when He was resurrected. It wasn't until Revelation, an unveiling, that the veil was taken away. What Revelation prophesied became reality when the temple and old covenant were finally destroyed. The veil of judgment and death, through which people had seen God since the days of the vassal covenant, was finally removed. The old covenant had prevented people from seeing who God really is; all they had seen was judgment and condemnation. But on the other side of AD 70, that veil has been taken away, and we are now free to see God as the loving father He is. The first century believers would have clearly understood that this is what Revelation is about—prophesying the destruction of the old covenant, which had been veiling God, and thereby revealing fully the glory of Christ and His new covenant.

## GOD'S HEART IN REVELATION

When people read Revelation without understanding the background and purpose, it can seem very terrifying, disturbing, tragic, and confusing. Futurists live fearful of experiencing these events in their lifetimes, and even some preterists look back to the historic events with horror. However, when we read it with an understanding of the new covenant and its canon, we begin to see God's heart in it. Certainly, the loss of life was tragic and terrible. We do not want to overlook

that. However, to God the events of the Book of Revelation were glorious and beautiful *because* they initiated the anticipated moment in history when the veil would at last be removed. God had suffered through fifteen hundred years of being misunderstood and rejected, all because of the veil the Israelites had created when they rejected His covenant offer and asked instead for the Law. Now, that veil could no longer get in the way and prevent people from relating with Him. If we get this, we see how glorious this truly was.

Revelation was not about the destruction of a people but the destruction of a flawed system that had veiled God for years. And it was the revelation of the new covenant in Christ. We see this in Revelation 11:19, where it says:

*Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and within his temple was seen the ark of his covenant. And there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake and a severe hailstorm.*

The earthly ark of the covenant had been lost in the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC. It had not been seen on earth for many years. When Jesus died, the temple was shaken and the veil was torn, revealing an empty room where the ark should have been. When John saw the ark of the covenant, he was not seeing that old earthly ark of the old covenant, which had been lost. He was actually seeing the temple in heaven, where Jesus entered and, according to Hebrews, sprinkled His blood on the heavenly ark of the covenant. If Jesus had put His blood on the ark of the old covenant, He would have been the perfect lamb sacrifice, and His blood would have sealed us

into the old covenant forever. Thankfully, instead, He put His blood on the ark of the new covenant in the temple in heaven. This was an incredible and glorious transition from the burden of the Law into the freedom of faith!

We see further evidence of Revelation as a covenant canon document in this often-misunderstood passage:

*I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this scroll: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to that person the plagues described in this scroll. And if anyone takes words away from this scroll of prophecy, God will take away from that person any share in the tree of life and in the Holy City, which are described in this scroll (Revelation 22:18–19).*

This command not to add to or take away from something is found one other place in Scripture: Deuteronomy 4:2, which says, “*Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the Lord your God that I give you.*” In fact, this sort of phrase was common covenant language used to “seal” a covenant between two parties.<sup>98</sup> Thus, it makes absolute sense that a statement like this would close out the final book in the canon of the new covenant. The purpose of Revelation 22:18–19 is not to scare people but to demonstrate Revelation’s position within the canon of the new covenant. It was another way of showing that the whole book is a covenant book, one that was very important to the first century believers, who were relying on its instructions to be able to escape the destruction of Jerusalem. This is why it was so important that no material was added or



removed.

## A SURVEY OF REVELATION

Now that we understand the background and context of Revelation, we will take a very brief look at the contents of chapters 1 through 20. The Book of Revelation is divided into nine parts. It begins with an introduction and ends with an epilogue; in between are seven visions.

1. The Introduction
2. First Vision: The Seven Churches
3. Second Vision: The Seven Seals
4. Third Vision: The Seven Trumpets
5. Fourth Vision: Followers of the Lamb or the Followers of the Beast
6. Fifth Vision: The Seven Bowls
7. Sixth Vision: The Babylonian Harlot and the Bride
8. Seventh Vision: New Heavens and New Earth
9. Epilogue

For most of the remainder of this chapter, we will focus on the seventh vision, but before we do, we will look briefly at Revelation 18–19, which tells of the fall of Babylon.

# THE FALL OF BABYLON

In Revelation 18, beginning with verse 9, we find a section often referred to as the “Threefold Woe over Babylon’s Fall.” The first question we must answer is: What city was John referring to using the name *Babylon*? The answer can be found by examining the use of a phrase often used in Revelation—the *great city*. The identity of this city is clarified in Revelation 11:8, where it speaks of the two witnesses: “*Their bodies will lie in the public square of **the great city**—which is figuratively called Sodom and Egypt—where also their Lord was crucified.*” In other words, the great city is Jerusalem. That is where Jesus was crucified. We see that John was using these names symbolically in his statement, “*which is figuratively called Sodom and Egypt.*” This means, when we see the names Sodom and Egypt in Revelation, they actually refer to Jerusalem. Because Jerusalem had become like *Sodom* and *Egypt* in God’s eyes, the plagues and destruction that once came on Egypt and Sodom were now coming on Jerusalem. These two names are consistently used as a picture of Jerusalem throughout the book.

The other picture of Jerusalem is Babylon. We know this because it too is referred to as *the great city*. That is our clue that it is another symbol for Jerusalem and the coming judgment. We see this term used throughout Revelation 18, where it talks about the fall of Babylon:

*Woe! Woe to you, **great city**, you mighty city of*

*Babylon! In one hour your doom has come! (Revelation 18:10).*

*Woe! Woe to you, **great city**, dressed in fine linen, purple and scarlet, and glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls! In one hour such great wealth has been brought to ruin... (Revelation 18:16–17).*

*Was there ever a city like this **great city**? (Revelation 18:18).*

*Woe! Woe to you, **great city**, where all who had ships on the sea became rich through her wealth! In one hour she has been brought to ruin! (Revelation 18:19).*

*With such violence the **great city** of Babylon will be thrown down, never to be found again (Revelation 18:21).*

John clearly connected Babylon, *the great city*, to the great city mentioned in Revelation 11:8—Jerusalem. Thus we can see that in Revelation, the names *Babylon*, *Sodom*, and *Egypt* (as well as *the Harlot*) all symbolically point to Jerusalem. The threefold woe over Babylon's fall is really the woe over Jerusalem's fall. In chapter 19, we find "The Threefold Hallelujah Over Babylon's Fall." This is the opposite perspective on the same event. While Revelation 18 shows the grief of humanity over the destruction of Jerusalem, which was an incredible trade city, their holy city, and the city of their ancestors, Revelation 19 gives heaven's perspective, which is not woe but rejoicing. Heaven rejoiced over the fall of

Jerusalem, because it was the end of the old covenant and the beginning of the fullness of the glorious new covenant.

## THE NEW HEAVEN AND NEW EARTH

This leads us to the seventh vision of Revelation: the new heaven and new earth in Revelation 21–22. Most Christians have been taught that this is a picture of heaven after the final judgment. The problem with this idea, however, is that at the end of chapter 22 John said, “*This is coming to pass soon.*” The question is: Does the word *this* include everything prior to it in Revelation? Is all of the book coming to pass soon, or just part of it?

When we look at Revelation 21–22 without assuming they describe heaven, we actually find some startling parallels to the new covenant. Heaven certainly exists as the abode of God and believers after death (and after the future final return of Christ). Yet this passage does not describe only something in eternity but something we can experience right now. It is the “age to come” the Jews believed would replace the present evil age. That is exactly what John was describing symbolically here. Following are nine evidences that Revelation 21–22 is not a description of heaven but a description of the new covenant world:

1. **The water of life (see Rev. 22:1).** This represents God’s offer of salvation. Jesus spoke about it in John 4 with the woman at the well. He also spoke about it at the feast in John 7. We are invited to come to Him and

drink.

2. **The twelve foundations with the apostles' names written on them (see Rev. 21:14).** Paul also wrote of the Church being built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets in Ephesians 2:20. That is not just for the future but for the present.
3. **The heavenly Jerusalem as a cube (see Rev. 21:16).** The city is described as a cube, with each side measuring 1,200 stadia, which in modern terms is approximately 1,400 miles. If we were to measure from Rome to Jerusalem from the East to the West and from the northern edge to the southern edge of the Roman Empire of that day, it would add up to 1,400 miles by 1,400 miles, with the Isle of Patmos exactly at the center of that measurement.<sup>99</sup> So the world of the new covenant at that time was 1,400 miles by 1,400 miles (or 1,200 stadia), with John on the isle right in the center of the whole thing. It also stretches out toward heaven, which makes it a cube.
4. **The absence of the temple in the New Jerusalem (see Rev. 21:22).** The temple does not exist in the New Jerusalem because the work of the cross has removed the need for the previous temple. We are now temples, according to First Corinthians 3 and 6.
5. **The nations will walk by its light (see Rev. 21:24).** This suggests that nations still exist as separate national entities, which leads us to conclude that this is a

present condition, not the eternal, heavenly condition. Jesus also referred to the Church as “*the light of the world*” (Matt. 5:14).

6. **The gates never close (see Rev. 21:25).** This illustrates the present ongoing work of evangelism.
7. **The unclean practice abomination and lying (see Rev. 21:27).** Here again we see evidence of a pre-final judgment setting. Heaven will not include people of this sort.
8. **The tree of life has leaves for the healing of the nations (see Rev. 22:1–2).** This statement indicates the nations have not yet been healed.
9. **Sorcerers, immoral people, murderers, idolaters, and those who love and practice lying are outside the gates (see Rev. 22:15).** These people are right outside the open gates and may come in at any time. This shows our present reality, not life after the final judgment. Following the final judgment, these people will be sent to the lake of fire. But that is not the picture we see here. Instead, right outside our open gates live all kinds of scoundrels, and the doors remain open so they can come in at any time.

What we see described in Revelation 21–22 is the new covenant world, with the New Jerusalem, the Bride of Christ, the new heaven, and the new earth, and the new temple. All of these describe the new covenant world we live in *right now*.

# WHAT REMAINS

The fact that Revelation describes events that happened in the past does not make it less relevant for us. After all, the other historical stories of the Bible—such as Jesus’ birth, death, and resurrection—still have relevance for us these many years later. The Bible is full of relevant information for us, even if most of it is not in our future. The relevance does not change just because Jesus’ prophecies have already been fulfilled. The opposite is true. We get to live in the wonderful result of those fulfilled prophecies—the new covenant world with an open door to salvation that all may enter.

And we also get to look forward to the fulfillment of a few prophecies that are still in our future. We know this is true based on Revelation 21:5, where it says, “*He who was seated on the throne said, ‘I am making everything new!’*” This is in the present tense. God is not finished; the world is not perfect. Instead, He is in the process of *making* all things new, and we have the opportunity to work with Him in that expansion of His Kingdom on the earth. We are His co-laborers, the Bride of Christ, and we are seated with Him. Thus, we get to help make all things new as ambassadors to earth. This is an ongoing, gradual process that will eventually bring us to a point of perfection in the future that we have not yet reached.

In conclusion, here are five ways in which understanding Revelation in this way is valuable and important to us. When we have a proper understanding of Revelation, we realize:

1. We have been fully established in the new covenant with our Bridegroom, King Jesus.
2. All wrath was poured out on the old covenant system and never needs to be repeated. The new covenant system comes with no wrath. It comes with forgiveness.
3. We are working with the King to make all things new.
4. We have no reason to fear a future one-world government run by the beast or any other futurist prognostications about the endtimes.
5. Jerusalem should not be an idol for the modern Christian. We now live in the heavenly Jerusalem and are part of the new covenant world. The old was put in the past, and God yelled hallelujah over its destruction three times. It must not be the centerpiece of our eschatology.

Revelation closes out the new covenant canon because it is the final word on the end of the old covenant and the establishment of the new covenant. We are now and forever in the new covenant, where Jesus is unveiled and freedom is released. The doors are open to all, and we are invited to partner with Jesus in making all things new.

## **REVIEW TEST QUESTIONS**

1. When was the Book of Revelation written?



2. Per the Syriac, John wrote the Book of Revelation when he was thrown on the island of Patmos by which emperor?
3. Which three main books did John pull imagery from for the Book of Revelation?
4. On what day was the temple destroyed in Jerusalem in both 586 BC and AD 70?
5. In the Greek, in reference to one third of the earth being destroyed, the word *ge* (indicating a localized event) is used how many times? How many times in the Book of Revelation is the word *kosmos* (meaning “the entire world”) used?
6. What was veiling Jesus, according to Second Corinthians 3?
7. When the names *Sodom*, *Babylon*, and *Egypt* are used in the Book of Revelation, what city is being written about?

## RELATED MATERIALS

Kenneth Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*.

John A. T. Robinson, *Re-dating the New Testament*.

Frank Viola, *The Untold Story of the New Testament Church*.

<sup>89</sup> Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell*, 45–67.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 63–64.

<sup>91</sup> Viola, *The Untold Story of the New Testament Church*, 176.

<sup>92</sup> A more thorough explanation of these is available in the author's book, *Raptureless*.

<sup>93</sup> The phrase coming on clouds is used in Ezekiel, Jeremiah, and Isaiah in reference to God coming in judgment on a city or a nation. Whether it was Babylon or Edom or Egypt or Israel, this idiom meant He was coming to bring judgment. This was commonly understood prophetic language, and it does not speak of the end of the world.

<sup>94</sup> Eberle and Trench, *Victorious Eschatology*, 127.

<sup>95</sup> An important book on this is *Before Jerusalem Fell*, by Dr. Kenneth Gentry, the leading preterist scholar on the Book of Revelation. It in, Gentry goes through the internal and external evidence for dating Revelation prior to AD 70. Another helpful book is John A. T. Robinson's *Re-dating the New Testament*, in which he concludes that the entire New Testament was written before AD 70

<sup>96</sup> *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance*, Greek #2889.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., Greek #1093.

<sup>98</sup> Kline, *The Treaty of the Great King*, 59.

<sup>99</sup> Mulholland, *Revelation*, 122.



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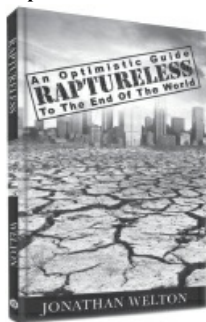
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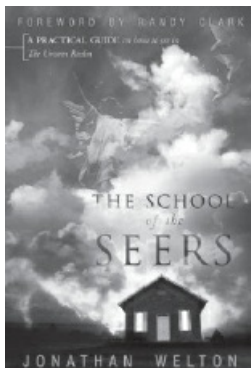
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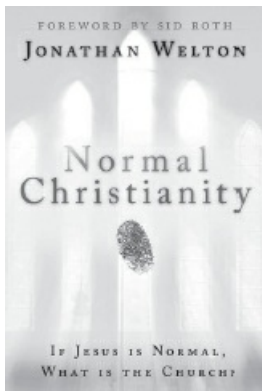
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Jesus and the Book of Acts are the standard of *Normal Christianity*.

Remember the fad a few years ago when people wore bracelets

reminding them, What Would Jesus Do? Christians state that Jesus is the example of how to live, yet this has been limited in many cases to how we view our moral character. When Christians tell me they want to live like Jesus, I like to ask if they have multiplied food, healed the sick, walked on water, raised the dead, paid their taxes with fish money, calmed storms, and so forth. I typically receive bewildered looks, but that is what it is like to live like Jesus!

Perhaps we are ignoring a large portion of what living like Jesus really includes. Many Christians believe they can live like Jesus without ever operating in the supernatural. After reading in the Bible about all the miracles He performed, does that sound right to you? (Excerpt from book)

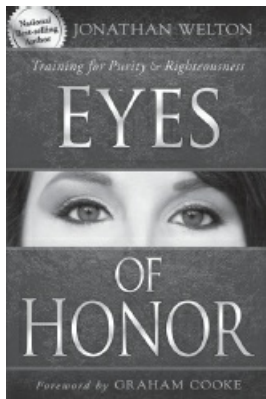
## **What others have said**

I believe before Jesus returns there will be two churches. One will be religious, and the other will be normal. This book of Jonathan Welton's will help restore your childlike faith, and you will become normal!

~ **Sid roth**, Host of It's Supernatural! Television Program

# ADDITIONAL MATERIAL BY JONATHAN WELTON

**Eyes of Honor: Training for Purity and Righteousness**  
by Jonathan Welton



After struggling with sexual temptation for years, author Jonathan Welton devoted himself to finding a way to be completely free from sexual sin. He read books, attended 12-

step groups, and participated in counseling—with no success.

Spurred on by countless friends and acquaintances who shared a similar broken struggle and longed for freedom, the author searched Scripture. There he found the answer, which he shares with you in a compassionate, nonjudgmental way.

*Eyes of Honor* helps you understand how to live a life of purity by realizing:

- Your personal identity
- How to view the opposite sex correctly
- Who your enemies are

*Eyes of Honor* is honest and refreshing, offering hope and complete freedom and deliverance from sexual sin. Jesus' sacrifice on the cross and your salvation guarantee rescue from the appetite of sin. Your true identity empowers you to stop agreeing with lies of the enemy that ensnare you.

“This book is stunningly profound. He got my attention and kept it.”

~ **Dr. John roddam**, St. Luke's Episcopal

*Aurora Writing & Editing Services*



AMY CALKINS, WRITER & EDITOR

Amy Calkins is not only a dear friend, but also a tremendous writer and editor. I have had the pleasure of working with her on four of my books, and she is a gift of God. I would strongly urge anyone to work with her; she will help you take your writing to a whole new level.

—Jonathan Welton

Writing an effective and influential book is not as simple as typing up your ideas in a book-length document and sending it off to the printer. Getting a book into print is easier now than it's ever been due to the growth of low-cost self-publishing and the powerful communication tools available through the internet. Yet the ability to craft a well-written and effective book still takes time and expertise. That's where Aurora comes in. Let us help you craft your ideas and message into a form that will have the ability to influence and inspire. Whether through ghostwriting, copyediting, or proofreading, we want to help your book succeed. For more information on what these services entail, as well as endorsements from authors we've worked with, visit [aurora-pub.com](http://aurora-pub.com).

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