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FOUNDATIONS

Bedrock Beliefs for all Believers



Foundations: Bedrock Beliefs for All Believers
by Shane Callicutt

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Foundations was originally written for the personal use of the author in small groups. The decision to make it publicly available was made later. As such, you will note that there are no footnotes or reference pages. Instead of spending hours and hours pouring back through the material to add references for something that will be given away, here is a list of Bible translations, pastors, authors, teachers, and source materials that have been helpful along the way.

- The ESV Study Bible
- The Lexham English Bible
- The King James Bible
- Pastor Noah Schlag
- Pastor Matt Milligan
- Bradley Penrod
- Pastor Matt Chandler
- Dr. Eric Mason
- The Unseen Realm, Dr. Michael Heiser
- The Naked Bible Podcast, Dr. Michael Heiser
- Dr. Michael Brown
- Remnant Radio
- Pastor Mike Winger
- The Bible Project
- The Encyclopedia Britannica

Enjoy the study!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	7
The Big Picture	9
Creation	13
Fall	27
Redemption	41
Restoration	55
Our God	71
Who Does He Say He Is?	73
How Has He Revealed Himself?	89
How Does He Relate To Us?	109
Elementary Teachings	125
Dead Works & Faith	127
Washings	141
Laying on of Hands	155
The Resurrection of the Dead	169
Eternal Judgment	181
Pressing Onward	193

INTRODUCTION

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil. Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. And this we will do if God permits - Hebrews 5:12-6:3

These verses tell us a few things about the local church.

First, this issue isn't unique to early believers; it's an ongoing problem for all believers. We shouldn't consider ourselves more educated or enlightened than them. Every believer must move from infancy to adulthood in their faith. The problem addressed in Hebrews is that some believers were stuck in infancy and didn't know it.

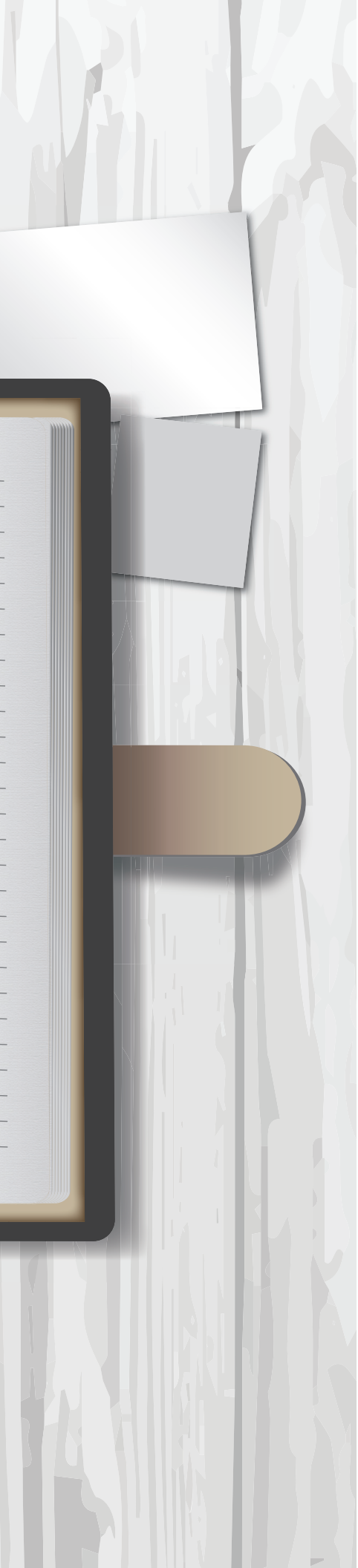
Second, our powers of discernment, which help us distinguish good from evil, won't develop if we never leave the milk of the Word. That simply means this: spiritual growth is the only way to walk in the victory Christ has obtained. If you don't move on from the milk to the meat, it may even be evidence that you never knew Him (see Hebrews 6:4-6).

Third, many of the elementary doctrines of Christ listed here are the same things that we go over and over in our churches. Whoever wrote Hebrews was interested in moving his readers beyond these **milk** matters. It's concerning that what the Bible calls milk and elementary, many local churches seldom move beyond.

Foundations will help. This study has been written with these elementary matters in mind, plus some other foundational beliefs that together form everything upon which the Christian faith stands. It has been written so that both new and seasoned believers can reap benefits. Foundations is designed for small groups. There are discussion questions and plenty of space for taking notes.

Dig in and enjoy the journey!





THE BIG PICTURE

Everyone has a story, including you. It helps you make sense of the world. When things happen, good or bad, your story gives the event tone and color. This is one reason two individuals who witness the same thing can have completely different understandings of what happened. Their diverse stories helped them create unique tones and colors for what they saw.

Your story is important. It gives every event (smaller story) in your life meaning. Big stories that give smaller stories meaning are called metanarratives. Your life has a metanarrative that defines everything. It's made up of what you've chosen to believe about the world. What you believe about the world is linked to how you've processed the things you've endured. Let's say it again. Everyone has a metanarrative, a big picture story.

Q What is your story?

The Bible has a *metanarrative*.

Let's make that more personal.

God has a

story

It's easy to say that the Bible is God's story and move on. But the Bible is a book full of smaller narratives, which makes it easy to lose track of the big picture. The metanarrative of the Bible is the story about the stories. It's the account that gives everything else meaning. If you don't understand God's story, you can easily get stuck, even discouraged. And, as a Christian, the Biblical metanarrative is what you've embraced. Therefore, it would make sense for every believer to know and understand God's story.

CREATION

Creation involves God's activity in creating all that there is, both seen and unseen. He created the spirit world and the physical world. The spirit world is where heaven, the heavenly hosts, and God's throne is located. The physical world is the visible universe and the earth. God created Adam and Eve in his image (Gen 1:26) and placed them in his garden in Eden (Genesis 2:7). Adam and Eve were denied only one thing in all of the world. They were forbidden to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

- GOD CREATES** → God doesn't need to create, he WANTS to create. Why? He WANTS to share his glory beyond himself. He WANTS to create a family with whom he can dwell.
- THE PROBLEM** → Create a family to share himself with who will FREELY CHOOSE to love him. Free will creates opportunity to sin - to choose to NOT love God.
- THE PLAN** → He knows Adam and Eve will freely choose to sin. Redeem his family through the blood of his Son, Jesus Christ who will FREELY CHOOSE to die.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. - Genesis 1:1

- GOD CREATED:**
- | | |
|---------------------|-----------------------|
| Spirit World | Physical World |
| * Heavenly Host | * Visible Universe |
| * Heaven | * Earth |
| * God's Throne | * Animals, Mankind |



ETERNITY PAST



And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed. - Genesis 2:8



And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." Genesis 2:16-17

FALL COVENANTS



The Fall begins with the first rebel. Satan, an anointed guardian cherub (Ezekiel 28:14), brings sin into creation. He was the most beautiful of all God's heavenly host (Ezekiel 28:13) and he allowed pride over his beauty and power to cause him to sin (Isaiah 14:13-14, Ezekiel 28:15, 17). God cast him out (Ezekiel 28:16, Luke 10:18). This began a war in the spirit realm, but it would not be contained there.



Satan appears in the Garden of Eden in the form of a serpent and successfully tempts Adam and Eve - the image bearers of God - to eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. He draws Adam and Eve into his rebellion and their sin brought death and a curse upon all of creation (Genesis 3, Romans 5:12).

BUT GOD God made a COVENANT to bring a Savior who would redeem mankind from the curse.

{ YOU START HERE }
ALONG WITH EVERY HUMAN BORN SINCE ADAM BORN INTO SIN, ACCOUNTABLE TO GOD FOR YOUR SIN

Mankind had become so corrupted by sin, that God decided to flood the entire earth and start over with Noah's family (Genesis 7-8). God also made a COVENANT to never destroy the earth again with a flood (Genesis 9).



But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord. - Genesis 6:8

I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel. - Genesis 3:15

Satan's rebellion is just the spark. Genesis 6:1-4 speaks of more heavenly hosts who left their place to come corrupt humanity even more. Revelation 12:4 teaches that a third of the heavenly hosts followed Satan in his rebellion.



However, even starting fresh with Noah's family did not deal with the problem of sin. Only a few generations after Noah, humanity united at Babel to build an enormous tower so that they could reach God (Genesis 11)

God confused their languages and the nations which were born at Babel fell away from our God - Yahweh - and worshiped lesser gods.



After Babel, God called Abraham and made a COVENANT with him to raise up a nation - ISRAEL - through his offspring with his wife Sarah (Genesis 12, 15, 17).

And he believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness. (Genesis 15:6)

Starting with Abraham's son, Isaac, God grew a family that became the nation of Israel. Along the way, God raised up men and women in Israel through whom he would keep his COVENANT with Abraham, but also with Adam and Eve to raise up a Savior who would redeem mankind from the curse. And all along the way, Satan fought persistently to stop the arrival of the Redeemer.



SPIRITUAL WAR


In this section, we'll break God's story into four movements:

- **Creation**
- **Fall**
- **Redemption**
- **Restoration**

These movements will create a way for us to understand and connect the various stories we find in the Scriptures into one flowing narrative.

REDEMPTION COVENANTS



[PROMISE FULFILLED!]



Christ's death and resurrection have broken the curse of sin that Adam and Eve brought upon mankind.

JESUS CHRIST, the SON of God came to earth, and was born to a young virgin named Mary (Isaiah 7:14, Matthew 1:18-23, Luke 1:26-38).

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. - Isaiah 7:14





He lived a sinless life, but was condemned to die a sinner's death. His death on the cross was in our place to take the wrath of God against our sins (2 Corinthians 5:21).


For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. - 2 Corinthians 5:21

God raised Jesus from the dead as the first to be resurrected eternally, defeating death and the powers of Satan once and for all (1 Corinthians 15:20-22).

But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. - 1 Corinthians 15:20-22




Because he died a sinner's death in our place, and took the punishment that we deserve, we can receive forgiveness for our sins through faith in his finished work on the cross and repentance!



Then Jesus returned to Heaven and left us with a command to make disciples of the entire world (Matthew 28:18-20). But as he left, he told the disciples to wait in Jerusalem for power from the promised Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4-9).


But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth. - Acts 1:8

NEW HEAVEN, NEW EARTH



God will recreate both heaven and earth and the two shall come together. The new Jerusalem will descend to the new Earth and no sin will ever corrupt creation again! (Revelation 21)

PENTECOST!




Ten days after Jesus returned to Heaven he sent the promised Holy Spirit (Acts 2) who indwells every believer (Galatians 4:6), empowers every believer to witness (Luke 12:12), and transforms every believer into the likeness of Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 3:18).

And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" - Galatians 4:6

[YOU CAN BE HERE]

because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. - Romans 10:9

God has been building his Church through the mission he gave to his people to reach the whole world with the Gospel, reversing what happened at Babel by bringing the nations back to our God through Christ Jesus!



BOOK OF LIFE!

ONLY PEOPLE WHO HAVE TRUSTED JESUS CHRIST FOR SALVATION WILL HAVE THEIR NAMES RECORDED IN THE BOOK OF LIFE!


GREAT WHITE THRONE JUDGMENT

The dead are raised and stand before God for final judgment. If anyone's name is not found in the Book of Life, they will be cast into the Lake of Fire (Revelation 20:11-15).

[EVER SINCE...]

SPIRITUAL WAR

YAHWEH



RESTORATION

CHRIST RETURNS

We look forward to his return because it will usher in the ETERNAL Kingdom, complete all COVENANTS that God has made with mankind, and will bring the SPIRITUAL WAR that began at the FALL to a final end.

DEATH IS DEFEATED!




Death is also finally defeated and is cast into the Lake of Fire. (Revelation 20:14)

SATAN IS DEFEATED!



The original rebel and our Accuser is finally defeated and is cast into the Lake of Fire. (Revelation 20:10)

YAHWEH



ETERNIFY FUTURE

ALL COVENANTS FULFILLED

SPIRITUAL WARENDS

GOD DWELLS WITH US AGAIN!

Yahweh's home will be with mankind and he will dwell with us as he did in Eden. We will live with him and he with us, forever. (Revelation 21:4)



NO MORE CURSE!

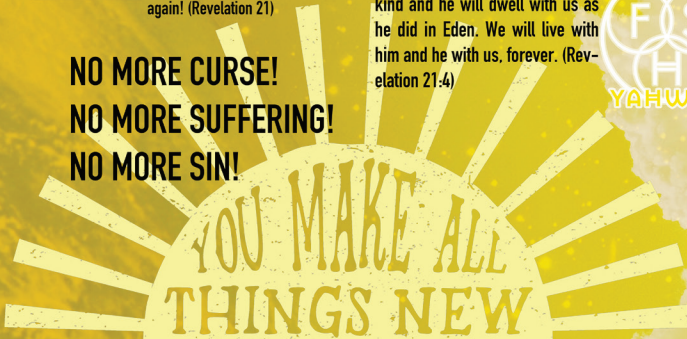
NO MORE SUFFERING!

NO MORE SIN!

YOU MAKE ALL THINGS NEW

REVELATION 21:5

YAHWEH



CREATION

Creation involves God's activity in creating all that there is, both seen and unseen. He created the spirit world and the physical world. The spirit world is where heaven, the heavenly hosts, and God's throne is located. The physical world is the visible universe and the earth. God created Adam and Eve in his image (Gen 1:26) and placed them in his garden in Eden (Genesis 2:7). Adam and Eve were denied only one thing in all of the world. They were forbidden to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

GOD CREATES

→ God doesn't need to create, he **WANTS** to create. Why? He **WANTS** to share his glory beyond himself. He **WANTS** to create a family with whom he can dwell.

THE PROBLEM

→ Create a family to share himself with who will **FREELY CHOOSE** to love him. Free will creates opportunity to sin - to choose to **NOT** love God.

THE PLAN

→ He knows Adam and Eve will freely choose to sin. Redeem his family through the blood of his Son, Jesus Christ who will **FREELY CHOOSE** to die.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. - Genesis 1:1

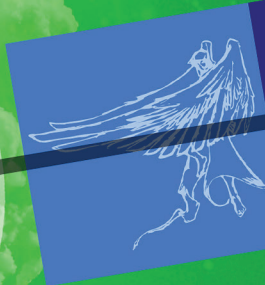
GOD CREATED: Spirit World

- * Heavenly Host
- * Heaven
- * God's Throne

Physical World

- * Visible Universe
- * Earth
- * Animals, Mankind

ETERNITY PAST



And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed. - Genesis 2:8



And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat. for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." Genesis 2:16-17

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God Created

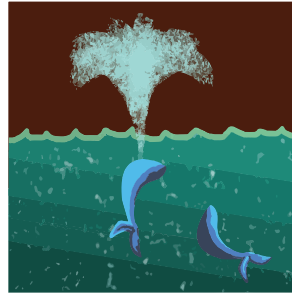
The Spirit World

- The invisible realm
- Heaven (God's residence, His throne, His Temple)
- The Hosts of Heaven (angels, cherubim, seraphim)



The Physical World

- The visible realm
- Earth, sun, moon, stars
- All animals and Mankind



Q What does Genesis 1:1 tell us about God's story?

Q Is there anything that we can say God did not create?

Q If God created everything, what is our responsibility to Him?

Six Days of Creation

The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. – Genesis 1:2

The rest of Genesis chapter one gives a broad survey of how God ordered what He created. Verse two begins easing us into the progression of creation. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. Both statements tell us that, at first, there was no order. Having no form and being empty are ways of describing creation without order. Darkness over the face of the deep is a description of chaos. So, initially, everything was disordered and chaotic.

Yet, the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. The chaos and disorder weren't beyond God's control. He was present and ready to bring order. The verses that follow divide God's ordering of creation into six days and those days divide into two sets of three.

Each day of creation begins and ends with the same phrases:

"And God said," and,
"there was evening and morning."

First, it's important to note that God's command orders everything. God spoke it, and it happened accordingly. Evening and morning show us two things. Perhaps most clearly, it gives us a sense of time. Six consecutive cycles of evening and morning equal six complete days.

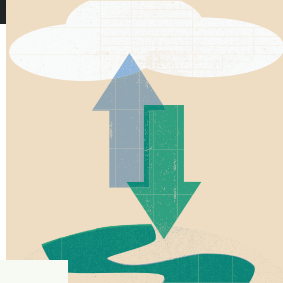
However, it also establishes a rhythm of daily work and rest. God worked during the day, and then there was evening a morning before He resumed working. Daylight hours are for work, and night hours are for rest.

The six days of creation show us how God brought order to the heavens and the earth. Days 1-3 deal with order between the heavens and earth, and days 4-6 deal with populating the ordered heavens and earth with beings.



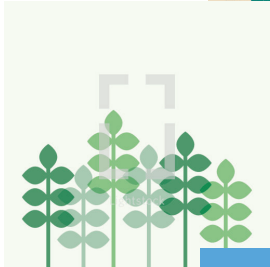
Days 1-3: Order between the heavens and earth

- Day 1 – light and dark (1:3-5)
- Day 2 – separation of the heavens from the chaotic waters (1:6-8)
- Day 3 – the emergence of dry land (and plant life) from the waters (1:9-13)



Days 3-6: Populating the heavens and earth

- Day 4 – the lights in the heavens – sun, moon, and stars – to govern day and night, determine signs and seasons and measure the passage of time. (1:14-19)
- Day 5 – the sea creatures for waters, birds for the skies. (1:20-23)
- Day 6 – the land animals and humans. Humans would govern all the earth domains: sky, sea, land, and the creatures they contain. (1:24-31)



For a long time, Christians have debated whether we should interpret these six days of creation as literal twenty-four hour days or as something more figurative. That debate isn't in view for this study. However, let's note two things and move on. First, ancient Israelites and early Christians wouldn't blink about God creating the world in six literal days. It wouldn't occur to them to read Genesis chapter one any differently. Second, we should be cautious about explaining away things that seem too supernatural. Wherever you land on this topic, make sure that it still requires faith in a supernatural God to believe it.



Let's look at two things we can learn about God from the six days of creation.



1. **God brings order.**

He spoke, and His ordering of the cosmos made a place where life can flourish. What was chaotic and disordered became ordered under God's creative power. While no verse says God is a God of order, Scripture thoroughly implies it. The Apostle Paul indirectly affirms this in 1 Corinthians 14:33 by saying that God isn't a God of confusion.

2. **God shares authority.**

He gave dominion to humans over the sky, sea, land, and all creatures on the earth. God's intention was for humans to be His imaging representative rulers and to spread His image over the whole world through fruitful multiplication. We see this at work when Jesus shared His authority with the disciples in Luke 10:19.



.....

Q What do the six days of creation tell us about God's intentions?

Q How do God's intentions set the tone for the big picture story of the Bible?

Q Why is it essential for us to understand God's intentions in the beginning?

God's Garden

And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground the LORD God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. – Genesis 2:8-9

God loves gardens. Jesus and the Prophets frequently use the metaphor of a gardener when they talk about God. It shouldn't be a surprise that one of God's creative acts was to grow a garden. He raised it in the land of Eden, which is why we call it the Garden of Eden. A geographic fact about the Garden of Eden is that God planted it in a high place, like a mountain top. Genesis 2:10 says a river flowed out of Eden and diverged into four rivers. Rivers flow downhill; therefore, the garden was in a high place.

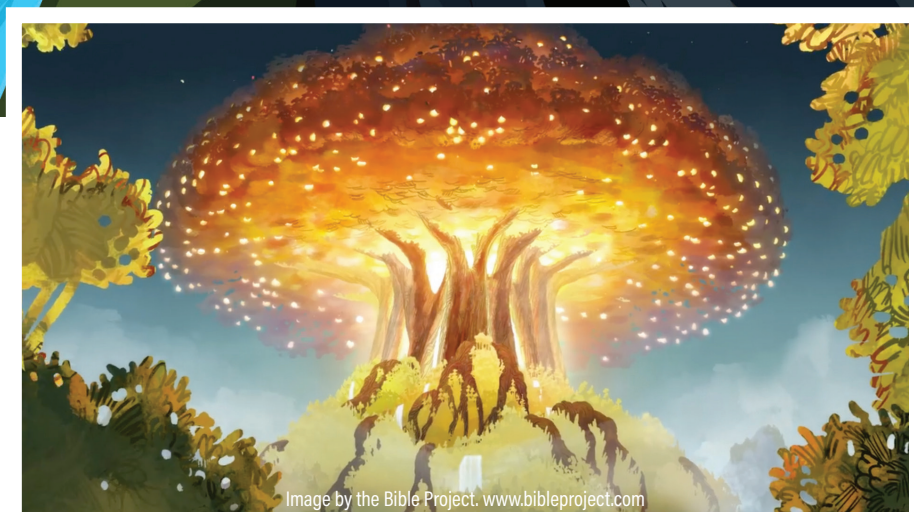


Image by the Bible Project. www.bibleproject.com

However, the most important thing about the Garden is this: it was God's dwelling. Genesis 2:5 says that God planted His garden before any plants of the field had sprung up. But God caused His Garden to grow immediately with the best trees and plants, all beautiful and good for food. The Tree of Life was present in the Garden of Eden. The Tree of Life is also on the New Earth in Revelation 22:2. Then the Tree of Life is symbolically present in the Tabernacle and the Temple. Wherever God sets up His throne, the Tree of Life is nearby.

.....

What does the Garden of Eden tell us about God's story? It tells us that from the beginning, the LORD desired to dwell with humanity on His earth. It tells us that the Garden represented an intersection between the unseen spirit world and the visible world. The LORD wasn't content to live apart from the humans He loved. He didn't want to be a distant deity. He wanted proximity to those He loved.

Q What other passages of Scripture speak of God as a gardener?

Q Why is the Garden of Eden an essential part of God's story?

God's Imagers

*So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them. – Genesis 1:27*

The crowning creation in Genesis chapter one is humankind. They were the only creation in six days of creating of which God called very good. They were also the only creation made in the image of God. This is why humans are imagers of God. ***Imager is a status, not a function.*** Being made in God's image is often spoken of in terms of things we do. God is creative, so humans are creative. God has emotions and intelligence, so we too have those things. While the sentiment behind these statements is understandable, they don't stand up to examination.

If being in the image of God is tied to anything we can do, then disabled humans who can't do those things won't qualify. If it depends on intelligence and emotions, what do we say about dolphins? They are highly intelligent and



demonstrate emotional complexity. What about miscarried and aborted children who never develop the capacity to possess emotions and intelligence? Imager must be a status. As a status, imager is something uniquely given to humans. No other creature, regardless of intelligence or emotional capacity, has received it. Whether aborted, miscarried, or born developmentally disabled, no human is less than God's image because it's a given status. Even if we discovered life more intelligent than humans, we would remain His imagers because He declared us as such.

We said earlier that God designed humans to be His representation on the earth. Men and women were given dominion (authority) over the skies, the seas, and the earth. They had rule over all of the creatures. They were to spread the image of God across the world by growing families and building communities of imagers everywhere. How was that supposed to happen? Genesis chapter two zooms in on the creation of humans and offers insight.

then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature. – Genesis 2:7

First, let's note that the man, Adam, had a job. Genesis 2:15 says that God placed Adam in His garden to work it and keep it. Work and keep might seem to be two words saying the same thing; in this case, they don't. Adam's job description was this:

- **Work the garden.** Cultivate it, till the ground, plant, harvest, and ensure its flourishing.
- **Keep the garden.** Protect, stand guard, serve as a watchman, be in charge of its wellbeing.

God gave Adam complete oversight of the Garden and was responsible for everything that happened within its boundaries. (This is important for how we understand the consequences of the Fall in the next session). Also, because the Garden of Eden was also God's throne - His Temple - **the nature of Adam's responsibilities were priestly**. He protected the sanctity of God's dwelling. Surprisingly, there was only one prohibition given to Adam.

And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." – Genesis 2:16-17

Then God says something new: **it is not good**. Everything has been good or very good up to this point. But God pointed out that it wasn't good for Adam to be alone. So, the LORD put Adam into a deep sleep, took a rib from his side, and fashioned a helper for him. In Genesis 2:20, the Hebrew word for **helper** is used numerous times in the Old Testament. For most of those uses, helper is in the sense of deliverer or rescuer. Far from only being a helper in the domestic sense, the helper God made for Adam was a co-ruler with him. When Adam saw her, he was elated and called her **woman**. Genesis 2:24 recorded for us their marriage to each other where they became one flesh; what God took out of Adam, He reunited in marriage.



Humans are an integral part of God's story, from page one. He created them to spread His image around the world. He invested authority in them to rule over the physical world where He placed them. Adam and Eve were supposed to represent God in every way to every creature under their dominion. They had unfiltered access to the LORD of hosts at all times. They took care of God's temple-garden and enjoyed His presence.

Q What role were humans supposed to play in God's story?

Q How do men and women, though different, both image the LORD?

Q In the Garden, what was the nature of the LORD's relationship to humans?

The Seventh Day

And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation. – Genesis 2:2-3

The seventh day doesn't get much space in the creation story, but it's an essential topic and ripples through the rest of the Bible. What's immediately apparent about the seventh day is that it does not end with an evening and morning statement. This omission is significant. **The seventh day never ended.** Since it never ended, we should take note of what was happening on that day.

What Happened on Day Seven?

- **God rested** from His creating work.
- **God blessed** the seventh day.
- God made the seventh day **holy**.

God rested, but don't mistake this. The LORD was not tired. Genesis 2:3 says He rested from all the work He did in creation. However, that shouldn't lead us to think He stopped working altogether. Creation was complete. He ceased creating. From what we've learned so far, you could say that He rested from creating and turned His attention to cultivating His relationship with His creations.

God blessed the seventh day. He favored the seventh day, making it unique. The seventh day of the week would become Israel's Sabbath day, upon which they were to rest as God had rested. Because God blessed the seventh day, there is an inherent promise of blessing to those who observe the weekly Sabbath rest cycle.

God made the seventh day holy. To be holy is to be set apart. Making the seventh day a day of rest set it apart from the other six days. The holiness of the seventh day depends upon keeping it distinct from the other six — this why the fourth commandment tells us to keep the Sabbath day holy. Protect and guard it so that you can rest.

In God's story, the seventh day - this restful, blessed, and holy day - **never ends**. The book of Hebrews (4:9) teaches us that God's people will enter into His rest - that eternal seventh-day rest that the LORD is still enjoying. The Prophets and the book of Revelation give us many glimpses into that final rest. The Ten Commandments teach us to practice weekly Sabbath rest, a foreshadow of the seventh-day rest that awaits us.



Q How does the seventh day telegraph how God's story will culminate?

Q If Adam and Eve were created to live, work, and rest in God's seventh day, how should that change the way we view work?

Q How does practicing Sabbath rest now prepare us for entering God's seventh-day rest?

.....

What You Should Know...

Here are the big ideas you should have learned about Creation.

- The LORD is our Creator God. To be Creator, He existed before all created things.
- He created the heavens and the earth in six days and ordered those realms in ways that would allow life to flourish.
- The cycle of day, evening, and morning established daily rhythms of work and rest for humans to follow.
- The Garden of Eden was God’s temple-garden, where He established His throne to dwell with the humans He created.
- Adam and Eve were imagers of God, given dominion to rule the earth and spread God’s image throughout the world by fruitfully multiplying.
- God blessed the seventh day as a never-ending, holy, restful day for enjoying fellowship with His people.
- The seventh day – Sabbath – became a weekly day of rest observed by God’s people that reminded us to rest from our work as God did.

This is how God’s story begins. God is the good guy, the hero, the protagonist. The beginning of His story gives us insight into His heart, purposes, and plans. We know for sure from the opening act that He created a world where He would dwell with us. The next act introduces enemies with plans of their own to thwart the LORD’s good plans.

~NOTES~



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FALL COVENANTS



The Fall begins with the first rebel. Satan, an anointed guardian cherub (Ezekiel 28:14), brings sin into creation. He was the most beautiful of all God's heavenly host (Ezekiel 28:13) and he allowed pride over his beauty and power to cause him to sin (Isaiah 14:13-14, Ezekiel 28:15, 17). God cast him out (Ezekiel 28:16, Luke 10:18). This began a war in the spirit realm, but it would not be contained there.

Satan appears in the Garden of Eden in the form of a serpent and successfully tempts Adam and Eve - the image bearers of God - to eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. He draws Adam and Eve into his rebellion and their sin brought death and a curse upon all of creation (Genesis 3, Romans 5:12).



BUT GOD God made a COVENANT to bring a Savior who would redeem mankind from the curse.

{ YOU START HERE }
ALONG WITH EVERY HUMAN BORN SINCE ADAM BORN INTO SIN, ACCOUNTABLE TO GOD FOR YOUR SIN

Mankind had become so corrupted by sin, that God decided to flood the entire earth and start over with Noah's family (Genesis 7-8). God also made a COVENANT to never destroy the earth again with a flood (Genesis 9).

I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel. - Genesis 3:15

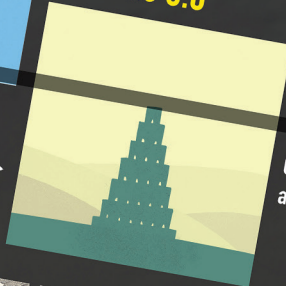
Satan's rebellion is just the spark. Genesis 6:1-4 speaks of more heavenly hosts who left their place to come corrupt humanity even more. Revelation 12:4 teaches that a third of the heavenly hosts followed Satan in his rebellion.

But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord. - Genesis 6:8



However, even starting fresh with Noah's family did not deal with the problem of sin. Only a few generations after Noah, humanity united at Babel to build an enormous tower so that they could reach God (Genesis 11)

God confused their languages and the nations which were born at Babel fell away from our God - Yahweh - and worshiped lesser gods.

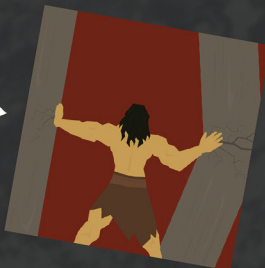


After Babel, God called Abraham and made a COVENANT with him to raise up a nation - ISRAEL - through his offspring with his wife Sarah (Genesis 12, 15, 17).

And he believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness. (Genesis 15:6)



Starting with Abraham's son, Isaac, God grew a family that became the nation of Israel. Along the way, God raised up men and women in Israel through whom he would keep his COVENANT with Abraham, but also with Adam and Eve to raise up a Savior who would redeem mankind from the curse. And all along the way, Satan fought persistently to stop the arrival of the Redeemer.



SPIRITUAL WAR

FALL

Spiritual War

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. – Genesis 3:1a

Every story has a beginning.

Every story also has a turn. We met the hero of the Bible – the LORD God, Creator of all things. He is the protagonist, and the first two chapters of Genesis show us His good plans. Genesis chapter three introduces **the antagonist – the villain.** *The serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field.* Let's dispel one myth immediately. The serpent was not a talking snake. Although the serpent is often depicted as a snake in Sunday School, there's much more going on. For now, diving too much into the Hebrew language would not serve us well, but let's say this. The Hebrew word for serpent has multiple meanings, which together help us know this serpent is more than a snake. He is a divine being.

Who is the serpent? The Prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel give us some of the only background information we have on the serpent's identity. Look at Ezekiel first.

*You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone was your covering... You were an anointed guardian cherub. I placed you; you were on the holy mountain of God; in the midst of the stones of fire you walked. You were blameless in your ways **from the day you were created**, till unrighteousness was found in you. ...so I cast you as a profane thing from the mountain of God, and I destroyed you, O guardian cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire. **Your heart was proud because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor...** – Ezekiel 28:13-17 (emphasis added)*

The serpent was an **anointed guardian cherub**, covered in every precious stone. He resided in the Garden of Eden and was blameless until he sinned. How exactly did the serpent sin? Isaiah provided some answers.

How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn! How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low! You said in your heart, "I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high; I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far reaches of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High." But you are brought down to Sheol, to the far reaches of the pit. – Isaiah 14:12-15 (emphasis added)



This anointed guardian cherub rebelled. His beauty turned his heart to sinful vanity and pride. He schemed to perform a coup, and the LORD cast Him down from his position. This was the shot heard around the universe. A created being rebelled against his Creator and began a spiritual war. By New Testament times, this rebelling guardian cherub was identified as **the Devil, the Old Serpent, the Dragon, the Accuser, the Adversary, or just plain old Satan.**

Q Who is the antagonist – the villain – of God’s story?

Q What event is the first turn in God’s story?

Q What were the consequences of the serpent’s rebellion?

Fatal Temptation

If you recall from Genesis chapter two, God gave Adam **one prohibition:**

*[but] of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.
– Genesis 2:17*

The serpent knew this, so one day he approached God's imager, Eve, and said:

"Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?" – Genesis 3:1b



What followed was a conversation filled with half-truths and veiled deceptions. Eve's response even offers clues that she and Adam had added to God's prohibition. She says they aren't even to **touch** the tree in the midst of the Garden (3:3). That's more than what God had commanded. God only said that they should not eat from it.

.....

The serpent then put forth two lies:

- ***You will not surely die.***
- ***You will become like God.***

You will not surely die. In one sense, this was true. Adam and Eve did not immediately suffer physical deaths. However, ultimately, they did die, albeit a long time later. But there was a death that happened at that moment. They experienced immediate spiritual death.

You will become like God. This was a lie because, as imagers, they were already like God. The serpent played on Eve's intuition that though they were imagers, they weren't actually just like God. He caused her to doubt her understanding of her identity, and she took the bait, ate the forbidden fruit, and enticed Adam to do so as well.

Now, remember, God gave Adam a job: ***work and keep the Garden.*** His position gave him complete oversight of the Garden, which made him responsible for everything that happened within its borders. Many try to blame Eve for the Fall because she's the one who Satan successfully tempted. However, Adam is held responsible. His failure enabled her failure.

All of this brings up a great question. Why did the serpent tempt Eve at all? What did humanity have that made Satan desire their destruction? This divine rebel had declared war on his Creator, and anyone that represented/imaged Him became targets of his hatred.

Q What can we learn about Satan's tactics from how he tempted Eve?

Q What can we learn about ourselves from Eve's response to Satan's temptation?

Q How did Adam enable Eve's failure?



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Death and the Curse

Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths. – Genesis 3:7



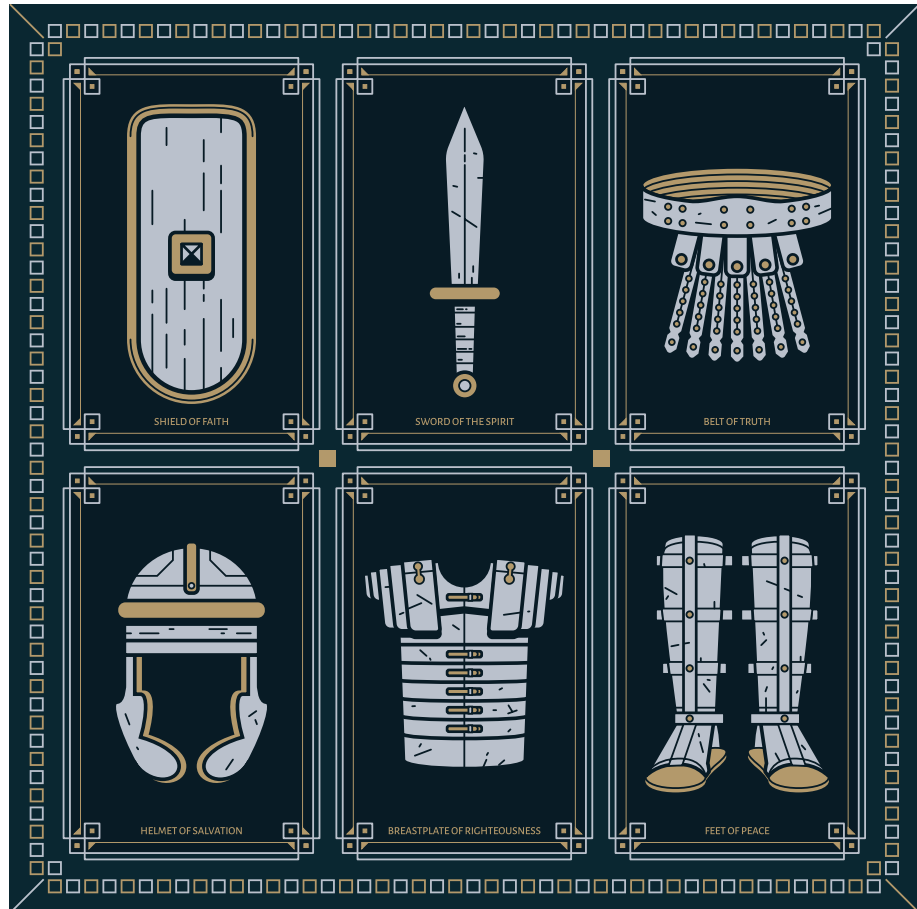
Eating from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil did two immediate things. First, it created a **separation** between themselves and the LORD. Remember, they immediately suffered a spiritual death, which severed their life-sustaining relationship with God. Second, it **opened their eyes**, and they suddenly understood that they were naked. Apart from a life-giving relationship with God, their nakedness made them feel shame for their physical differences, so they made loincloths to cover themselves.

What followed was the LORD's curse and consequences. He found Adam and Eve hiding from Him, asked them what happened, listened to them shift blame, and did the following:

1. **The LORD cursed the serpent** and issued a promise that one day Eve's offspring would overcome him (3:14-15)
2. **He increased Eve's childbirth pains** and declared that her relationship with Adam would be defined by ongoing struggle, but Adam would be the head. (3:16)
3. **The LORD cursed the ground** so that Adam would have increased labor in working it. He would work it by the sweat of his brow. (3:17)
4. **Death entered creation.** Adam and Eve would eventually die physically. (3:19)

therefore the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. 24 He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life. – Genesis 3:23-24

A spiritual war that began between a divine rebel and his Creator spilled over into humanity. Adam and Eve chose to listen to Satan's temptation, forged their own path, and it cost them their divine connection with the LORD. They were cast out of God's Garden, just as Satan was also cast out (Ezekiel 28:16).



Q Who is the offspring of Eve that will crush the head of the serpent?

Q How did Adam and Eve's sin affect their relationship with each other?

Q How does the curse on the earth continue to affect us today?

Age of Covenants

I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel. – Genesis 3:15

God's story took a turn with the Fall. Adam and Eve sinned and fell from their station, taking all of future humanity with them. But, don't think for a moment that this surprised the LORD. The Fall only set the next phase of His plan into motion. Genesis 3:15 contains the first promise of the Gospel (good news).



The promise that Eve's offspring would bruise (some translations say crush) the serpent's head was the pistol shot that began the race. The essence of the promise to the serpent is this: ***you deceived Adam and Eve, but one day their descendant - a human - will succeed where they failed, defeat you, and become the new head of a new humanity.*** To accomplish the promise of an offspring who would defeat Satan, God entered into a series of covenants with humans. These covenants form what many scholars and theologians call the ***scarlet thread of redemption.*** This scarlet thread weaves through the entire Old Testament.

What is a Covenant?

Twenty-first-century Western people don't typically have a firm grasp on the meaning of covenant. In fact, apart from the legal world and religious circles, the word itself has entirely fallen out of use. We are more familiar with contracts than covenants. In light of that, let's define covenant.

A covenant is an agreement founded upon the character of the concerned individuals. Unlike contracts, which are built upon legal agreement, covenants are built upon moral integrity. If a contract is violated, there are legal consequences that can be settled in court. If a covenant is broken, there are no legal consequences; instead, there are relational consequences.

In God's story, He established covenants, not contracts. Why? Because the LORD desires relationships with people, not legally binding behaviors. Covenants are relational. The Bible is clear that God, not people, started every covenant between God and people. That's an exciting thought. If God is initiating the covenant, it is founded upon His character (and ours, but we're terrible). His character never fails or changes.

God initiates two kinds of covenants. There are ***unconditional covenants*** and ***conditional covenants.*** Unconditional covenants have no stipulations or rules with consequences. Conditional covenants have if-then terms; ***if you do this, then this will happen.*** Typically, there favorable terms for obedience and negative terms for disobedience.

The LORD's covenants had one large-scale purpose: ***to prepare the way for Eve's offspring.*** Our study's goal isn't to analyze each covenant, but here is a chronological synopsis of the major covenants God made with humans in the Old Testament.

OLD TESTAMENT COVENANTS

- 1. *Redemption Covenant.*** Genesis 3:15 is a covenant (although that word isn't used) that God would bring forth Eve's offspring who will defeat the serpent. This is an **unconditional** covenant.
- 2. *Noahic Covenant.*** Genesis 9 contains God's covenant with Noah, all other living creatures, and the earth itself that he would never again destroy the world by a flood. God gave the rainbow as a sign of that covenant. This is an **unconditional** covenant.
- 3. *Abrahamic Covenant.*** In Genesis 12, God initiates a covenant with Abraham to bless all nations through his family. In Genesis 15, God affirms that covenant again. In Genesis 17, God gave circumcision as the sign of the covenant. And, in Genesis 22, God confirms His covenant with Abraham a final time. This covenant was **conditional**, contingent upon Abraham believing the LORD (Genesis 15:6), and circumcision (Genesis 17:14).
- 4. *Mosaic Covenant.*** The covenant God gave through Moses, spanning Exodus through Deuteronomy. This covenant includes the giving of the Ten Commandments, laws for Israel's civil government, and ceremonial laws for worship in the Tabernacle. This covenant was sealed through the various animal sacrifices prescribed in the Law. This was a **conditional** covenant, with blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience in Deuteronomy 28.
- 5. *Davidic Covenant.*** God initiated a covenant with King David in 2 Samuel 7:12-16, which promised that David's throne would endure forever. His royal family would possess an everlasting kingdom. This covenant led to Jesus Christ, a descendant of David, and is the King of kings. The Davidic Covenant was **unconditional** because it did not depend on David's family's character and morality, but on God's character to see it through.

It's important to understand that these covenants prepared the way for Jesus, each progressively narrowing the path. God made the big promise in Genesis 3:15 to send an offspring. God promised never to destroy the world by water again, renewing His commitment to redeeming humanity. In Abraham, God narrowed his focus to one family and covenanted to bless the whole world through his son Isaac and then Jacob (Israel). When Israel had grown and became enslaved to Egypt, God rescued them through Moses and initiated a covenant that would make them a holy nation. Then God narrowed the path once more to Israel's royal family and established a covenant with King David. King David's throne would be established forever in his descendant, ***Jesus the Messiah!***

When you read the Old Testament, the stories you read are all smaller pieces of God's story. When you're reading through Judges or meditating on the Psalms, it's easy to lose sight of the big picture. Each smaller story has its own characters, context, and message for the reader, but it is connected to the grand, big picture of God's story. Therefore, each small story is its own adventure, but also a wheel, rolling us forward in God's plan to redeem all things.



Q How should we read the stories of the Old Testament in light of God's bigger story?

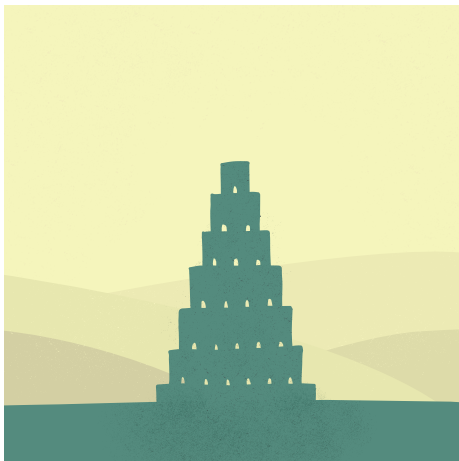
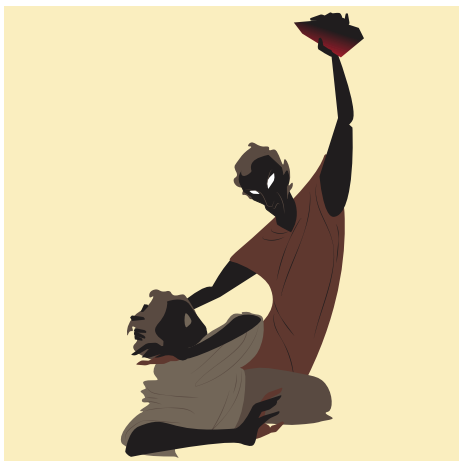
Q Does the *scarlet thread of redemption* affect your understanding of Scripture?

Q What do the covenants tell us about God's story?

Increased Rebellion

And the LORD regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. – Genesis 6:6

The Fall isn't only about Satan's fall, Adam and Eve's subsequent fatal decision to follow him in rebellion, and God's covenants. The Fall showcases, on repeat, how wicked humans become in the absence of a loyal relationship with the LORD. Our increasing wickedness became evident quickly in Genesis 4 when Cain killed Abel. It only took one generation to reach murder. From there, the sin of mankind only increased. It increased so much that in Genesis 6, the LORD decided to flood the earth and start over with Noah and his family.



However, Noah wasn't perfect, and neither were his sons. It was only three generations later (Genesis 10:9, 25; 11:1-9) that the LORD judged humanity again at Babel, confusing their languages and sending them out from each other. After God chose Abraham and established a covenant with him, Abraham continued to demonstrate his sinfulness; as did Isaac, as did Jacob, and for sure, as did all of Jacob's sons! Israel, God's chosen people, couldn't keep it together either. Only a fraction of Israel's entire national existence was spent in obedience to the LORD.

The increased rebellion of humanity is also linked to the ongoing conflict in the spirit realm. Satan's rebellion led to more divine rebels who joined him. The nations worshiped these rebelling spirits as their own gods, who led them deeper into increased debauchery. An angel gives the prophet Daniel a glimpse into the **spiritual princes** who have authority over the nations (Daniel 10:13, 20). In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul references these spiritual forces of darkness as **authorities, cosmic powers, and spiritual forces of evil in heavenly places** (Ephesians 6:12). Humans are wicked all on our own, but we receive an assist in our depravity from these cosmic powers who work to blind the world to the truth of the Gospel (2 Corinthians 4:4).



Q What does the increasing rebellion of mankind tell you about God's story?

Q Why do humans get more wicked when they're out of fellowship with the LORD?

Q How does the spiritual war affect the wicked actions of humanity?

REDEMPTION COVENANTS

PROMISE FULFILLED!



JESUS CHRIST, the SON of God came to earth, and was born to a young virgin named Mary (Isaiah 7:14, Matthew 1:18-23, Luke 1:26-38).

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. - Isaiah 7:14



He lived a sinless life, but was condemned to die a sinner's death. His death on the cross was in our place to take the wrath of God against our sins (2 Corinthians 5:21).

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. - 2 Corinthians 5:21



God raised Jesus from the dead as the first to be resurrected eternally, defeating death and the powers of Satan once and for all (1 Corinthians 15:20-22).

But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. - 1 Corinthians 15:20-22

Christ's death and resurrection have broken the curse of sin that Adam and Eve brought upon mankind.

Because he died a sinner's death in our place, and took the punishment that we deserve, we can receive forgiveness for our sins through faith in his finished work on the cross and repentance!



Then Jesus returned to Heaven and left us with a command to make disciples of the entire world (Matthew 28:18-20). But as he left, he told the disciples to wait in Jerusalem for power from the promised Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4-8).

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth. - Acts 1:8



PENTECOST!

Ten days after Jesus returned to Heaven he sent the promised Holy Spirit (Acts 2) who indwells every believer (Galatians 4:6), empowers every believer to witness (Luke 12:12), and transforms every believer into the likeness of Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 3:18).

And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" - Galatians 4:6

YOU CAN BE HERE

because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. - Romans 10:9

God has been building his Church through the mission he gave to his people to reach the whole world with the Gospel, reversing what happened at Babel by bringing the nations back to our God through Christ Jesus!



EVER SINCE...

— SPIRITUAL WAR —

The defining moment of God's story was sending Jesus. What was so defining about it? It was the moment that God fulfilled His promise to the Serpent.

I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel. – Genesis 3:15

The Prophets prophesied of this defining moment.

Therefore the LORD himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. – Isaiah 7:14

But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days. – Micah 5:2



As prophesied, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was conceived in a young virgin named Mary and was born in Bethlehem, the city of David. He came to accomplish what God said to the Serpent. To fulfill God's promise, Jesus needed to succeed where Adam failed.

Q How does Jesus fulfill God's promise to the Serpent?

Q How does Jesus succeed where Adam failed?

Redeemed Image

I and the Father are one. – John 10:30

...Whoever has seen me has seen the Father... – John 14:9b

If you recall, God created Adam and Eve in His image. Humans were supposed to be His representation on earth. They were given dominion over the skies, seas, land, and all creatures in them. Their mandate was to spread the LORD's image across their earth by multiplying fruitfully. God's glory would cover the world because His imagers would be everywhere.



When Adam and Eve sinned, they didn't cease to be imagers. However, their sin separated them from the LORD and, in a sense, distorted the image of God they reflected. Put simply, Adam and Eve no longer represented the LORD accurately. Adam could not say to his friends and family, "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father," because sin had separated them.

However, because Jesus was without sin, He perfectly represented the Father. Where Adam failed in this, Jesus succeeded. When we see Jesus, we see the Father because He perfectly represents Him.

*He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth.
– 1 Peter 2:22*

*He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint
of his nature... - Hebrews 1:3a*

Redeemed Mission

Jesus not only redeemed the image of God in humanity, but He also redeemed Adam's mission. Adam's responsibilities were to work and keep the garden. We learned that work had to do with gardening, cultivating, and flourishing, and keep had to do with being a protective watchman responsible for wellbeing. Adam failed in these responsibilities, but Jesus succeeded.

Adam, the gardener, failed in the garden. Jesus succeeded in gardens. He began His work of redemption in the Garden of Gethsemane and finished it in a garden-tomb. In fact, when Mary Magdalene saw Him after His resurrection, she mistook Him for a gardener tending the garden at His tomb.

*Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" **Supposing him to be the gardener**, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." – John 20:15 (emphasis added)*

Adam, the protector, also failed. He allowed the Serpent to deceive his wife. Jesus, however, called Himself the Good Shepherd and is a protective watchman over His flock.



I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. – John 10:14-15

Jesus fulfills Adam's responsibilities perfectly. He cultivates and creates flourishing for His people, and He protects them from those who would do them harm.

Redeemed Sinners

Jesus redeemed the image and mission, but the mandate to spread God's image everywhere on the earth remained. That required the redemption of sinful humans. **Redeeming humanity would be the ultimate reversal of Adam's failure and the final blow to fulfill the Genesis 3:15 promise.** Christ's death was the Serpent bruising the offspring's heel, but Christ's resurrection was the offspring bruising the Serpent's head. How did He do this?

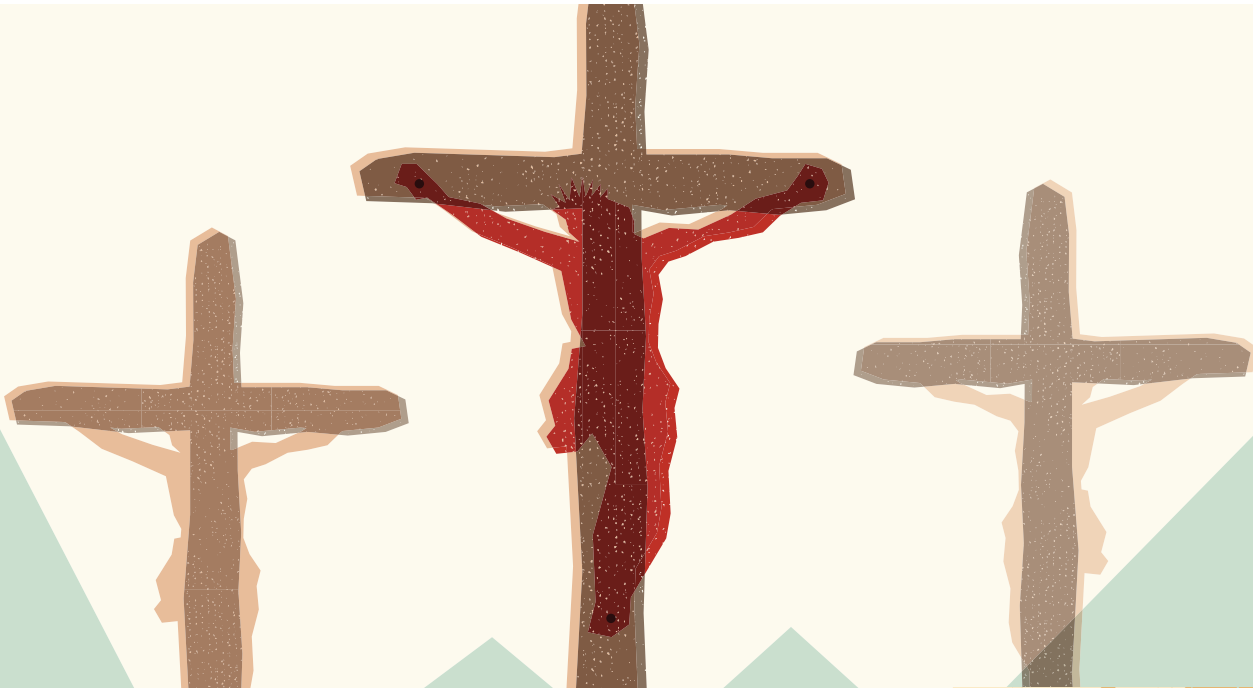
Sins Forgiven

- Adam's sin brought death because the wages of sin is death (Romans 3:23).
- Sin is forgiven only through the shedding of blood (Hebrews 9:22). This is first demonstrated in Genesis 3 when the LORD clothed Adam and Eve with garments of skin. An innocent animal died to cover

their shame (Genesis 3:21). The Law of Moses made animal sacrifices a regular rhythm of Israel's worship as they sought forgiveness, personally and nationally.

- Jesus was without sin and became the ultimate, perfect sacrifice for humanity's sins when He died on the cross. Christ's death both forgave sin and provided the most significant victory in human history.

...but [Jesus] emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. – Philippians 2:7-8



Death Conquered

Christ's death was the ***deathblow*** to death because He resurrected! He returned to life in a glorified body and then ascended back to Heaven, where He is still living today. In addition, Christ's resurrection is a guarantee that all who believe in Him will also resurrect as He did.



But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. – 1 Corinthians 15:20-22

New Humanity

As we mentioned earlier, Jesus came to succeed where Adam failed. His success made Him the head of a new humanity. Anyone who believes in Jesus – who calls upon the name of the LORD (Romans 10:13) – is born again as a new human: ***a new creation***.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. (2 Corinthians 5:17)

The Bible calls this new humanity ***the Church***. The New Testament uses several metaphors to describe how the Church is supposed to function in the world.

- ***A Family (Romans 8:15-17, we are sons, He is our Father)***
- ***Ambassadors (2 Corinthians 5:20)***
- ***Servants (1 Corinthians 9:19)***
- ***A City (Matthew 5:14; Revelation 21:2)***
- ***Lights (Matthew 5:14; Ephesians 5:8)***
- ***Salt (Matthew 5:13)***
- ***Pilgrims/Sojourners (1 Peter 2:11)***
- ***A Bride (Revelation 19:7)***
- ***Citizens of God's Kingdom (Ephesians 2:19)***
- ***Priests (1 Peter 2:5, 9)***
- ***A Kingdom (Colossians 1:13)***
- ***A Body (1 Corinthians 12:27)***

The Church's mission on earth is to function as ***all of these*** while we bear witness to the power of Christ's death and resurrection to the rest of the world.



.....

Q In what ways is the image of God in us redeemed through Jesus Christ?

Q What are the implications of Christ succeeding in Adam's failed mission?

Q As redeemed sinners, how are we equipped to bear witness of Christ's power?

The Day the Church was Born

And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, "you heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now ... you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." (Acts 1:4-5, 8)



Before He returned to Heaven, Jesus told the disciples to stay put and wait for **the Holy Spirit**. Per His command, they gathered together every day in the same place to pray. Ten days later, on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was sent and descended upon the disciples like flaming tongues of fire (Acts 2:3-4). When this happened, the believers began declaring God's glories in different languages as the Holy Spirit directed them. It created a disturbance so loud that people in the streets outside could hear them.



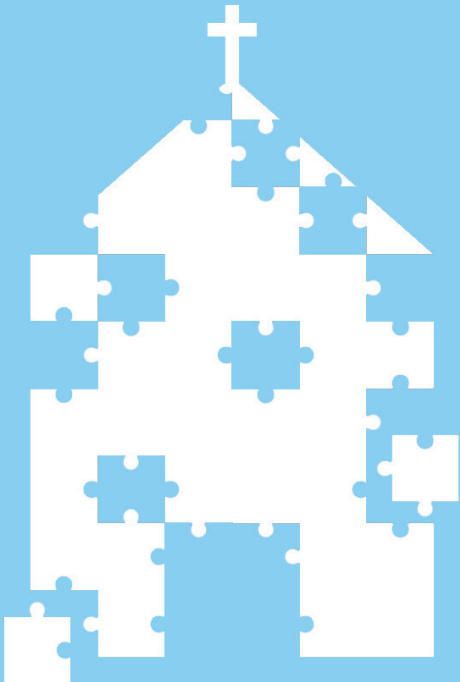
Because it was the festival of Pentecost, there were Jews from many nations in Jerusalem. As some of them passed by the place where the disciples had gathered, they heard the mighty works of God declared in their own languages. After a considerable crowd gathered, Peter stood up and preached what many consider the first sermon of the Church. After he finished, ***about three thousand people were birthed into the Church.***

So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. (Acts 2:41)

This is the day the Church was born. It didn't happen because Peter used those ten days of prayer to put together a fantastic sermon. It happened because the Holy Spirit arrived and filled the disciples with power that they could never conjure on their own. ***From day one, the Church has been dependent upon the power of the Holy Spirit, and that will never change.*** He indwells us, empowers us, and He is the one who transforms us into people reflect Jesus.

And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" – Galatians 4:6

Some organizations call themselves a church, but ***the Church can only be Holy Spirit-filled new humans!***



What Does This Change?

In God's story, the defining moment of Christ's death and resurrection changed everything. The nature of the spiritual war shifted. Christ became the head of His new humanity (Ephesians 5:23), and those who believe in Him are made new and filled with the Holy Spirit. Jesus leads a people who are no longer enslaved by the power of sin or held in fear by the consequence of death. In Christ, Satan and his band of fellow divine rebels no longer have authority over believers. The Holy Spirit arms believers to wage spiritual war against spiritual adversaries.

For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, - 2 Corinthians 10:4-5

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. – Ephesians 6:12-13

How Do We Fight?

If we're not careful, we can over-complicate the answer to this question. But for the sake of simplicity, here's the most straightforward answer: **become like Jesus**. If you're becoming like Jesus, you are winning, period. No doubt, becoming like Jesus is a process, which is why believers occasionally get carried away with strategies and tactics for winning spiritual war. There is room for strategizing, but the LORD has given us every resource we need within His Word and through His Spirit. Don't get caught up in gimmicky spiritual warfare methods that cannot be rooted in God's Word. Keep things simple. **Become like Jesus by knowing and obeying Him, and you will bring light to the darkness.**

Spread the Gospel

Being a light in the darkness shouldn't be confused with other things. We can do good works for people and fail to bring the light. The Church grows, and the darkness retreats by the power of God, through the spread of the Gospel. New believers aren't born through humanitarian aid. If we dig a well in a village but never share the Gospel, we gave them fresh water, but not **living water**.

Sharing the Gospel is one of the primary ways we fight spiritual warfare. What is the Gospel? Gospel means good news. Everything we've discussed about God's story, from creation, to fall, to redemption has been telling us His good news. You don't have to share the whole story at once to share the Gospel. It can be shared as simply as this.

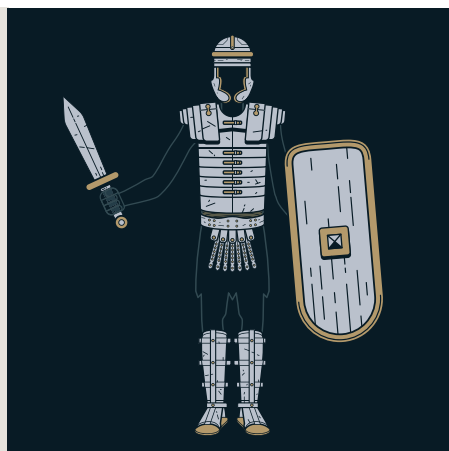
- ***God is our Creator. He created us for His glory and pleasure.***
- ***We failed to obey Him and sinned against Him.***
- ***Sin brings death and separation from God.***
- ***God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to pay the penalty for our sins so that we can have eternal life with Him.***
- ***If you repent from your sins and believe that God raised Jesus from the dead, you will be saved and born again as a new creation into His redeemed family.***

As we share this simple message, God uses it to give people eternal life. Are there people who scoff at the simplicity of the Gospel? Yes, and there always will be.

*For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.
– 1 Corinthians 1:18*

The LORD has chosen the foolishness of the Gospel to save a people for Himself. ***Spiritual battle is won every time we share it.*** In one sense, we succeed when people hear and believe. In another sense, even if people don't accept the Gospel, it is a victory even to share because God's Word is never proclaimed in vain.

*so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it. –
Isaiah 55:11*



.....

Q How did the sending of the Holy Spirit change the spiritual war?

Q Why is it important to be filled with the Holy Spirit?

Q How does being Spirit-empowered affect sharing the Gospel?

What You Should Know...

Here are the big ideas you should have learned about Redemption.

- Jesus Christ is the promised offspring of the woman in Genesis 3:15
- Jesus fulfilled the promise to the Serpent by succeeding where Adam failed – becoming a new Adam.
- Jesus' mission was to image the Father, undo Adam's failures, and redeem sinners.
- Jesus redeemed sinners through His death and resurrection.
- Everyone who repents from their sins and believes that God raised Jesus from the dead will be reborn as a new creation in the new humanity – the Church.
- The Holy Spirit comes to indwell and empower the Church.
- The Spirit empowers us to share the Gospel bringing its light into the darkness.

Redemption and the Fall overlap. Since Adam and Eve, every person is born into fallen humanity. But Jesus came and started something new. Ever since He came, fallen men and women around the world have been turning to Him for redemption. It's conceivable that as the Church has spread around the world, there hasn't been a



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RESTORATION

CHRIST

RETURNS

We look forward to his return because it will usher in the ETERNAL Kingdom, complete all COVENANTS that God has made with mankind, and will bring the SPIRITUAL WAR that began at the FALL to a final end.

ALL COVENANTS FULFILLED

SATAN IS DEFEATED!



The original rebel and our Accuser is finally defeated and is cast into the Lake of Fire. (Revelation 20:10)

DEATH IS DEFEATED!



Death is also finally defeated and is cast into the Lake of Fire. (Revelation 20:14)

GREAT WHITE THRONE JUDGMENT



The dead are raised and stand before God for final judgment. If anyone's name is not found in the Book of Life, they will be cast into the Lake of Fire (Revelation 20:11-15).

BOOK OF LIFE!

ONLY PEOPLE WHO HAVE TRUSTED JESUS CHRIST FOR SALVATION WILL HAVE THEIR NAMES RECORDED IN THE BOOK OF LIFE!

NEW HEAVEN, NEW EARTH



God will recreate both heaven and earth and the two shall come together. The new Jerusalem will descend to the new Earth and no sin will ever corrupt creation again! (Revelation 21)

GOD DWELLS WITH US AGAIN!

Yahweh's home will be with mankind and he will dwell with us as he did in Eden. We will live with him and he with us, forever. (Revelation 21:4)

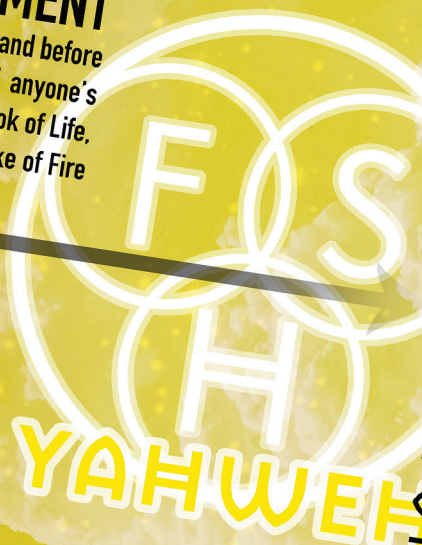
NO MORE CURSE!

NO MORE SUFFERING!

NO MORE SIN!

YOU MAKE ALL THINGS NEW

REVELATION



ETERNITY FUTURE

SPIRITUAL WARENDS

RESTORATION

How it Ends?

And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." – Revelation 21:5

Every story has an end; however, that needs some explaining. When we read stories to children, we often end the story by saying, *the end*. It's a nice way to communicate that storytime is over. Many old silent movies end with the message in large text: *the end* or, if they're fancy, *fin*. But, is it really an end? Imagine that the characters in your favorite stories are real. Do they simply cease to exist after the end of the book or movie, or do their stories continue off-page or off-screen?

When we approach this subject of Restoration, we're not learning about how things end. We're learning about how things **begin again**. But before we dive head-long into this, let's quickly review.

CREATION

- The LORD is our Creator God. To be Creator, He existed before all created things.
- He created the heavens and the earth in six days and ordered those realms in ways that would allow life to flourish.
- The cycle of day, evening, and morning established daily rhythms of work and rest for humans to follow.
- The Garden of Eden was God's temple-garden, where He established His throne to dwell with the humans He created.
- Adam and Eve were imagers of God, given dominion to rule the earth and spread God's image throughout the world by fruitfully multiplying.
- God blessed the seventh day as a never-ending, holy, restful day for enjoying fellowship with His people.
- The seventh day – Sabbath – became a weekly day of rest observed by God's people that reminded us to rest from our work as God did.



FALL

- The primary antagonist – the villain – in God's story is the rebelling cherub, Satan.
- Satan successfully tempted Adam and Eve, luring them into his rebellion against God.
- God enacted covenants with humanity, promising He would redeem them through the offspring of Eve.
- The covenants gradually narrow in focus, from all of humanity to one family; from the nation, Israel, to Israel's royal line, which leads to Jesus Christ. This is called the scarlet thread of redemption.
- The Fall was the beginning of a spiritual war that led to more divine rebels joining Satan, determined to mislead the nations and increase humanity's rebellion.

REDEMPTION

- Jesus Christ is the promised offspring of the woman in Genesis 3:15
- Jesus fulfilled the promise to the Serpent by succeeding where Adam failed – becoming a new Adam.
- Jesus' mission was to image the Father, undo Adam's failures, and redeem sinners.
- Jesus redeemed sinners through His death and resurrection.
- Everyone who repents from their sins and believes that God raised Jesus from the dead will be reborn as a new creation in the new humanity – the Church.
- The Holy Spirit comes to indwell and empower the Church.
- The Spirit empowers us to share the Gospel bringing its light into the darkness.

In God's saga, Creation is one beginning, and Restoration is a new one. What Creation began Restoration will begin again, and it begins again with Jesus Christ's second coming.

The second coming of Jesus isn't a debatable matter. The New Testament is crystal clear that Jesus will return. In Acts 1, angels declared to the Apostles as they watched Him ascend:

And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven." Acts 1:10-11

The Apostle Paul testified of His return in 1 Thessalonians 4.

For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words. – 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18

The book of Revelation is almost entirely about what will happen before and after Christ's return. For Christians, Christ's return is a non-negotiable belief. We believe it by faith because God's Word says it will happen. However, what is debatable are the numerous ways to interpret the events that Revelation says will precede Christ's coming. Do not trust Google and YouTube theologians on this subject. There are essentially three end-time beliefs that have stood the test of time, each with enough Scriptural support to make them contenders. We'll list them here, but we're not spending significant time unpacking them. For our purposes, it won't be necessary to engage with them deeply.

Premillennialism

Premillennialists believe that the events in the book of Revelation, which precede Christ's return, happen before the 1,000-year reign of Christ. This understanding is the oldest and, thought by many to be, the most literal understanding of Christ's return. It is the Apostles and believers' point of view through the first three centuries of the Church.

Postmillennialism

Postmillennialists embrace the belief that the Gospel, through the Church, will gradually overtake the world and usher in a golden age - millennium - of spiritual blessing for the Church. Then at the end of this golden age, there will be a brief apostasy, led by Satan, followed by the return of Christ to bring judgment and usher in the new heaven and new earth.

Amillennialism

Amillennialists believe that there is no literal 1,000-year reign of Christ. They believe His reign began with His first coming. Therefore, we now live in a figurative millennium where He rules on earth through believers (the Church) and from Heaven where He is seated.

Regardless of which belief you think is the truth, they all culminate with the same event: ***Jesus Christ's physical return to the earth.*** From that perspective, it doesn't matter which end-time belief you embrace because you should live in light of His return, regardless.

Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords. – Revelation 19:11-16



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Q How does Christ's return affect your faith?

Q Does Christ's return change your heart toward daily living?

Q How does Christ's return encourage you right now?



All Covenants Fulfilled

Christ's return signals the fulfillment of every unfulfilled covenant God ever made with humans. When we examined the Fall, we listed five covenants: Redemption, Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Davidic. Each of these covenants will be consummated when Jesus returns.

- **Redemption Covenant.** Genesis 3:15 is a covenant (although that word isn't used) that God would bring forth Eve's offspring who will defeat the Serpent. **FULFILLED!**

and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. – Revelation 20:10

- **Noahic Covenant.** Genesis 9 contains God's covenant with Noah, all other living creatures, and the earth itself that he would never again destroy the world by a flood. God gave the rainbow as a sign of that covenant. **FULFILLED!**

When the new earth is created, God's promise will be complete. He will have never flooded the whole world again.

- **Abrahamic Covenant.** In Genesis 12, God initiates a covenant with Abraham to bless all nations through his family. In Genesis 15, God affirms that covenant again. In Genesis 17, God gave circumcision as the sign of the covenant. And, in Genesis 22, God confirms His covenant with Abraham a final time. **FULFILLED!**

*After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, **from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages**, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" – Revelation 7:9-10 (emphasis added)*

- **Mosaic Covenant.** The covenant God gave through Moses, spanning Exodus through Deuteronomy. This covenant includes the giving of the Ten Commandments, laws for Israel's civil government, and ceremonial laws for worship in the Tabernacle. This covenant was sealed through the various animal sacrifices prescribed in the Law. **FULFILLED!**

*In most ways, Jesus fulfilled the Mosaic Covenant through His ministry in His first coming. But Jesus fulfills it entirely in His second coming by doing what Moses couldn't do. **Jesus leads us into the Promised Land and lives with us.***

No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. – Revelation 22:3-4

- **Davidic Covenant.** God initiated a covenant with King David in 2 Samuel 7:12-16, which promised that David's throne would endure forever. His royal family would possess an everlasting kingdom. This covenant led to Jesus Christ, a descendant of David, and is the King of kings. **FULFILLED!**

And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed. – Daniel 7:14

Spiritual War Ends

Christ's return will herald the end of the spiritual war that began in Genesis chapter three. However, because there is disagreement among believers on interpreting the sequence of events in Revelation, it's difficult to say emphatically how the end of the war will unfold. For our purposes, here are the irrefutable things that will happen without leaning too much into a particular point of view.



- There will be a final confrontation between the LORD and Satan's forces where Jesus utterly triumphs. (Revelation 19:11-21; 20:7-10)
- There will be a resurrection of dead believers who reign with Christ. (1 Corinthians 15:51-52; Revelation 20:4-6)
- There will be a resurrection of unbelievers to final judgment before the Great White Throne of God. (Revelation 20:11-15)
- Satan, his forces, death, hell, and all whose names aren't written in the Book of Life will be cast into the lake of fire where they will remain for eternity. (Revelation 20:10, 14-15)



Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years. – Revelation 20:6

The lake of fire is also called the second death. Believers should not fear the second death because Jesus conquered death by His death and resurrection. Once we are resurrected with Him at His coming, we will never die again!

*For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.”
“O death, where is your victory?
O death, where is your sting?”
The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. – 1 Corinthians 15:53-56*

Q How does the future promise of fulfilled covenants affect our trust in Him today?

Q How does Christ’s utter victory over Satan strengthen us for spiritual battle today?

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Q How does the promise of future resurrection affect how we face death today?

What Have We Been Fighting For?

The last two chapters of Revelation, along with numerous Old Testament Prophet passages, give us the best glimpses of the LORD's future new beginning. These Scriptures are hard to understand at times because we do not have a frame of reference. All we've known is sinful humanity, sickness, disasters, wars, rumors of wars, and death. Reading about a future existence where none of those are factors can be challenging. This lack of understanding has led many into severe misunderstandings about what eternity with God will be like. On top of that, God's Word only gives us a birds-eye view of our new beginning. Let's begin this phase of our topic by debunking a handful of popular notions.

We spend eternity in heaven.

HALF TRUTH. We'll cover this more in a moment, but saying we spend eternity in heaven is only a fraction of the reality we'll enjoy.



Eternity is timeless.

FALSE. Revelation 22:2 tells us that the Tree of Life yields new fruit each month. If we're counting months, then the passage of time is something we still notice. Perhaps a more appropriate statement would be that time doesn't hold the same importance. We won't be bound to calendars and schedules... who knows? However, we can at least see that time is still a thing in the eternal ages to come.



People become angels when they die.

FALSE. Jesus saved us to become new humans, not transform into angels. We've already dealt with verses that demonstrate we resurrect from the dead. Jesus did not become an angel after His resurrection, and since our resurrection will be like His, neither will we.



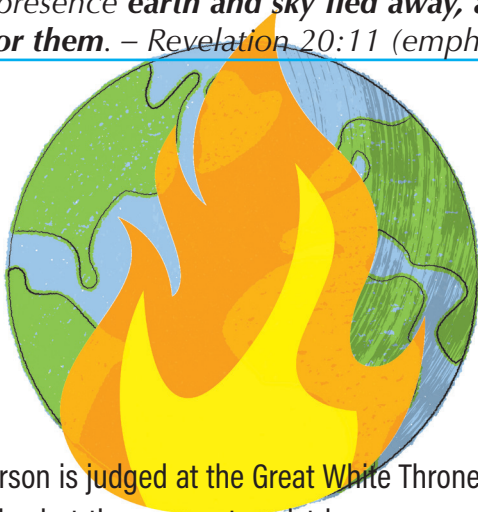
There's no work in heaven.

UNCLEAR. We know that Adam had work to do in the Garden of Eden, so it may not be accurate to say that our future new beginning will be work-free. This is one of those things that the Bible doesn't make clear. Perhaps the safest thing to say is that it won't be like the work we endure now. For now, we work to survive. Survival won't be an issue in eternity. Work as we know it will cease. The nature of new-creation-work, for now, is only a guess.



Let's now look at what the LORD **has** revealed. The Bible does crack the door open just a little, allowing us to see how our new beginning gets started, and it begins before His Great White Throne.

*Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence **earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them.** – Revelation 20:11 (emphasis added)*



Before a single person is judged at the Great White Throne, the earth and sky not only take a hike, but they cease to exist because **no place was found for them.** The world as we know it vanishes. Does it blow up? Does it fall into a black hole? Does it vaporize? All John says is it fled from the LORD's presence. After judgment is finished, and all His enemies are defeated and sentenced to the lake of fire, something amazing happens.



Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. – Revelation 21:1

New Heaven, New Earth

After the LORD completes all judgment, He recreates both Heaven and Earth! We only get a brief glimpse of what it will be like, but here's what is evident.

- God's dwelling place will be with men and women. (Revelation 21:3)
- God will wipe away all tears, and there will be no more pain and death. (Revelation 21:4)
- All sin will be separated from the new Heaven and Earth in the lake of fire. (Revelation 21:8)

What do these things tell us? First, we see Creation restored to God's original desire: Heaven and Earth come together as one because God dwells with humanity once again. This is why we said spending eternity in heaven is a half-truth. Eternity will be spent on earth. It's a new earth, but it's earth nonetheless. It's an earth where its boundary with heaven has been erased. Therefore eternity is a heavenly existence on earth, which is how God intended from the beginning.

Next, it's not a giant leap to say that because God now dwells with us on earth, tears, pain, death, and the like are eliminated. God removes them. His presence with us will make sorrow a thing of the past because ***the former things have passed away.***

Finally, sin will never gain entrance into the new creation because it has been placed in the lake of fire. The lake of fire is somehow separated from the new creation. How? The Bible isn't clear. The only indication given about this is in Isaiah's final chapter, which seems to say it will be visible from the new heaven and earth (Isaiah 66:22-24).



The New Jerusalem

In Revelation 21, the New Jerusalem is portrayed as two things: ***a bride and a city.***

*Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues and spoke to me, saying, "Come, I will show you **the Bride, the wife of the Lamb.**" And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me **the holy city** Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, - Revelation 21:9-10 (emphasis added)*

The new Jerusalem is both a people and a place. Because John describes it as a bride, we know that the new Jerusalem is the people of God. Because John describes it as a city, we know that it's also the place where the people of God dwell.

The River and Tree of Life

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. – Revelation 22:1-2



The River of Life and the Tree of Life should ring a bell. The Garden of Eden had both. Although Genesis doesn't call the river in Eden the River of Life, this river's presence in the New Jerusalem is a direct recreation of how things began. This connection back to the beginning gives us yet another parallel that reveals God's intentions from the start. The New Heaven, Earth, and Jerusalem in Revelation show us how the LORD designed things to be all along.

This is what we've been fighting for, and ***it is glorious!***

A New Beginning

Every story has a beginning. God's story has two beginnings that serve as bookends to the Bible. Everything that happens between these bookends is moving us from one creation to the next. Understanding this forward motion in God's story gives every smaller narrative within the Bible connective meaning. That means they have meaning that transcends their moment in history. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David, and Daniel aren't just men that God uses to teach us morality lessons. They are connected in the tapestry of a larger story about God's work to make all things new.

God is the hero of His story. God is the author of His story. God is the finisher of His story. We are simply blessed that He has loved us and, through Christ, brought us into His plans to begin again.

Q Why is it important to understand what we've been fighting for?

Q How do the new heaven and new earth change your concept of eternity?

Q Does a new beginning give you hope for your circumstance today?

What You Should Know...

Here are the big ideas you should have learned about Restoration.

- Restoration begins when Jesus Christ returns.
- Restoration is about the passing of the old creation and the beginning of the new.
- Believers will resurrect to new life; unbelievers will resurrect to final judgment.
- Satan, his forces of evil, death, hell, and anyone not written in the Book of Life will be cast into the lake of fire – the second death.
- After final judgment, the LORD will recreate the heavens and earth, brand new.
- Heaven and earth will exist together, and God will dwell with His people forever.
- Sin will never enter God’s creation again.

Here at the end of this study, we find a fresh start. The whole point of everything we’ve studied is to get history to this place. The LORD has desired this all along; to dwell with His human family. God’s story gives explaining power to every story we read in God’s Word. It even helps explain many of the stories that are harder to understand. Knowing what you know now should equip you to read your Bible with more of God’s perspective.

~NOTES~



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OUR GOD

In the first section of Foundations, we took a long look at the Bible's metanarrative – God's story. Now we turn our attention to God, Himself. We've learned His story, but who is He? Who is this Hero of the Bible? Thankfully, He has given us answers to those questions within the pages of His Word.

In this section we will answer the question, "Who is He?" in three ways.

- ***Who does He say He is?***
- ***How has He revealed Himself?***
- ***How does He relate to us?***

Q How would your best friend or spouse describe you to a stranger? Try to answer this question by answering the three questions above.



WHO DOES HE SAY HE IS?

The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation." Exodus 34:6-7

Genesis reveals quite a bit about the LORD. He is the Creator. Our sin grieves His heart, and He won't allow it to continue unjudged forever. He is a covenant-making God. However, oddly enough, it's entirely possible to read Genesis, and even a great deal of Exodus, without really understanding the LORD's essential character. Fortunately, a few chapters before Exodus concludes, the LORD tells us seven truths about Himself. He is:

- **Merciful**
- **Gracious**
- **Slow to anger**
- **Abounding in steadfast love**
- **Faithful**
- **Forgiving**
- **Just**

We're going to examine each of these qualities, using the Old Testament to illustrate each one. Why only use the Old Testament? Because, for the centuries that led up to Jesus, God's people understood these things about Him from the Old Testament books. It would do every Christian well to know that the Old Testament's God is the same God of the New.

God is Merciful

First things first, let's define mercy. Merriam Webster defines mercy as *compassion or forbearance given, especially to an offender or one subject to one's power*. Let's make that a little simpler. ***Mercy is an act of compassion that withholds the just penalty for an offense.*** If you've ever been pulled over for speeding, pled your case to the officer, and got off with a warning, that's mercy.

The LORD called Himself merciful. That means He is full of compassion to withhold the just penalty for an offense. How has God revealed His mercy to

us in His story? It is first displayed in Genesis chapter three. The penalty for eating from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil was death: for in the day that you eat of it, you shall surely die.

In part, Adam and Eve did die the day they sinned, but it wasn't a complete death. They died spiritually, but not physically. God did not take their lives. He didn't put them to death immediately for their transgression. Instead, He showed mercy and allowed them to live. The penalty of death was delayed, and they lived long lives before they died physically. Even though life would never be the same for them, God's mercy allowed them to live. God's mercy means we don't receive what we deserve.

Q What are some obvious ways that you benefit from God's mercy?

Q Why is mercy such an essential part of our character?

Q Would you consider yourself merciful?



God is Gracious

What is grace? Grace and mercy may be similar, but they aren't the same thing. Where mercy is not receiving what we deserve, grace is receiving what we don't deserve. You could say that receiving mercy is itself an act of grace because we don't deserve it. That is a true statement, but God's grace doesn't stop there.

Look at Abraham. The LORD appeared to Abraham (then Abram) and established a covenant with him.

Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

– Genesis 12:2-3

Already, in this covenant, we see more than God's mercy at work. The LORD is showing far more. His mercy is that He called Abraham at all. His grace is that He not only called him but blessed him with incredible promises.

A gracious person goes beyond what is expected or required. It's no different with the LORD. He goes above and beyond the bounds of mercy. He blesses us with blessings that are well beyond forgiveness. We often speak of forgiveness being the ultimate gift, and we should rightly celebrate it. But the LORD's grace gives us far more. He is a gracious God.

Q Are you a gracious person?



.....

Q How does God's grace transform us into gracious people?

Q In our relationships, what are some ways to go beyond what is expected or required?

God is Slow to Anger

God's anger isn't fast. In fact, the first time you read about His anger is in Exodus 4:14. The LORD's anger burned against Moses because he refused to trust Him. That might not jump off the page, but it is fascinating that God doesn't reveal His anger to us until we're well into human history. Even with the Flood, the Bible says that God was grieved, not angry (Genesis 6:6).

How many years did God give Israel and Judah to repent from their idolatry before He judged? How long did the LORD wait for the Canaanites to repent before He sent Israel into the land as an instrument of His wrath? The answer to both of those questions is hundreds. He was patient with them for hundreds of years.

How patient is the LORD with us? How many times do we come to Him with the same sin that we can't seem to shake? How often do we tell the LORD that we'll never do something again, only to break that oath? Answer: too many to count. Yet, His anger kindles slowly. Why else would He endure humankind's increasing depravity for so long?



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Q Why do many of us have such short tempers?

Q What are the things that anger us so quickly?

Q How can we slow our anger?

God is Abounding in Steadfast Love

Steadfast love is a somewhat complicated word to translate from Hebrew. In Hebrew, it's the word *khosed*. It combines love, loyalty, and generosity into one word. The variety of terms used across our English Bibles shows the complication.

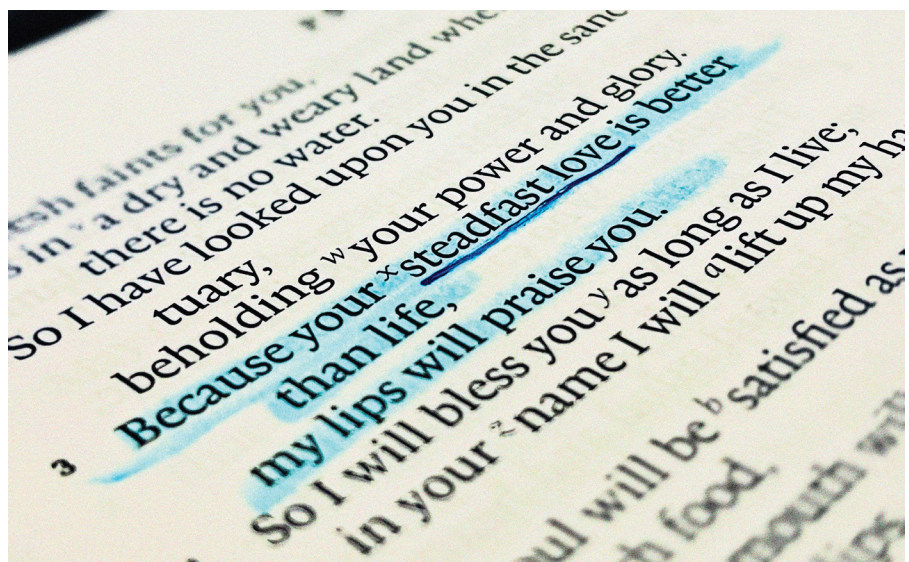
- **Love (NIV)**
- **Unfailing Love (NLT)**
- **Loving Devotion (BSB)**
- **Goodness (KJV)**
- **Faithfulness (NASB)**
- **Lovingkindness (NASB 1995)**
- **Faithful love (HCSB)**
- **Great Love (CEV)**

Khesed, then, is loyal/trustworthy/faithful/generous love. The ESV says steadfast, which means firmly fixed in place; not subject to change. Take all of these English words, and you begin understanding what *khesed* means.

Perhaps the best Old Testament example of *khesed* is Ruth. The book of Ruth begins by explaining some backstory.

In the days when the judges ruled there was a famine in the land, and a man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons. The name of the man was Elimelech and the name of his wife Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. They went into the country of Moab and remained there. But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons. These took Moabite wives; the name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. They lived there about ten years, and both Mahlon and Chilion died, so that the woman was left without her two sons and her husband. – Ruth 1:1-5

What follows is a story that demonstrates the ***khesed*** of Ruth. Naomi, Orpah, and Ruth journey back to Judah. On the way, she told Orpah and Ruth that they should return to their families in Moab because she had no more sons to offer them as husbands. Orpah returned, but Ruth loved Naomi and refused to leave her side. The people of Bethlehem witnessed Ruth's character, and Boaz, the story's redeemer, later summed up her character with one word: ***khesed*** (Ruth 3:10). Ruth had nothing to gain by remaining with Naomi, but her steadfast love wouldn't allow her to leave. Ruth reflects what God says He abounds with: ***khesed***.



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Q Do you recall a time when someone – apart from God – showed you this kind of love?

Q What was your response?

Q How should we respond to God’s steadfast love?

God is Abounding in Faithfulness

In Exodus 34:6, steadfast love and faithfulness are paired together in the same clause: ***abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness***. It’s as if these are complementary or that somehow you don’t get one without the other. If God is abounding with steadfast love, of course He’ll also abound with faithfulness. Yet, these aren’t synonyms. Faithfulness is a characteristic of the LORD that stands alone. How do we see God’s faithfulness demonstrated?

King David. We can say many things about David. He was not a perfect man. Before he died, he even showed himself as an adulterer and murderer. But the Scriptures call David a man who walked faithfully before the LORD.

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*And Solomon said, “You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant David my father, **because he walked before you in faithfulness**, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart toward you. And you have kept for him this great and steadfast love and have given him a son to sit on his throne this day.” – 1 Kings 3:6 (emphasis added)*

How was David faithful? Look at David’s relationship with King Saul’s son, Jonathan. They were best friends, even though Jonathan’s dad was trying to kill David. David had opportunities to kill King Saul that he refused to take because he loved the LORD and Saul and Jonathan! After Jonathan and Saul are dead, David became king, but he actively sought to bless someone from Saul’s family. Mephibosheth, Jonathan’s only remaining son, who had a disability in his feet, was brought into David’s house, was cared for, and always ate at the king’s table (2 Samuel 9). David’s faithfulness to people was a natural expression of his faithfulness to God. And God’s faithfulness is pictured in David. God is abounding in the kind of faithfulness that was at work in King David’s life.



Q What can we learn from King David’s faithfulness to Jonathan?

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Q How is it similar to the way that God is faithful to us?

Q How has God's faithfulness made you a more faithful person?

God is Forgiving

Many Christians don't associate the Old Testament with God's forgiveness, yet here it is. God points out that He forgives *iniquity*, *transgressions*, and *sin*. The God of the Old Testament is forgiving. It's common for us to speak of sin as one broad category but notice that the Lord identifies three things He forgives.

He forgives iniquity. Iniquity is depravity. It's the fallen state in which we are born, the sin nature we inherit from Adam. It's the part of us that bends us toward rebellion and doing things our way.

He forgives transgressions. Transgressions are purposeful acts of rebellion and are the things toward which our iniquity bends us. Transgressions are premeditated. They are actions chosen instead of obedience to the LORD. When King David lamented that adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah were sins against God alone, he had this in mind (Psalm 51:4). Obedience to the LORD will never lead us to sin against another person, so anytime we transgress other people, we first transgress God.

He forgives sin. These are the acts we take that just fall short. Sin means to miss. What this means is that the LORD also forgives those times when we simply miss the mark. Sin covers a spectrum of actions from our knee-jerk responses to bad drivers to the accidental wounds we inflict on others from ignorance. These aren't deliberate acts of rebellion, but they are actions that

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_____ fall short of God's glory, which we are specially tuned to do because of our iniquity.

_____ God forgives all of them. Why? It's part of how He keeps His steadfast love. The Lord says, "**Keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgressions and sin.**" Who models this for us in the Old Testament?

_____ Consider Joseph. Joseph's brothers hated him, partly because he was Jacob's favorite and partly because he was a snotty brat. Twice he bragged about his dreams where his family bowed, and the host of heaven bowed down to him (Genesis 37:1-11). They ultimately conspired against him, sold him to slave traders, and told Jacob that a fierce animal killed him.

_____ Thirteen years later, the LORD had prospered Joseph so much that he was governor of all Egypt, second only to Pharaoh. His brothers arrived one day to buy grain because there was a famine. Joseph saw his brothers, and though he concealed his identity and tested them for a short time. He ultimately revealed himself, forgave them completely, and moved the entire family to Egypt under his care.

_____ This is God's forgiveness at work in Joseph.

Q Have you ever thought of your sin in light of the three things that God forgives?

Q Are there people in your life who you have a hard time forgiving?

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Q How should God's forgiveness shape ours?
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God is Just

Remember what we said about God's mercy? He is full of compassion to withhold the just penalty for an offense. That statement has a head-on collision with this one. How can the LORD be both merciful and a God **who by no means clears the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation?** They don't appear to be compatible character traits. Let's go back to a place earlier in Exodus. This phrase about visiting iniquity shows up in a slightly different context.

You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments. – Exodus 20:4-6

If this rings a bell, that's good. This is the second commandment – the full version. We often hear an abridged version: You shall not make for yourself a carved image. Let's examine these side by side.

You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments. – Exodus 20:5-6

keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation. – Exodus 34:7

Exodus 20:5 is a warning against worshipping idols. Disobedience to this command arouses God's jealousy and brings about the same thing He says in Exodus 34:7. He visits the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation. However, Exodus 20:6 also says that He shows steadfast love to those who love Him and keep His commandments. It seems to be simple.

God shows mercy and steadfast love to those who love Him and obey His commandments. But for those who rebel and are disloyal, He does not clear their guilt. The LORD is just toward those who rebel and merciful to those who love Him. We will unpack this more in future chapters. The primary purpose here is to demonstrate that He can be (and is) both merciful and just without contradiction.

The Old Testament is full of passages that speak of God as a righteous judge.

God is a righteous judge, and a God who feels indignation every day. If a man does not repent, God will whet his sword; he has bent and readied his bow; - Psalm 7:11-12

For the LORD is our judge; the LORD is our lawgiver; the LORD is our king; he will save us. - Isaiah 33:22

Along with Psalm 9:8, 82:8, 94:2, Jeremiah 11:20, and many more.

Q Do you find comfort in the idea that God is a righteous judge?

Q Does God's righteous judgment affect how you live?

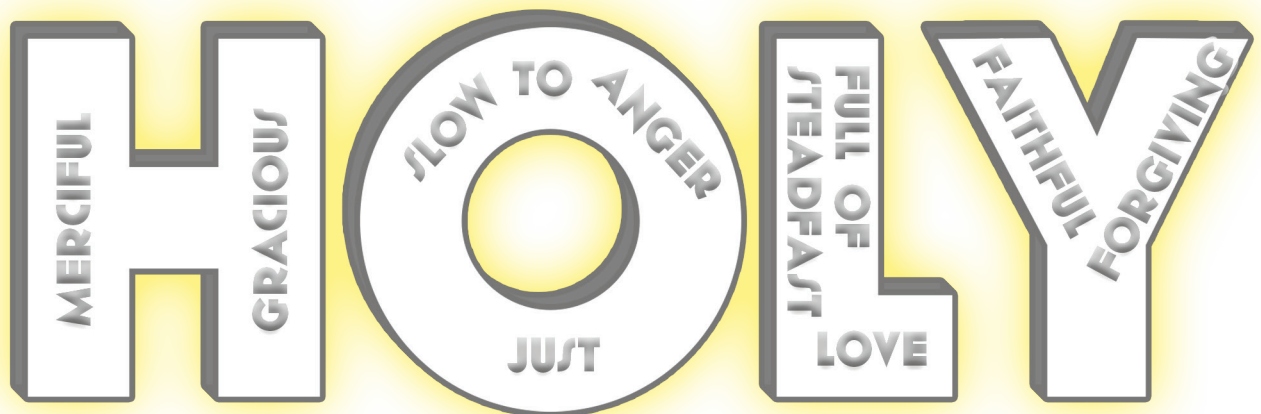
Q How should His righteous judgment transform us?

What You Should Know...

This is who God says He is. The God of the Big Picture that we studied in the first section is this kind of God. He says He is:

- **Merciful**
- **Gracious**
- **Slow to anger**
- **Abounding in steadfast love**
- **Faithful**
- **Forgiving**
- **Just**

These are the characteristics that He thought described Himself best to ancient Israel. But there's one word that God uses about Himself that isn't mentioned here.



These characteristics come together in perfect harmony and execution to make Him completely holy. Holy is a word that just means *other than*. The LORD is completely *other than us*. Yes, we are His imagers, but our iniquity has shattered and stained the image. We are not holy. We are not these things He said to describe Himself. That's why we need Him to save and transform us into His likeness so that we can be holy as He is holy (Leviticus 11:44, 1 Peter 1:15).

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Q Does the LORD's description of Himself challenge your understanding of Him?

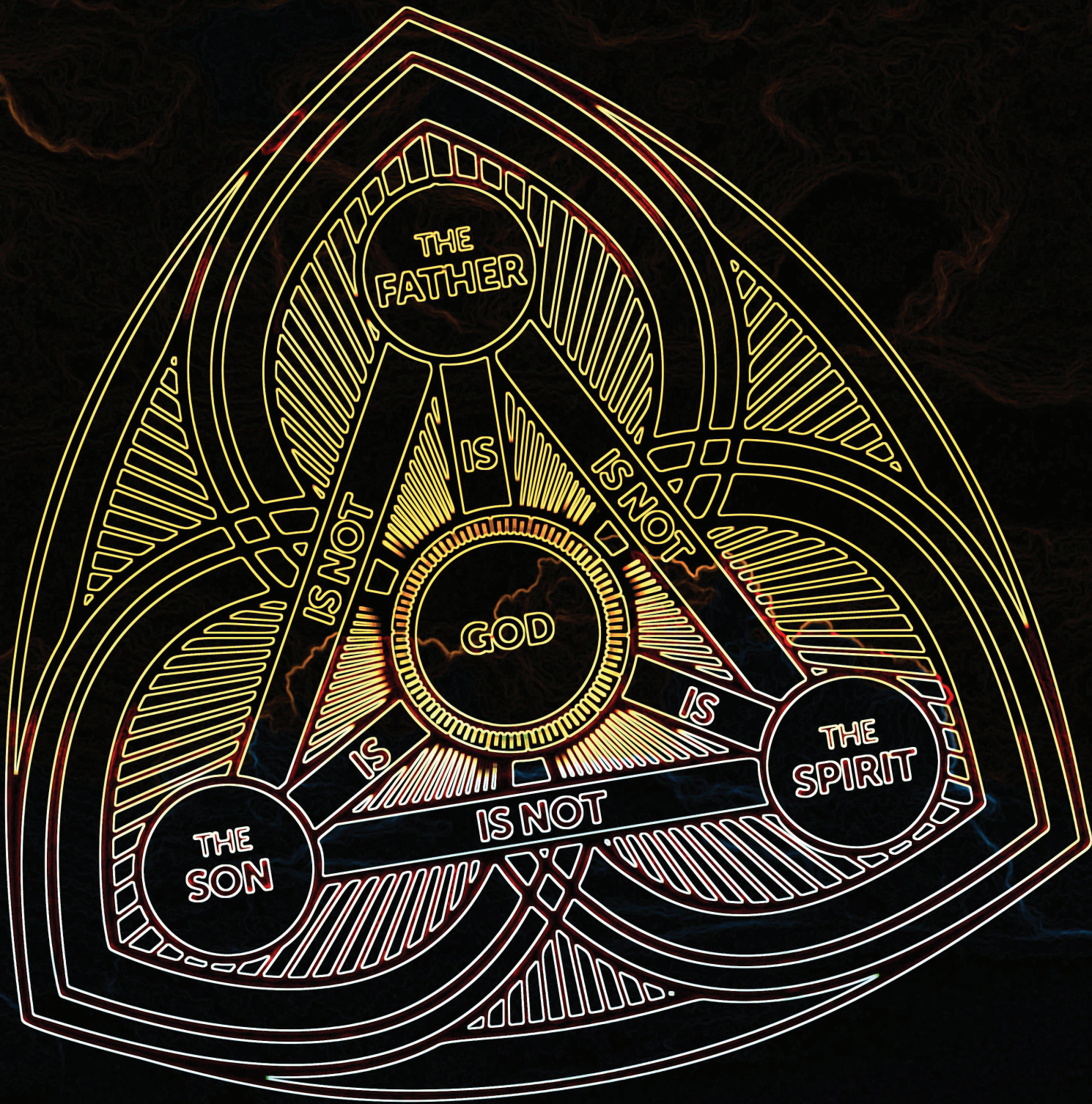
Q Does the LORD's description of Himself challenge the way you see yourself?

Q Has knowing Jesus transformed you in these particular areas? If so, how? If not, why?

~NOTES~



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HOW HAS HE REVEALED HIMSELF?

*"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one."
Deuteronomy 6:4*

So far, this study has danced around this topic without diving into it deeply. One of the fundamental beliefs of the Christian faith is that the LORD has revealed Himself as one God in three distinct persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. In most Christian churches, the foundational nature of this belief makes it unquestioned. Unless you're a theologian, you simply don't consider the issue.

However, the unquestioned nature of this belief works against us when we encounter opposition. We almost always do a lousy job of defending beliefs that we've never questioned ourselves. Our opponents are ready to dismantle what we believe at a moment's notice. The inability to defend gives our opponents the illusion of winning and creates uncertainty in our own beliefs.

In this chapter, we're going to equip you with an understanding of how the LORD has revealed Himself by examining three things.

- **The LORD is one.**
- **The LORD reveals Himself in three persons.**
- **The LORD'S persons are separate, equal, and still one.**

The LORD is One

Christianity sprang from the Jewish faith, and we both agree and believe this core understanding. The LORD is one. In an immediate sense, the Jews emphasized this truth in the face of the surrounding nations who worshiped other gods or even multiple gods. When Moses received the Law, Israel was fresh out of bondage. Egypt worshiped a pantheon of gods and likely forced them upon the people of Israel. The LORD made this distinction clear to His people. He is one. But more importantly, He is unique among the gods. Deuteronomy 6:4 can also be understood to mean the LORD is ***unique***. In the sense of His uniqueness, he stands apart from the gods of Egypt and all other gods.

There is none like Him

The Old Testament consistently repeats declarations that God is utterly unique from His creations. Here are a few samples.

There is none holy like the LORD: for there is none besides you; there is no rock like our God. – 1 Samuel 2:2

There is none like you, O LORD, and there is no God besides you, according to all that we have heard with our ears. – 1 Chronicles 17:20

remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, - Isaiah 46:9

There is none like you, O LORD; you are great, and your name is great in might. – Jeremiah 10:6

God reminds us, on repeat, that He is entirely unlike anything He created. This is an essential truth because it prevents familiarity. Just when we think that maybe God isn't all that different from us, He reminds us, ***"There is none like me."***

He is God of gods

The LORD'S uniqueness puts Him in a category all by Himself. He is not only different than us, but He's also different than the hosts of heaven. They are created beings, thus making the LORD their Creator, which means He is different from them as well.

For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who is not partial and takes no bribe. – Deuteronomy 10:17

Egypt and the nations that surrounded Israel worshiped many other gods. Our God, the LORD, is God over them! That makes perfect sense in that He showed Egypt's gods to be powerless against Him. Note Numbers 33:4.

*...while the Egyptians were burying all their firstborn, whom the LORD had struck down among them. **On their gods also the LORD executed judgments.** – emphasis added*

The plagues weren't only to convince Pharaoh into letting Israel leave. They were the LORD'S warfare against the gods of Egypt.

Q How does the LORD's uniqueness set Him apart from people and other gods?



Q Why is it important for Him to be unique from His creation?

He is before all creation

The LORD is eternal. Part of His uniqueness is that He existed before all created things.

Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God. – Psalm 90:2

Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. – Isaiah 40:28

In this regard, the LORD is unique. Many creation accounts from the surrounding nations include tellings of how their gods came into existence. The God of Israel has no such narrative. He is eternal. The LORD, our God, has always existed, and as Creator, He brought all things into existence.



The LORD Reveals Himself in Three Persons

Here is where we part ways with our Jewish fathers. But even though we part ways with them on this point, this continues the discussion of the LORD'S uniqueness. However, in all fairness, the belief that the LORD reveals Himself in multiple persons wasn't exclusively Christian. Although the rabbinical community declared it a heresy in the second century, the Jews of Christ's day entertained the idea that the LORD had revealed Himself as two persons.

In Daniel chapter seven, the Ancient of Days gave the Son of Man dominion. The Son of Man came riding on the clouds, which is how the Psalmist describes the LORD in Psalm 104. This made room in Jewish theology for a *two-personed* LORD. As Christians increased and taught that Jesus was the Son of Man (Christ even claimed this at His trial), the Jews distanced themselves from any multi-personed belief about the LORD.

So, first things first. How can God be one and three simultaneously? Welcome to the mystery of the Godhead! There are no analogies that help us understand it completely. There are no examples in nature that demonstrate how it could be possible. On top of that, there isn't a single verse in the Bible that overtly says God is one but also three individual persons. You won't find a verse that says, "And God said, 'I AM three in one.'" If this is so, why do Christians embrace what we've labeled the Trinity?



That's a great question, and the answer is simple. We've concluded that God is a Trinity because the Bible portrays each person of the Trinity as doing things only God can do. Because of this, and because we also hold that God is one, we arrive at the oft-confusing belief that God is both three and one. The three persons of the LORD have a complex unity.

God the Father

The Old Testament isn't overflowing with references to God as the Father, but it's definitely there.

Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the LORD, Israel is my firstborn son,' – Exodus 4:22

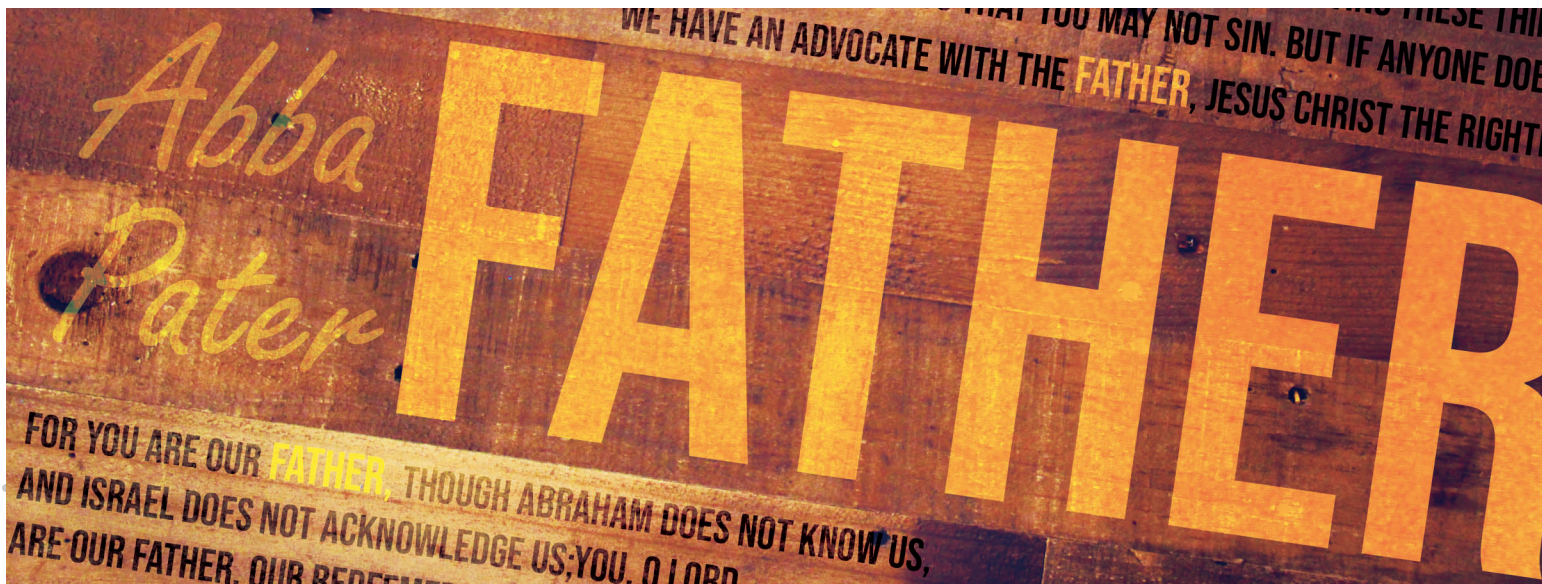
For you are our Father, though Abraham does not know us, and Israel does not acknowledge us; you, O LORD, are our Father, our Redeemer from of old is your name. – Isaiah 63:16

When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. – Hosea 11:1

The Fatherhood of God is revealed more directly in the New Testament. Jesus constantly referred to the LORD as Father. When He taught the disciples to pray, the first words He uttered in His model prayer were, "Our Father." The Apostles continued the belief in God's Fatherhood.

To the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father. – Colossians 1:2

And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, - 1 Peter 1:17



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Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world. – James 1:27

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. – 1 John 2:1

God as Father reigns over creation supremely, working out His plan for all things for His glory and the good of those who love Him.

*Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the LORD GOD: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, **but for the sake of my holy name**, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came. – Ezekiel 36:22 (emphasis added)*

The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth. He fulfills the desire of those who fear him; he also hears their cry and saves them. The LORD preserves all who love him, but all the wicked he will destroy. – Psalm 145:18-20

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. – Romans 8:28

The Father has given all authority to Jesus, the Son until every enemy vanquished. Then Jesus, the Son, will return all authority to the Father.

Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For “God has put all things in subjection under his feet.” But when it says, “all things are put in subjection,” it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him. When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all. – 1 Corinthians 15:24-28

Hopefully, it's clear that God the Father is the person who most people, including much of Scripture, have in mind when we say, “the LORD.” The very phrase, “the LORD,” is almost always a reverent substitution for God's divine personal name, Yahweh. The prophet Daniel called the Father the Ancient of Days, and He gave the Son of Man dominion.

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Q When you think about God, does a father come to mind first?

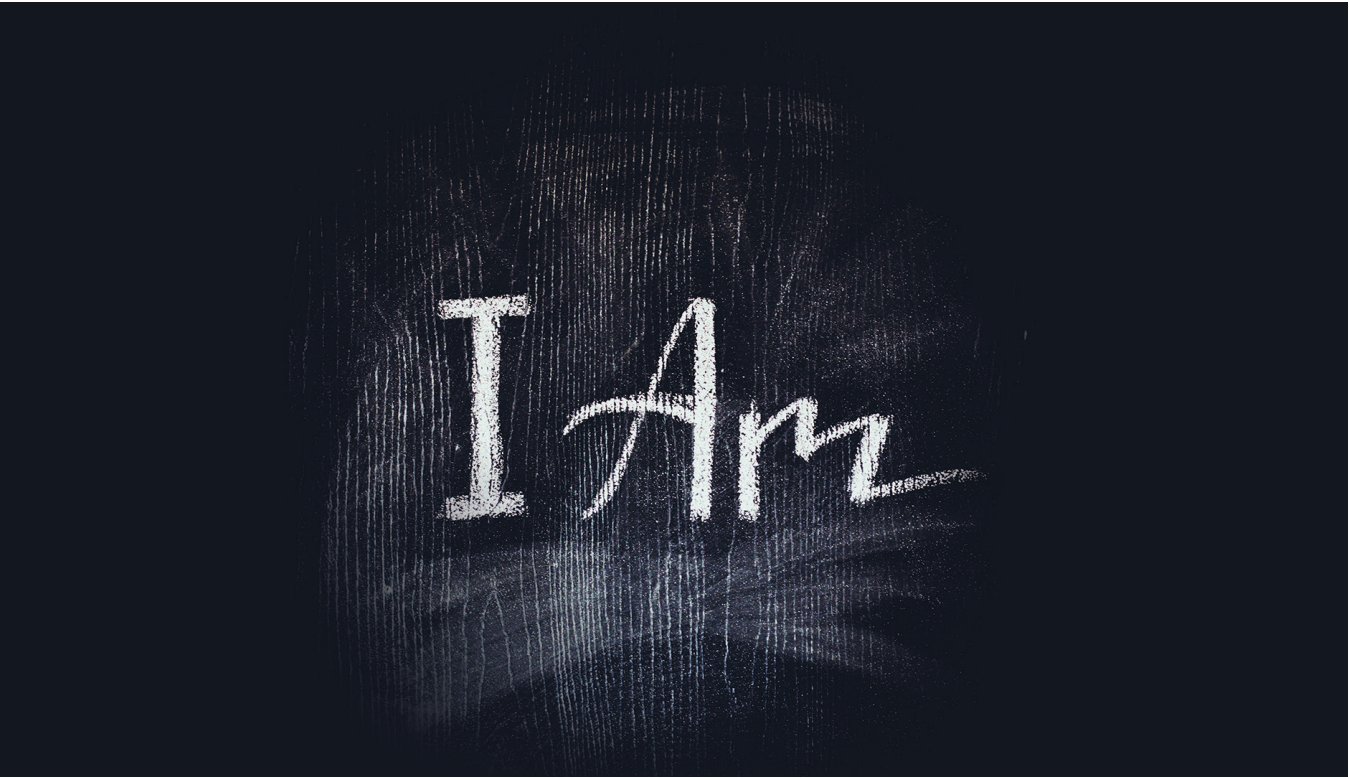
Q How should the fatherhood of God affect our understanding of His character?

Q Since God is our Father, how should we approach Him?

God the Son

Jesus called Himself the ***Son of Man*** many times, but what did that mean? As we've already mentioned, the Son of Man in Daniel is the cloud-rider who approached the Ancient of Days.

I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.
– Daniel 7:13-14



John aimed to prove that Jesus was who He said he was. His Gospel isn't a play-by-play timeline from beginning to end of Christ's ministry. John selected and ordered particular moments from his time with Jesus that would best demonstrate his point: Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God.

Among these moments, John brings up seven I AM statements from Jesus.

- **I am the bread of life - John 6:35**
- **I am the light of the world. - John 8:12**
- **I am the door of the sheep. - John 10:7**
- **I am the good shepherd. - John 10:11**
- **I am the resurrection and the life. - John 11:25**
- **I am the way, the truth, and the life. - John 14:6**
- **I am the true vine. - John 15:1**

Seven of these statements toy with the mind of the Jewish hearer. They tease the scene with Moses at the burning bush where Yahweh calls Himself I AM. The first four I AM statements were said publicly and were less direct deity claims. *Bread of life* and *light of the world* link Jesus with God's presence in the Temple. The Temple had the Bread of the Presence and the Eternal Flame. *The door of the sheep* links to Psalm 118:20 that He is the gate for the righteous. *The good shepherd* ties to several Prophet passages where the shepherd of Israel is the LORD Himself.

The final three were said to his close friends and disciples in private moments and were more direct deity claims. *The resurrection and the life* was told to Martha after Lazarus had died. *The way, the truth, and the life* was an encouragement to the disciples the night before he was crucified. The true vine was also said the night before His death.

However, there's only one I AM statement that nearly got Jesus killed. It typically isn't grouped with the other I AM statements, but perhaps it should be.

Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly I say to you, before Abraham was, I am!" – John 8:58

When the Jews heard Him say this, they picked up stones to stone Him. This was perhaps Christ's most direct claim to be God in any of His public teachings.

But it wasn't just Christ's statements that prove His claim to be God. It was His works. He healed. He cast out demons. He forgave sins. He prophesied. He never sinned. And the big reveal is that He resurrected from the grave and ascended back to the Father! These things prove His claim to be the LORD in the flesh.

Q If someone challenged your belief that Jesus is God, how could you biblically defend your faith?

Q Why is it important that we believe Jesus is God?



the
HOLY SPIRIT

God the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit's place in the Godhead is much simpler to understand in part because he is explicitly associated with the LORD from the beginning.

"And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters." – Genesis 1:2

However, Christ's teachings about the Holy Spirit offer enough revelation to draw a clear conclusion that He too is a full member of the three-in-one nature of God. Look first in John chapter three.

"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." – John 3:5-8

This is Christ's first recorded teaching about the work of the Holy Spirit. Jesus explained to Nicodemus that being born again isn't a physical rebirth but a spiritual birth. That spiritual birth happens by the activity of the Holy Spirit. Drawing an analogy with the wind was intentional. Jesus knew that this would spark Nicodemus' memory of another instance where the wind's arrival caused a birth.

"Then he said to me, 'Prophecy to the breath; prophecy, son of man, and say to the breath, Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live.' So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army." – Ezekiel 37:9-10

Nicodemus would've known the Valley of Dry Bones and that it prophesied how God would bring back Israel from death. Jesus repurposed Ezekiel's words to describe the work of the Holy Spirit in salvation. The Spirit is the wind that gives life where there was no life in Ezekiel, and He is the one who resurrects the dead spirits of men and women in salvation! You see this role of the Spirit described differently in a closely related prophecy of Ezekiel.

“And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.” – Ezekiel 36:26-27

Jesus was connecting these dots for Nicodemus. The Holy Spirit is intimately involved in the new birth because He resurrects our dead spirit to new life. Ezekiel even noted that God's people would have a new spirit (v.26) **and** His Spirit (v. 27). Taken with the Valley of Dry Bones, the work of the Holy Spirit in salvation gives new hearts, resurrects dead spirits, brings life where once there was none.

The Holy Spirit creates new life. Who else but the LORD can do this? The Holy Spirit is the person of God who is the breath – the wind – who regenerates the heart and resurrects the spirit of every believer. That alone demonstrates His deity and secures His place in the Godhead. Only God creates new life.

Q Does the belief that the Holy Spirit is God change the way you think about Him?

Q How important is the Holy Spirit to your faith? Do you see Him as essential for daily living or just someone who speaks up when you're sinning?

The LORD'S Persons are Separate, Equal, and Still One

Here's where things get complicated. We've shown that the LORD has revealed Himself in three persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Typically, the Bible portrays these three persons as separate individuals, each with a particular ministry. Yet, we also know (as we've discussed) that the Word also teaches God is one. We've also discussed that each person of the Godhead is fully God because they each do things that only God can do. In light of all this, these three statements must be true.

1. **God is three persons.**
2. **Each person is fully God.**
3. **There is one God.**

All analogies that we use to explain this eventually break down. There is nothing in creation like the LORD that would compare. This plays well into what we've already discussed. He is completely different from His creation.

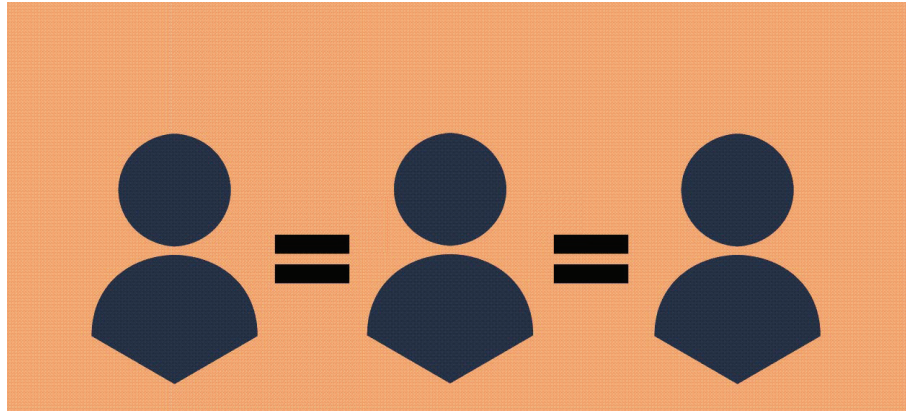
Denial of any of these three statements results in errors. Here are examples for each statement.

1. **Modalism** denies that God is three distinct persons but instead believes He's one God who appears in different modes at different times. It affirms that the Father, Son, and Spirit are fully God, but it insists they are all the same person.
2. **Arianism** denies the full deity of the Son and the Holy Spirit. It insists they are created persons, but not eternal, thus not equal with the Father. It affirms the personhood of the Father, Son, and Spirit but would only uphold the Father as the one true God.
3. **Titheism** denies the oneness of God. It affirms the personhood and deity of the Father, Son, and Spirit but denies that they are one God.

The LORD's Persons are Separate

Jesus demonstrated this truth in a single statement.

But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. – John 14:26



ther, the Son, and the Holy Spirit each have different roles, but they all possess equal authority. Look at Matthew 28:18-19.

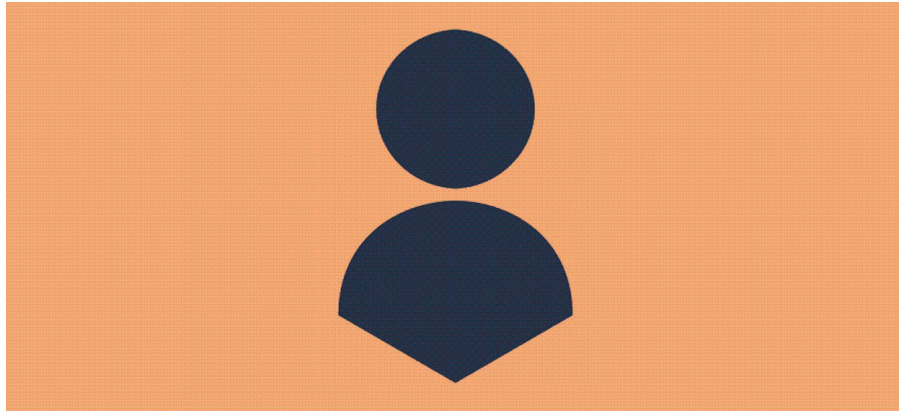
And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." – Matthew 28:18-19

Jesus possesses all authority in heaven and earth, yet, He instructs us to baptize in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. He demonstrates here that all the authority of God is shared equally between every person of the LORD. If all authority belonged to the Son alone, why baptize in the name of the Father and the Spirit?

The LORD's Persons are One

This is where we began. We must take everything we've discussed and bring it beneath the umbrella truth that God is one. The complex unity of the LORD's three-in-one nature will remain a mystery to our finite minds. Yet, the righteous are justified by faith. If we could understand everything about the LORD, faith wouldn't be necessary. The Bible even tells us that there are things we will never fully comprehend.

The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law. – Deuteronomy 29:29



Not everything made sense to the people of Israel. The Lord responded that some things about Him would remain a secret. Yet, everything that He does reveal belongs to us, and it is upon us to understand and believe. We don't need to understand the mystery of the Trinity, or else the LORD would have explained it better. However, we must believe what the LORD has revealed about Himself.

What You Should Know...

This is how God has revealed Himself. The LORD's three-in-one nature - the Trinity - is a core belief of the Christian faith. Here are the essentials we covered in this chapter.

- **There is one God and He is unique**
- **He has revealed Himself in three distinct persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.**
- **Each person of God is fully God.**
- **Each person of God is fully separate.**
- **Each person of God is fully Equal**
- **All three persons of God are one God.**

The LORD has revealed everything we need to know about Him that would lead us to redemption in Jesus Christ. However, He has not revealed absolutely everything about Himself, which is why the Trinity, in some ways, will always remain a mysterious matter of faith. His triune nature will defy all rational explanation because we have nothing in all of creation that compares to Him.

Q How important is the belief that God has revealed Himself in three distinct, equal, unified persons?

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Q Why does every analogy used to explain the Trinity eventually fall short?

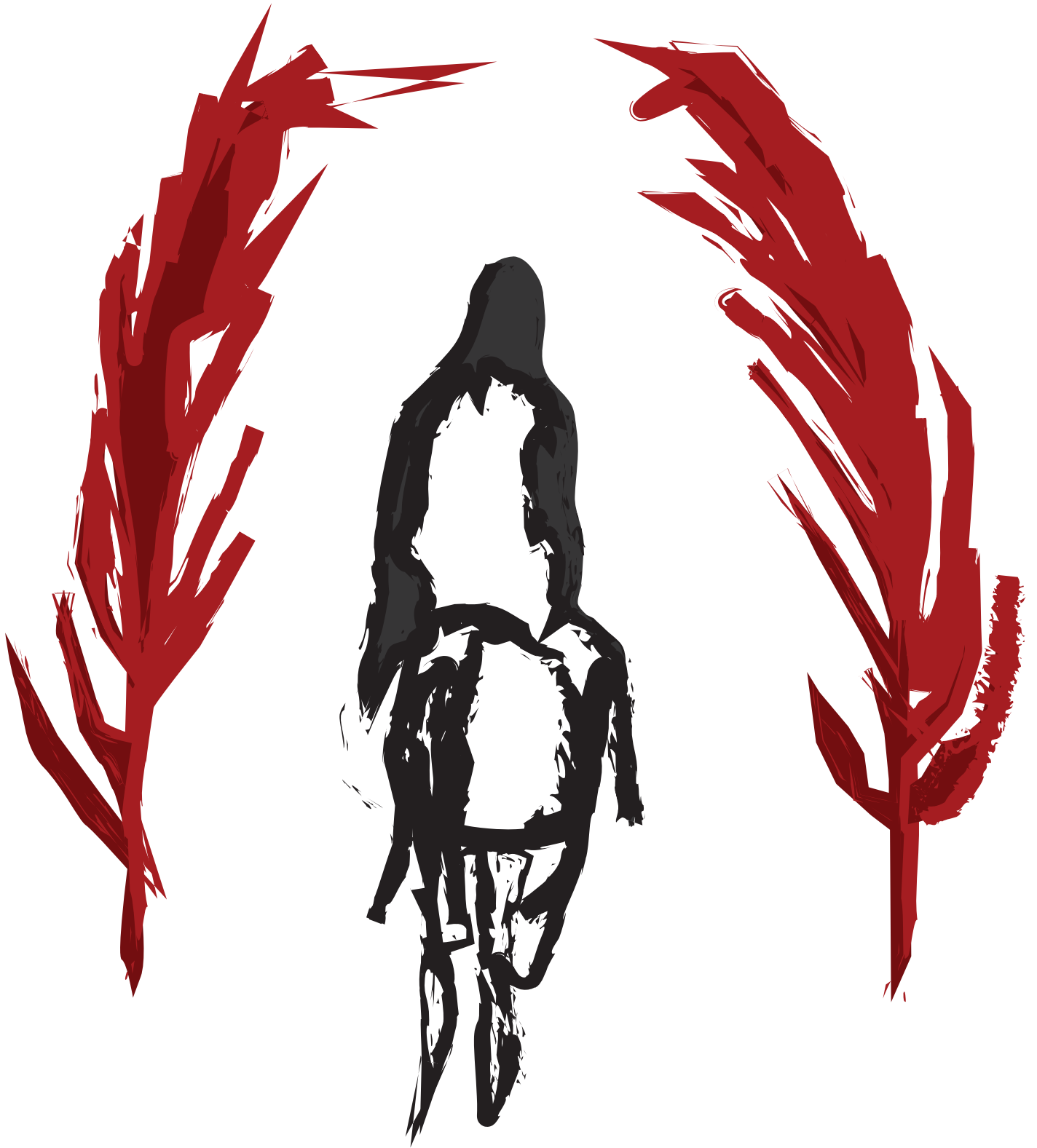
Q How would you Biblically defend God's three-in-one nature?

~NOTES~



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HOW DOES THE LORD RELATE TO US?

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. – Hebrews 4:15

The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God – Romans 8:16

In our discussion about God, we have discussed who the LORD says He is and how He has revealed Himself. In this last part of that discussion, let's examine how He relates to us. We'll deal with this from two primary perspectives: understanding and speaking. ***How does the LORD understand us, and how does He speak to us?*** In some ways, this subject isn't complicated. However, leave it to people to make something simple hard. There's a lot of debate in some church circles over how the LORD speaks to us. We're going lay down the arguments and simply see what the Word says.

Q In your experience, how does the LORD speak to you?

Q Do you ever consider that the LORD understands how you feel in any given circumstance?

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Q Do you ever consider that the LORD understands how you feel in any given circumstance?

Second, Paul said Jesus didn't seek equality with God, but instead, He emptied Himself. What does that mean? This is a hot topic in some Christian circles. In our explanation, there are two truths that we cannot deny: Christ was both fully God and fully human. If any of our answers reduce one or the other, then we've crossed into error.

The word **emptied** is where the confusion begins. What did Paul mean? Does it mean He put off His Godhood to become human? No, because He has never ceased to be God. But if He never stopped being God, how could He be completely human at the same time? The debate surrounding this issue isn't new. It's as old as the church. For our purposes, we're not going to chase down every point of disagreement. Instead, we'll simply declare what has been Christian teaching since the Apostles. Jesus Christ is fully man and fully God, undiluted in any way. The theological term for this is the **hypostatic union** of Christ's natures. Any teaching that denies this truth is out of bounds.

Therefore, **emptied** means that Jesus denied Himself access to His divine nature, but He never dispossessed it. There is a false teaching that emptied means Christ left His divinity behind to become human. But Christ's most divisive public declaration about Himself denies this, and he claimed divinity for Himself at that present moment.

Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am." – John 8:58

Perhaps a more relatable way to say it is this. Jesus went on a diet of ability. Because He is God, He possessed all divine powers, but He refused to use them. Instead, He lived as we do: dependent on and empowered by the Holy Spirit. Most of the time, this is implied in the text, but there are a few times when the Word tells us explicitly that Jesus was led and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness – Luke 4:1`

And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and a report about him went out through all the surrounding country. – Luke 4:14

And John bore witness: “I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him.” – John 1:32

you yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John proclaimed: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. – Acts 10:37-38



Third, Paul taught that Christ came as a servant and humbled Himself, even to the point of dying on the cross. Jesus could have been birthed into a wealthy family or even a royal family, but He chose to be born into a common family. Preachers like to portray Jesus' earthly parents as poor, and by American standards, that's correct. Yet, by first-century middle eastern standards, it's not so clear.

Joseph was a carpenter who presumably provided a steady income. Nazareth was a three-mile walk to the larger, wealthier city of Sepphoris, where Joseph and Jesus would have frequently worked. While Jesus' family wasn't wealthy,

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it would make sense to believe they had some means and lived what we might consider a working middle-class life by the standards of their day. With a life like this, Jesus' formative years would've lined up with the Proverbs.

...give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me. – Proverbs 30:8

Christ came as a servant. He trained in a trade that served the needs of others. He built things, repaired things, and provided a valuable service to the public. When He began His ministry, he served others by teaching, healing, restoring, and ultimately dying. His entire life was one of service.

Q Why was it necessary for Christ to be a servant?

Q Since Jesus' entire life was marked by service, what should change so we are also characterized by service?

Now, here's an interesting thought: **He still serves us.** Jesus is currently serving us from the right hand of God's throne. How does He continue serving? Popular preaching teaches that Christ's work was finished at the cross. In part, that's true. The work of salvation is completed and needs no more work. But He still serves us. How?

*Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, **who indeed is interceding for us.** – Romans 8:34 (emphasis added)*

With salvation's work complete, Jesus' transitioned from saving to interceding. What does it mean that Jesus is interceding for us? Some portray this in a courtroom setting where the Father is the judge, and Jesus is our defense attorney. But that isn't the case. Jesus told us in John 5:22 that the Father judges no one but that all judgment belongs to the Son. So, Jesus is the Judge. Christ's intercession isn't in a courtroom setting. It's in a prayer room setting. He prays for us. He's not an attorney, but instead, He's our high priest. That leads us back to one of our opening verses.

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. – Hebrews 4:15

And another.

*Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, **since he always lives to make intercession for them.** – Hebrews 7:25 (emphasis added)*

So, let's tie this all together. The eternal Son, Jesus Christ, emptied Himself and came to us as a servant. He lived a common life whereby He endured all forms of temptation yet did not sin. He was Spirit-filled and did all things through the leading and empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Now ascended back to the Father, Jesus continues serving us as our perfect high priest until He comes again as our conquering king.

Q Is it comforting that we have a high priest who sympathizes with our weaknesses?

Q Does Christ's service to us motivate you to serve others?

derstanding. There is a scene in John chapter six where Jesus intentionally thinned the crowd with a provocative teaching.

Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. – John 6:54

When people began leaving Him, He turned to the original twelve disciples and asked them if they also wanted to go. Of course, they didn't, and Peter responded with a firm declaration.

Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life," - John 6:68

The LORD's sheep knowing His voice isn't only a matter of being drawn to salvation. Even though Jesus' teaching was hard, even though the following was thinning, those who belonged to Jesus kept following Him. His sheep know His voice and will not follow another, and they won't leave when He says hard things.

Next, the entire New Testament tells us to expect that the LORD will speak. Here is a sampling of verses that show us.

And the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over and join this chariot." – Acts 8:29

And while Peter was pondering the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Behold, three men are looking for you." – Acts 10:19

And one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world (this took place in the days of Claudius). – Acts 11:28

While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." – Acts 13:2

The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God - Romans 8:16

And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. – 1 Corinthians 2:13

Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons – 1 Timothy 4:1

If the LORD didn't intend to speak to us, why would He lead us to expect it by showing us how He did it back then? Our problem is that we read verses like this, then wish that the LORD still spoke like that. But, if the Word of God shows us that He speaks, at what point did that change? When did we start expecting less than what the Bible reveals?

Our expectations need to be adjusted. The LORD indeed does still speak to us, and He never stopped, and He never will. The question is, more aptly, are we listening?

Q Is there a disconnect between your experience of the LORD and what you read of the early believers in the New Testament?

Q Have you ever wondered whether the LORD still speaks?

In what ways does the LORD speak?



If we believe the Word of God is true, then we should expect consistency between our experience of faith and the experience of the early disciples. We can and should expect that the LORD will speak to us as He did to them. A fair question, though, would be about our differences. Jesus isn't different; He's the same yesterday, today, and forever.

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. – Hebrews 13:8

However, there is one primary difference between the early disciples and us. We have a complete New Testament. The first-century believers received individual letters from the Apostles and shared them, but those letters weren't organized into the New Testament that we read today. Today, we possess the complete canon of Scripture, both Old and New Testaments, as a single complete work. Since we have a finished New Testament, some Christians question the need for the Holy Spirit to speak to us as directly as He did to the early disciples. And this is a legitimate question, which is why it's essential to discuss the ways the LORD speaks to us.

There are three primary ways the LORD speaks to us, and all of them are modeled in the Word of God.

- **The Word**
- **The Holy Spirit**
- **The Church**

The LORD speaks through His Word.

The law of the LORD is perfect reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes; – Psalm 19:7-8

Jews and Christians have long held this belief. If you want to hear the LORD speak, read His Word. The Scriptures are the written words of God to His people, and if you read them, you are hearing what the LORD has said to His people. If you claim to hear from the LORD, but you're not reading His Word, it's doubtful that you hear correctly.

Reading Scripture is the primary way that God speaks to us. It instructs us, revives us, gives wisdom, makes the heart glad, purifies, and lights the path before us. No Christian should claim that they're walking in God's will if they aren't reading the Word.

The Holy Spirit speaks to us.

And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me. – Acts 20:22-23

The verses we read earlier, and now these two, demonstrate one unchangeable fact: the Holy Spirit speaks to us. He spoke to believers back then, and He speaks to believers today. However, He is not the only spirit who speaks.

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. – 1 John 4:1

How do we test the spirits? Read the Word! The Holy Spirit does speak, but He will never contradict, add to, or take away from the Scriptures. You will never hear the Holy Spirit command you to do anything contrary to the Word. He will never ask you to harm the testimony of Jesus in your life. He'll also never ask you to do something that He's not prepared to empower you to do.

The LORD speaks through the Church.

While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." – Acts 13:2

The LORD speaks to us through the Church. If this one is a little stranger than the others, it's only because you're an American evangelical. The Body of Christ is the presence of the LORD on earth in the last days. If that's true, then the LORD will speak through the Church. The Holy Spirit indwells individual believers. The Holy Spirit speaks to individual believers. Therefore, it stands to reason that the LORD speaks to us by the Spirit through other believers as well. This isn't such a foreign idea when we consider how God uses other people to get our attention.

The LORD even gives the church spiritual gifts specifically for Him to speak to us through us. A word of knowledge is the Holy Spirit giving someone specific information, which otherwise he or she couldn't have known about a person or a situation that needs ministry. Prophetic words are given to instruct, warn, or encourage an individual believer or the entire local church. In some cases, a tongue is spoken by one, interpreted by an interpreter, and understood by someone else who needs a word from God. This is why we were told to keep gathering, allow tongues, and do not despise prophecy. God uses these means to speak through the Church.

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And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. – Hebrews 10:24-25

So, my brothers, earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. – 1 Corinthians 14:39

Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies, but test everything; hold fast what is good. – 1 Thessalonians 5:19-21

Q How has the LORD spoken to you through His Word?

Q How has the LORD spoken to you through the Holy Spirit?

Q How has the LORD spoken to you through the Church?

How do I hear Him?

This is the most practical thing to ask at the end of this teaching. In some ways, we've already answered it. Read the Word, listen for the Holy Spirit, and gather with the Church. Those three things will take you a long way. But there'll be times where you don't have your Bible, you're not in the middle of your quiet time, and you're not in a church gathering, yet you need to hear

from the LORD. There are a few disciplines that prepare us to hear from Him in the moment of need.

Cultivate a friendship with the Holy Spirit. This isn't rocket science. The Holy Spirit is a person, and He lives within you, so you should learn His voice. He is more intimate with you than your spouse or your closest friends because He knows the thoughts you have that you'd never say out loud. He knows you in ways you don't even know yourself. He's always with you. The problem isn't Him knowing you; it's you knowing Him.

Cultivating a friendship with the Spirit is simple. **Pray without ceasing.** Make every conversation with people a three-way conversation. Go to lunch with a friend, talk to them, and speak with the Holy Spirit internally. Ask Him how you can minister to your friend. Ask Him if there's a word of encouragement your friend needs. Then, whatever He gives you, find a way to speak it to your friend. You don't have to be weird about it and say, "The LORD just told me to tell you this." Just find a way to bring it up in the flow of your conversation. You could say something like this. "I don't know if this is from the LORD or not, but can I ask you a question?" Then say whatever it is.

Cultivate silence. Don't fill your spare time with podcasts, music, and busy-work. Leave space for silence. In the silence, ask the Holy Spirit to speak. If you're able, open your Bible and read. If you're driving, turn off the radio and listen for Him. Don't make all of your prayers a long monologue. Leave room to listen. When you hear something, test it. We've already read that there are other spirits speaking. Test what you hear with the Word, then test it with other believers. If it passes those tests, receive it and apply it. But you'll do this best by intentionally quieting the noise of life a few times a day and listening.



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Cultivate accountability. We overcomplicate accountability. In some ways, we've pigeonholed it into sitting down with a trusted friend regularly and asking the hard questions. If that's all accountability is, none of us will stick with it for too long. Accountability cannot only be about answering hard questions. Biblical accountability is broader. It's where you live life openly with brothers and sisters. You're open to offering and receiving both encouragement and admonishment. You don't hide things in fear of others finding out, but you invite counsel and help when you're struggling and offer the same to others when they need it. Yes, occasionally, it comes down to you and a trusted friend asking each other hard questions, but the vast majority of accountability is accomplished in the larger body of Christ. The Spirit speaks to us through other believers in ways we wouldn't otherwise hear when cultivate accountability.

What You Should Know...

Here are the big ideas you should have learned about how the LORD relates to us.

- Jesus came to us in the form of a servant.
- He can understand our weaknesses because He was tempted in every way.
- Jesus continues to serve us as our empathizing, understanding High Priest.
- The LORD still speaks to us.
- He speaks through His Word, the Holy Spirit, and His Church.
- We can cultivate disciplines in our lives that help us hear the Holy Spirit's voice.

This entire section of Foundations has discussed who the LORD says He is, how He has revealed Himself, and how He relates to us. And yet, in each of these things, we've only scratched the surface. The good news is if we learn to hear Him, He'll keep leading us into greater depths of love and understanding.

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HOLY
BIBLE



ELEMENTARY TEACHINGS

So far, we've covered two important topics. We've looked at the Bible's meta-narrative and we've looked at the identity of our Creator God and how He has revealed himself to us. In this section, we will cover what the Bible identifies as the elementary teachings of the faith. Hebrews 6:1-2 identifies five subjects that every believer should know and understand if they are to become mature.

Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. - Hebrews 6:1-2

In this section we will cover:

- ***Repentance from Dead Works and Faith***
- ***Washings***
- ***The Laying on of Hands***
- ***The Resurrection of the Dead***
- ***Eternal Judgment***

Q Do you possess a firm grasp on these subjects? Why or why not?



DEAD WORKS AND FAITH

Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God – Hebrews 6:1

The full title should read Repentance from Dead Works and Faith Toward God, but Dead Works and Faith fits better for the space on this page. It's appropriate that this is our first elementary teaching because if you get this wrong, you miss the Gospel of Jesus Christ altogether. We'll break this chapter into two sections since the subject has two distinct parts. In the first part, we'll deal with dead works and what it means to repent from them. Then we'll move into the subject of faith in God and why the author of Hebrews contrasts these two issues.

Q In your own words, how would you define repentance?

Q How important is repentance?

Q Can you please God without repentance?

Repentance

Since the first half of this teaching begins with **repentance**, it would serve us well to define repentance and discuss its importance to our faith. Repentance is the act of repenting. What, then, does repent mean? First off, it's not just a New Testament concept. The concept of repenting shows up frequently in Old Testament.

And when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before you, and you call them to mind among all the nations where the LORD your God has driven you, and return to the LORD your God, you and your children, and obey his voice in all that I command you today, with all your heart and with all your soul, – Deuteronomy 30:1-2

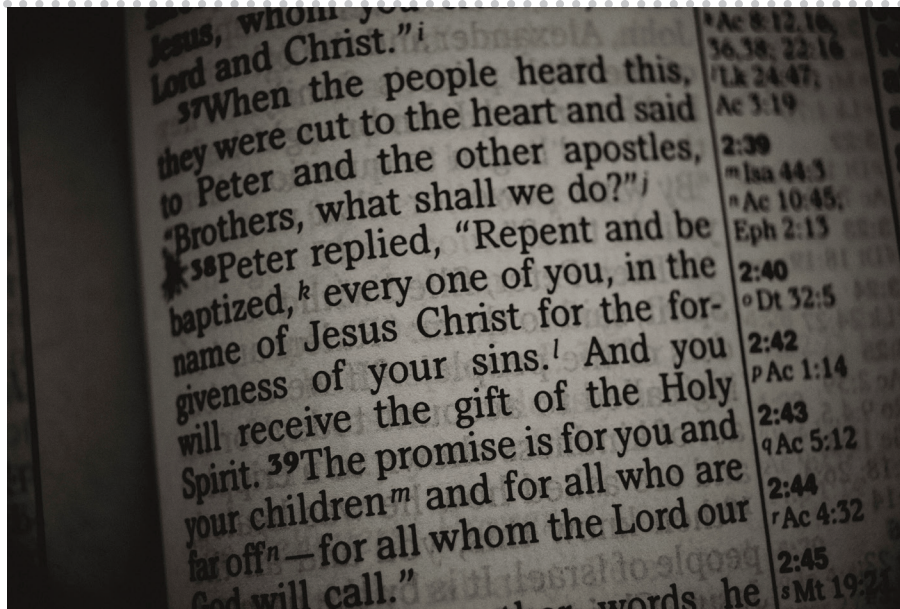
And when Ahab heard those words, he tore his clothes and put sackcloth on his flesh and fasted and lay in sackcloth and went about dejectedly. And the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, "Have you seen how Ahab has humbled himself before me? Because he has humbled himself before me, I will not bring the disaster in his days; but in his son's days I will bring the disaster upon his house." – 1 Kings 21:27-29

Return, faithless Israel, declares the LORD. I will not look on you in anger, for I am merciful, declares the LORD; I will not be angry forever. Only acknowledge your guilt, that you rebelled against the LORD your God and scattered your favors among foreigners under every green tree, and that you have not obeyed my voice, declares the LORD. – Jeremiah 3:12-13

Popular definitions of repent come from the Greek word **metanoia**, which means to change one's mind. Based on these verses, we can add some nuance to give us a more comprehensive definition. Biblical repentance is three-fold.

- **We humble ourselves before God.**
- **We agree with God about our sin.**
- **We stop sinning.**

You can't say you've repented if you stop sinning but disagree with God about your sin. In other words, you must agree that your sin is a cosmic violation of God's Law. It's not just a laundry list of mistakes and poor choices. You were in rebellion against the King of kings and LORD of lords. Your sin made you an



enemy of God. If you disagree with God about your sin, even if you somehow could stop sinning, you'd never seek the LORD for forgiveness because you can justify each and every one of them and ultimately reason that they aren't that bad.

Then, neither can you repent without humility. Humbling yourself before the LORD means deferring to His judgment over yours. You'll never agree with the LORD about your sin until you humble yourself. Simply put, humbling yourself before the LORD involves putting your opinions, thoughts, and ideas into subjection to God. You don't have a thought about something that isn't filtered through His Word.

It should go without saying, but you haven't repented if you haven't stopped sinning. Of course, even believers will continue to sin, so repentance doesn't necessarily mean you never sin again. This is where the change of mind comes into play. You humble yourself, agree with God about your sin, and then change your mind about sinning. You set your life on a new course to live differently than you did before you knew the LORD. So, **stop sinning** means **stop living in sin**. It's a choice to walk in a new Spirit-filled life with Jesus and to cease walking in darkness.

Q Have you truly repented?

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Q Has your understanding of repentance been faulty?

Q Is repentance a one-time event or an ongoing choice?

Dead Works

Now that we've defined repentance let's move on to what the Hebrews author meant by repentance from dead works. Using our definition, we can say this: ***we should humbly agree with the LORD about dead works and cease doing them.*** So, what are these dead works that we're supposed to stop doing?

Before we define dead works, let's talk about good works. Even though there are kinds of deeds that are lifeless, there are ones that give life which we should seek to do with regularity.

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. – Ephesians 2:10

Read this closely. The LORD created us; we are His workmanship. Not only that but we were also born anew in Christ Jesus. Here, the word ***created*** is more in line with being a new creation in the salvation we've received, rather than how God generally creates every human. Being a new creation, we have a purpose: good works that God prepared beforehand. These are the works that give life and the ones that the LORD intends for us to walk in as we journey. Not all works are dead works.

Then, what are dead works? This is a rather complex issue, as simple as it may sound. Why? Because dead works involve the motives of our hearts. So, let's begin with a broad definition and then fill in some details as we go along.

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Dead works are ***any deed done in the power of the flesh instead of the power of the Spirit.***

Q When you think of good works, what comes to mind?

Q How do you know if works are done in the power of the flesh versus the Spirit?

Q Why is it sometimes hard to know the difference?



Dead Works Cannot Save

The author of Hebrews isn't necessarily addressing lost people when he raises this topic. However, one of the big messages of the entire book of Hebrews is that works of the Law are utterly unable to save us.

For Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses—as much more glory as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself. – Hebrews 3:3

Jesus is greater than Moses. Moses brought the Law, and what Jesus brings is more excellent and more glorious. The Apostle Paul said it like this:

Now if the ministry of death, carved in letters on stone, came with such glory that the Israelites could not gaze at Moses' face because of its glory, which was being brought to an end, will not the ministry of the Spirit have even more glory? For if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation, the ministry of righteousness must far exceed it in glory. Indeed, in this case, what once had glory has come to have no glory at all, because of the glory that surpasses it. For if what was being brought to an end came with glory, much more will what is permanent have glory. – 2 Corinthians 3:7-11

Paul honors the Law, rightly saying it is glorious, agreeing with the psalmist: "The Law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul" (Psalm 19:7). But when Jesus inaugurated the new covenant – the ministry of the Spirit – He began something with such greater glory that it makes the Law seem to have no glory at all! This is why Paul can write to the Galatians and say,

yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified. – Galatians 2:16

JUSTIFIED

Dead Works Cannot Sanctify

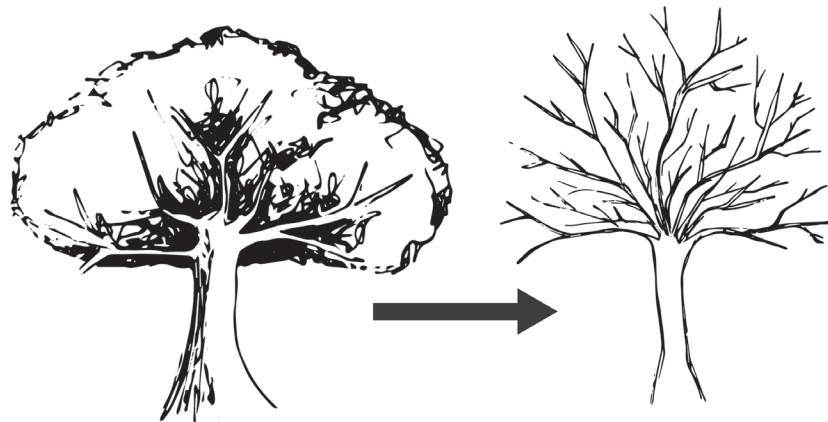
When Paul wrote to the Galatian church, he addressed a group of believers who trusted their works to “keep” them saved. They fell into the error that they could perfect their faith in God by works. Paul dished out some of the most critical words in all his letters because of this false teaching that gained traction in the Galatian church.

Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? – Galatians 3:3

This false teaching is more pervasive than many think – even today.

Sanctify is another essential word. Sanctification, simply put, is our ongoing transformation into Christlikeness. It’s not like justification, where it is entirely an external declaration of God. Sanctification is an internal work where we cooperate with the Holy Spirit’s transforming ministry. So, in this case, works do come into play, but we have to be careful how we approach them.

Consider how often Christians are told the following. Read your Bible, pray, attend church, give tithes, and join a small group or Sunday School class. Somehow, if you aren’t doing all of these, the LORD isn’t pleased with you. Let’s be clear. These are good things that people who love Jesus tend to do. Unfortunately, we tend to turn good things into dead things. Remember what we’ve already said about the Law? The Law is a good thing. It is perfect and glorious. But we turn God’s good Law into dead works when we misuse it.



If you depend on Bible study, prayer, church attendance, tithing, and small groups to keep you saved, you’ve turned those things into dead works.

Likewise, if you depend on Bible study, prayer, church attendance, tithing, and small groups to gain additional favor with the LORD, you’ve turned those things into dead works.

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You can never depend on your efforts to keep your salvation. Likewise, you cannot trust your efforts to gain additional favor. Why? If you believe this, you've believed wrongly from the start. You can never trust something to keep you saved that couldn't save you in the first place. And God has already given you ALL His favor in Jesus Christ. There is no additional favor to receive because you've received all of it already!

Let's tie this to our definition. Christlikeness doesn't happen by works of the flesh that rely on our own strength. Depending on works to keep us saved or sanctify us makes them dead works, even if they are inherently good things.

Q What does it mean to be sanctified?

Q How has your life become more Christlike since you first believed?

Q Why are we so prone to turn good things into dead things?



Faith Toward God

The author of Hebrews lumped repentance from dead works and faith toward God into one item because one is the answer to the other. The answer to dead works is faith toward God. Instead of relying on that (dead works), rely on this (faith toward God). If faith is the answer, then let's define faith.

The word **faith** comes from the Greek word **pistis**, which means persuasion or moral conviction of religious truth or the truthfulness of God. So we will say, biblical faith is **belief or trust in the truthfulness of God's identity and actions that produces new life**. Let's break that down.

Belief or trust. . . that produces new life. These phrases act as bookends to our definition. Belief (believe) and trust are essentially synonyms.

Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose trust is the LORD. – Jeremiah 17:7

[because] if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. – Romans 10:9

Belief and trust describe the action that is necessary for faith. To say you have faith means you must believe/trust something or someone. And the kind of belief we're talking about produces new life. We must mention new life in our definition because there's also a belief that produces death.

You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder! – James 2:19

In other words, there exists a demonic belief. That belief knows the facts of God, possesses knowledge of His character and His works, but refuses to submit to His lordship. This belief produces death. The longer you know about Him but refuse to submit to Him, the more likely it becomes that you never will.

*For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.
– Hebrews 6:4-6*

If your belief isn't creating new life, you have a demonic belief. How, then, does belief produce new life? Biblical faith transforms us into new creations and keeps changing us more and more as we journey.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. – 2 Corinthians 5:17

And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. – 2 Corinthians 3:18

Between our bookends is the whom or what in which we're believing: **the truthfulness of God's identity and actions.** In other words, we believe the truth claims concerning who God says He is and what He has done and will do. The follow-up implication is that we believe everything the Bible says about God because we believe that the Bible is God's revealed and inspired Word. We believe it, we submit to it, and that belief produces new life.

Q What is the danger of possessing knowledge about God without submission?

Q What kind of faith is evident in my life right now?

Q Can believers stray into demonic faith?

FAITH

Faith

FAITH

faith

FAITH

Faith

Faith Produces Good Works

So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. – James 2:17

Earlier, we briefly discussed that there are real good works that the Father has prepared for us. But the problem we've been unpacking is that we're prone to trust more in the works we do than the work Jesus has done. Let's wrap our discussion about dead works and faith with a picture of the ideal.

James seems to take an almost opposing view to Paul. Faith without works is dead. Let's look again at Ephesians 2:10.

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. – Ephesians 2:10

If you've been born again, you have work prepared for you to do. It's that simple. Therefore, James merely points out that a brother who professes faith yet shows no evidence of good works has dead faith and doesn't belong to Jesus.

Good works always accompany biblical faith. Those good works aren't done to keep us saved or find extra favor. They're done because the LORD equips us to do them, and we gladly walk in them out of our love for Him. These works aren't done out of our own strength but through the Holy Spirit, who gives us everything we need to accomplish what He leads us to do. And as we do them, they produce life, not death.



WASHINGS

“Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of ... washings...” – Hebrews 6:1-2

The matter of washings isn't as complicated as it may seem from a surface reading. In our Christian vocabulary, we don't typically use the word **washings**. Yet the author of Hebrews uses it with no additional explanation. In all likelihood, the original first-century readers knew precisely what he meant. But, twenty-first-century believers don't always pick up the meaning so easily. This has Old Testament roots, which we'll discuss, but the New Testament only mentions two specific kinds of washings.

The first and most primary is the washing of baptism. Jesus commanded us to baptize.

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, - Matthew 28:19

This verse alone establishes that we baptize new Jesus disciples. The New Testament is full of examples and teachings about baptism. In Acts, the early church practiced it, and the Apostles Paul and Peter taught it in their letters.

The second washing mentioned in the New Testament is foot washing. Jesus modeled it the night before His crucifixion.

Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, 4 rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. 5 Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him. – John 13:3-5

Christians debate the matter of foot washing. Some denominations of the church see it as an ordinance of the church because Jesus modeled it, and as such, the church should practice it regularly. Others do not see it as an ordinance, but as an example of humble service that we should uphold as a model. In that case, it's not a washing that we must incorporate as part of our worship. The best argument for the regular practice of foot washing is that Jesus modeled it. The best argument against it is that neither Jesus nor the

Apostles ever commanded the church to do it. John's Gospel mentions foot washing, and then it is never brought up again.

This chapter will focus on baptism as it is the only washing Jesus commanded and seems to be the only washing the Apostles spent any time addressing in their letters.

Q Have you been baptized? If so, when?

Q If you've been baptized, what was your reason?

Q Why is baptism important?



What is Baptism?

The Greek word for baptism – *baptizō* – simply means **to immerse**. But let's begin with some Jewish roots. The baptism practiced by Christians doesn't have a direct antecedent in the Law of Moses. The Tabernacle contained a bronze basin where the priests would wash their hands and feet before entering the Tent of Meeting.

The LORD said to Moses, "You shall also make a basin of bronze, with its stand of bronze, for washing. You shall put it between the tent of meeting and the altar, and you shall put water in it, with which Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and their feet. When they go into the tent of meeting, or when they come near the altar to minister, to burn a food offering to the LORD, they shall wash with water, so that they may not die. They shall wash their hands and their feet, so that they may not die. It shall be a statute forever to them, even to him and to his offspring throughout their generations." – Exodus 30:17-21

Every priest washed like this both before they entered the tent and before they burned offerings on the altar.

There were also washings for ritual purification if you touched a dead body (Numbers 19:10-13) or had a skin infection (Leviticus 14:8-9), among other things. But it wasn't until after the Jews returned from exile in Babylon and rebuilt the Temple that washings began taking on a form that looked like New Testament baptism. Jews of this time are called Second Temple Jews, and in the years between the rebuilt Temple and the life of Jesus, they developed many of the religious practices observed in the Gospels.

Second Temple Jews began baptizing converted Gentiles as a way of entrance into the Jewish community and faith. It removed any ceremonial uncleanliness from the Gentile before they entered the Temple. Second Temple Jews also began baptizing people for repentance. Archeologists unearthed baptizing pools called **mikvehs** around the Temple Mount in Jerusalem that date to around the first century B.C. Jews used these mikvehs for ritual baptisms for repentance and cleansing for Temple worship.



Enter John the Baptist.

In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said,

"The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.'"

Now John wore a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him, and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. – Matthew 3:1-5

John the Baptist continued the Second Temple Jewish tradition of baptism for repentance and cleansing. This explains why John was a little bothered when Jesus came to him for baptism.

John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. – Matthew 3:14-15

Jesus didn't need a baptism for repentance or cleansing. So the question stands: why did Jesus get baptized? Matthew and John are the only Gospel authors who give us any insights. We just read in Matthew where Jesus said, **"Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness."** The phrase, **fulfill all righteousness**, is somewhat cryptic, but given that we know baptism identified someone with God's kingdom, Jesus received baptism to identify with the kingdom of God publicly.

John's Gospel gives us more details.

The next day he [John] saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.' I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel." And John bore witness: "I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God." – John 1:29-34

John the Baptist unveils the entire purpose of his ministry. He came baptizing so that Jesus would be revealed to Israel. And the sign that would follow is that the Holy Spirit would descend and remain on Him. All four Gospels record that the Spirit descended on Jesus. Matthew, Mark, and Luke also include that the Father spoke from heaven.

and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." – Matthew 3:17

Therefore, Jesus' baptism served to identify Him with the ministry of the Messiah and affirm the ministry of John the Baptist to reveal the Messiah to Israel.

From this moment, the Christian understanding of baptism took form. Baptism continued to be a means of identification, as it was also in the Jewish faith. But it diverged and became an identification with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Messiah. This is why Jesus commanded us to baptize new disciples. In baptism, we identify with Him.

Q Did you grow up with a different understanding of baptism?

Q Were you baptized by immersion?

Q Why was it significant that Jesus asked John to baptize Him?

What Does Baptism Accomplish?

Now that we have defined baptism, the next logical question is what it accomplishes. Baptism accomplishes three things.

- **Identification with Christ**
- **Obedience to Christ**
- **Symbol of Covenant**

These three things are accomplished all at once and shouldn't be separated. They coincide within the waters of baptism in one moment. In fact, baptism is a singular event. We receive baptism once, not again and again. Let's look at each one.

Identification with Christ

We breached this topic earlier by calling baptism a means of identifying with Jesus. We identify with Him in three ways: death, burial, and resurrection. These three things are all symbolized in the act of immersion.

We Die

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? – Romans 6:3

Our before Christ (BC) life dies when we are born again. That might be difficult to grasp because not every old desire goes away after salvation. The new birth is spiritual. You were dead in your sins, with a dead spirit, but the Holy Spirit did a work of regeneration that gave you a new heart and resurrected your dead spirit. That alone makes you a new creation, but your new heart and new spirit still contend with a mind and body corrupted by sin.

The task of every believer is to bring the mind and body into submission to the Word of God by renewing the mind and disciplining our bodily desires. So, we don't always feel like the old life is dead because a great deal of who you are is still waiting for redemption. But you've received, in essence, a layaway payment on your full redemption with a new heart and new spirit.

Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace. – Romans 6:12-14

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. – Romans 12:2

Going under the baptismal waters symbolizes the death of the old life.

We're buried

*We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death...
– Romans 6:4a*

It's difficult to make too much of this because it's entwined with the death of the old life. But Jesus said a few things that point us to the significance of burial.

Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. – John 12:24

There's a sense that our old life must be buried. It's not enough for a grain of wheat to fall and lay on top of the soil. It must be buried in the dirt before it can bear any fruit. Fruit-bearing only comes after burial. The King James Bible uses the word mortify.

For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. – Romans 8:13 (KJV)

Mortify is an old word that simply means **put to death**. The words **mortuary** and **mortician** are related. It was important to ensure that the dead person was indeed dead in prior centuries. The KJV uses mortify the same way we would

use bury. We bury our dead for many reasons, but one being that it's not good to leave a corpse out in the open. Bad smells and the spread of disease to the living would be just the beginning.

Likewise, the dead BC life must be mortified. Its burial keeps the dead things from harming the living. However, the unexpected, good thing about keeping it buried is that from its burial will arise good fruit. The dead things become fertilizer for the new life.

Remaining under the baptismal waters (for a quick moment) symbolizes the burial of our old life.

We Resurrect

...in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.
– Romans 6:4b

We died, we were buried, but then we resurrected to new life. We mentioned earlier that the Holy Spirit resurrects your dead spirit through the work of regeneration. From the moment you are born again you become a new creation. Before that moment, the person you became did not exist. But through the same power who raised Christ, your spirit is resurrected, fundamentally changing your identity for eternity. You literally possess new life that will live eternally.

Rising out of the baptismal waters symbolizes the resurrection of your spirit to new life in Christ.

Q Does the symbolism of baptism have any bearing on how you live after baptism?

Q Are death, burial, and resurrection ongoing themes in our faith journeys?

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Q Should we expect a healthy spiritual life if we refrain from baptism?

Q What is the relationship between salvation and baptism?

Symbol of Covenant

In the Old Testament, circumcision was the physical sign of God's covenant with Israel. Jesus has made baptism the sign of His covenant with His people. When we are baptized, we are participating in the sign of Christ's new covenant. It represents the circumcision made without hands upon the heart of all believers.

In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.
– Colossians 2:11-12

In the Old Testament, circumcision was the physical sign of God's covenant with Israel. Jesus has made baptism the sign of His covenant with His people. When we are baptized, we are participating in the sign of Christ's new covenant. It represents the circumcision made without hands upon the heart of all believers.

This becomes yet another argument against the saving power of baptism. There were many circumcised Israelites who died in their sins and did not receive eternal life. They were born into an Israelite heritage that had them circumcised, but they spent their lives worshiping idols and died in that idolatry. Circumcision itself had no saving power. It was a symbol and nothing more.

Likewise, there will be many baptized people who will stand before the LORD and declare that they did many things in His name, but they won't make it.

On that day many will say to me, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?" And then will I declare to them, "I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness." – Matthew 7:22-23

Baptism is a symbol of the new covenant and represents the circumcision of the heart made without hands.

Q Does baptism save us? Does it keep us saved? Explain your answer.

Q Is baptism only symbolic or does it have spiritual benefits?

Q How is baptism tied to the New Covenant in Christ?



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LAYING ON OF HANDS

“Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of ... the laying on of hands...” – Hebrews 6:1-2

Of the five elementary doctrines listed in Hebrews 6:1-2, the laying on of hands might be the most bewildering. What is so important about laying hands that it merits a mention as an elementary doctrine? In many church traditions, laying hands on someone is thought of as a symbolic act that communicates approval or agreement. For instance, praying over a mission team before they leave or praying with a sick person often involves the laying on of hands.

However, its mention in this list of elementary doctrines may convey that there's more to it than being only a symbolic gesture. So, as we did with washings, we'll look in the Old Testament to see what happened with the laying on of hands and then move into the New Testament to see if anything changed.

Q Have you ever experienced a person or group laying hands on you?

Q How did the laying on of hands affect you personally?

Q Have you ever laid hands on someone?

Old Testament

Most of the Old Testament references to laying hands are found in priestly literature in the context of sacrifices. Here are a few.

He shall lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him. – Leviticus 1:4

And he shall lay his hand on the head of his offering and kill it at the entrance of the tent of meeting, and Aaron's sons the priests shall throw the blood against the sides of the altar. – Leviticus 3:2

and [he] shall lay his hand on the head of the goat and kill it in the place where they kill the burnt offering before the LORD; it is a sin offering. – Leviticus 4:24

And Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins. And he shall put them on the head of the goat and send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a man who is in readiness. – Leviticus 16:21

In these cases, when the priest laid his hands on the animals, something remarkable happened. The sins of individuals or the entire nation were placed upon the ritual animals. So, the laying on of hands was an act of impartation. Sin was transferred – spiritually speaking – from men to their sacrifice through the laid hands of the priest.

There are other examples where the laying on of hands did not involve sacrifices.

And Israel stretched out his right hand and laid it on the head of Ephraim, who was the younger, and his left hand on the head of Manasseh, crossing his hands (for Manasseh was the firstborn). – Genesis 49:14

Israel placed his hands on his grandsons, Ephraim and Manasseh, to impart a blessing to them. This is yet another instance of the laying on of hands imparting something to the one touched.



When you bring the Levites before the LORD, the people of Israel shall lay their hands on the Levites, and Aaron shall offer the Levites before the LORD as a wave offering from the people of Israel, that they may do the service of the LORD. – Numbers 8:10-11

So the LORD said to Moses, “Take Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand on him. Make him stand before Eleazar the priest and all the congregation, and you shall commission him in their sight.” – Numbers 27:18-19

In these two instances, laying hands was part of commissioning someone or a group of people to a specific vocation. The Israelites were supposed to lay their hands on the Levites to designate them for service in the Tabernacle. Then the LORD told Moses to lay hands upon Joshua as a part of his commissioning to lead. These may all be related to installing people to positions, but an impartation still occurs. In the case of the Levites, the Israelites gave priestly authority to them through their laid hands. In Joshua’s case, part of Moses’ authority was transferred to him (Numbers 27:20).

It seems that the common element that unites each of these is impartation. Each time hands are laid, something is given, shared, or imparted to the receiver.

Q Why is physical touch such an essential role in giving a blessing?

Q What is the connection between the physical and the spiritual when we lay hands?

New Testament

In the New Testament, the first mention of laying hands is in the Gospel of Matthew.

Then children were brought to him that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples rebuked the people, but Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven." And he laid his hands on them and went away. – Matthew 19:13-15

In this first mention, the laying of hands is associated with prayer and blessing. People brought to Jesus to receive a blessing. The model of imparting continues to hold. What kind of blessing did Jesus give them? It doesn't say. Matthew doesn't say these children were sick or in physical need. Parents simply brought them to Jesus for prayer and His touch, which may have merely given comfort and peace.

The Gospel of Mark introduces the connection between laid hands and healing.

And he could do no mighty work there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them. – Mark 6:5

Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again; and he opened his eyes, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. – Mark 8:25

Luke continues.

And he laid his hands on her, and immediately she was made straight, and she glorified God. – Luke 13:13

The association of laid hands and healing continues in Acts.

And the Lord said to him, "Rise and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying, and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight." – Acts 9:11-12

It happened that the father of Publius lay sick with fever and dysentery. And Paul visited him and prayed, and putting his hands on him, healed him. – Acts 28:8



The New Testament also continues the association of laying of hands with commissioning individuals for service.

And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them. – Acts 6:5-6

While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off. – Acts 13:2-3

The New Testament introduces a new idea with the laying on of hands. The book of Acts contains instances where the apostles laid hands on people to receive the Holy Spirit.

Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit. – Acts 8:18

So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” – Acts 9:17

And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying. There were about twelve men in all. – Acts 19:6

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Then there's one final instance of laid hands where the elders imparted a gift to Timothy.

*Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you.
- 1 Timothy 4:14*

Q Have you ever experienced a person or group laying hands on you?

Q How did the laying on of hands affect you personally?

Q Have you ever laid hands on someone?

Of everything we've read, the practice that likely generates the most questions is laying hands on people to receive the Holy Spirit. Entire denominations of the Church have been formed due to disagreement on this subject. The question that needs answering is this: do we receive the Holy Spirit at the moment of salvation or in a subsequent event where He is imparted through laid hands?

Because of the nature of salvation, we must conclude that every believer receives the Holy Spirit at the moment of new birth. But we shouldn't think that every believer is filled with the Spirit. In fact, being filled with the Spirit is an ongoing matter for all believers.

And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, - Ephesians 5:18

In Acts 9, when Ananias prayed for Saul, he didn't pray for Saul to receive the Spirit, but to be filled with the Spirit: "... so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." But it's noteworthy that Acts is not a consistent source for practice on this matter. Some new believers didn't get laid hands, while some did. Other believers repented and were baptized. Then others repented, received the Spirit, and spoke in tongues. Because of how this varies, it's a stretch to extract a normative practice in this regard from Acts.

So, we can determine that the laying on of hands imparts a spiritual blessing. But we should not conclude that the laying of hands must happen every time for every situation to receive the same blessing.

How then should we understand the New Testament use of laying hands?

- **Laid hands are not hasty.**
- **Laid hands impart blessings.**
- **Laid hands impart authority.**

Laid Hands Are Not Hasty

Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, nor take part in the sins of others; keep yourself pure. - 1 Timothy 5:22

This is the only warning offered where laid hands are concerned. The context of this verse is about bringing charges against an elder. Paul warned Timothy about being hasty in imparting authority to unqualified men. However, there is a broader application to this warning in church life.

Since laid hands impart blessing and authority, we should seek the LORD'S counsel before laying hands. Take note of the warning. "Hasty hands" can

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drag us into the sins of others. Rushing to fill a void of leadership or to give your blessing to someone can implicate you in any trespasses they might be harboring. You don't become guilty of their sin, but you do become guilty of a lack of wisdom and foresight. And at times, the court of public opinion can damage your ability to minister.

Scrutinize men and women thoroughly before imparting authority or blessing. Whether you're seeking a new elder, a deacon, a ministry leader, or a Sunday School teacher, do an appropriate level of research before giving them your blessing to serve. After examination, seek the Lord's counsel and let the Holy Spirit guide your next steps.

Now, this warning was offered in a letter to a pastor. It was given to help Timothy carefully select leaders. Does this apply in a situation outside of that context? Should we be cautious in laying hands on people to pray for them? This warning doesn't speak specifically to that situation, but here's a healthy guideline. First, let the Holy Spirit lead you. If He says yes, then seek permission from the person to lay hands.

Q Have you ever felt hesitation to lay hands on someone for prayer?

Q Do you think the church adequately scrutinizes people for leadership?

Q How do we balance scrutiny with a gracious spirit when evaluating people?



Laid Hands Impart Blessings

The hard part for 21st-century western believers is seeing laid hands as more than a symbolic gesture. The Bible doesn't view it as symbolic; therefore, neither should we. We've already noted several verses of Scripture that demonstrate this. We've read that laid hands can impart general spiritual blessings of comfort and peace, then healings, the filling of the Holy Spirit, and in Timothy's case, a spiritual gift of some kind.

In these cases, Paul's instruction in Romans 12:3 is helpful.

For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. – Romans 12:3

The temptation might be that since laid hands impart a blessing, you lay hands frequently with an over-realized expectation of results. But the LORD gives each of us measures of faith that differ. Some believers have a track record of prayer and laid hands that often result in gifts of healings. That doesn't mean that every person who prays and lays hands will have the same results because not everyone has received the same measure of faith.

In other words, we should walk humbly as we seek to be a blessing to others. We should understand how the LORD has equipped us to minister and serve accordingly. We shouldn't try to replicate someone else's ministry but find contentment in the measure of faith we've received. Laid hands aren't a magic trick. Simon, the magician, coveted the apostles' ability and tried to bribe them for their faith.

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Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, saying, "Give me this power also, so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." – Acts 8:18-19

Peter's response wasn't kind.

But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity." – Acts 8:20-23

Don't be like Simon. But rather, seek the LORD in all things. He will give you everything you need for life and godliness, including faith for serving others. If you lay hands on someone as you pray, trust the LORD for results, not your actions. He imparts the blessings, not you. We are only vessels and conduits for His use.

Q Is it challenging to see laying hands as a supernatural impartation of a blessing?

Q Have you ever been frustrated that laying hands seemed fruitless?

Q How do we balance scrutiny with a gracious spirit when evaluating people?

Laid Hands Impart Authority

Finally, when we commission people for ministry, our laid hands impart spiritual authority. This isn't something you can see with your eyes at that moment. It's something that bears fruit with time. Spiritual authority is born in humble service, and it's something that every believer should pursue. But there are those whom the LORD calls to greater responsibility within the body of Christ. We've already reviewed verses that make this clear. The first deacons were set apart and received authority to serve through the laying of hands. The church commissioned Barnabas and Paul similarly before they embarked on their missionary journey.

We discussed earlier that this is the context of Paul's warning to Timothy. Don't lay hands on men who aren't qualified to lead. Don't choose elders with haste just because you need someone to fill the role quickly. Imparting authority to men who won't use it wisely is a grave error that will bring harm to local churches. When we impart authority to people, we're not just giving them a leadership role; we're saying we endorse their way of life. Done with haste to the wrong person, we become complicit in their sins.

Laying hands imparts spiritual authority because Jesus gave the church the power to loose and bind things.

Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. – Matthew 18:18

Jesus said this in the middle of teaching on church discipline. In that context, if the church decides to put someone out of fellowship over unrepentant sin, heaven will affirm what is done on earth. It's a heavy responsibility that the LORD has given to his people. Implied in this teaching is that when we lay hands on a person and impart authority to lead, for better or worse, heaven will affirm that decision. Bad leader or not, if you make a local church your home, you agree to follow their elders or pastors as they lead. You'll be held to account for following as much as those who imparted authority to an unqualified leader.



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Q When we commission people for service, why should we lay hands on them?

Q What is our responsibility when we lay hands and impart spiritual authority?

Q Why would heaven affirm a church's hasty approval of an unqualified leader?

What You Should Know...

Here are the big ideas you should have learned about the laying on of hands.

- Laying hands is an act of impartation.
- It is an Old Testament practice in Levitical law for imparting people's sins onto their sacrifices.
- In both the Old and New Testaments, it imparts spiritual authority to people.
- In the Old and New Testaments, it imparts spiritual blessings.
- We can only impart what the Holy Spirit empowers us, by faith, to give.
- Laying hands on people to impart authority should be done wisely after examination and not in haste.
- Laying hands on people to impart a blessing should be done humbly and not for selfish motivations.

When we lay hands on people, it's essential to understand what happens. It's not a superstitious practice or merely a symbolic gesture. It is an action that imparts something in the spirit. We should be enthusiastic about laying hands on people but also cautious. Let the Holy Spirit lead your enthusiasm and remain humble, remembering that you are a vessel, not the source of what is imparted as you pray and lay hands.



~NOTES~

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RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD

“Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of ... the resurrection of the dead...” – Hebrews 6:1-2

Resurrection is an intriguing subject. The phrase, resurrection of the dead, sounds very zombie apocalyptic, and it's no surprise that Hollywood has a heyday with the idea of resurrection. They produce content containing resurrection that ranges from clearly not serious to deep dives into otherworldly content. For centuries, fiction authors have toyed with this theme. But it isn't limited to the fiction genre. Its roots are in Judaism.

It might surprise you, but the physical, bodily resurrection of the dead is a core belief of the Christian faith. But the abstract and kind-of-spiritual way that many Christians often speak about eternity doesn't feel very physical. In fact, to our shame, many of us are more informed about eternity by Tom and Jerry than the Word of God.

Q What comes to mind when you think of the resurrection?

Q Has the resurrection been a foundational theme in your faith journey?

Q Are your thoughts about the resurrection limited to Jesus?

As we dive into this, we'll approach the resurrection of the dead with three questions.

1. **When does it happen?**
2. **Why does it happen?**
3. **What does it accomplish?**

When Does it Happen?

While the Psalms make a few claims to resurrection, generally, it is the author speaking of his own personal resurrection. In addition, typically, the Psalms which speak of resurrection are thought to point to Christ's resurrection prophetically.

But God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol, for he will receive me. – Psalm 49:15

For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption. – Psalm 16:10

These verses imply a resurrection of the dead, but they don't spell out the belief that all people will rise from death, some to life, others to wrath. Only two prophets in the Old Testament speak of this directly.

Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise. You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For your dew is a dew of light, and the earth will give birth to the dead. – Isaiah 26:19

At that time shall arise Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people. And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone whose name shall be found written in the book. And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. – Daniel 12:1-2

This gives some insight into an issue in the Gospels. The Sadducees were a religious sect of the Jews who, among other things, rejected the resurrection of the dead. Their rejection was rooted in their rejection of the Prophets as Scripture. Sadducees only accepted the Torah, the first five books of the Bible, as Scripture. Since the resurrection of the dead is outside of the Torah, they rejected it.

But Jesus told the Sadducees directly.

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But notice, everyone resurrects. Both the good and the bad rise from the grave. The righteous rise to everlasting life, the wicked to shame and everlasting contempt. That about does it for what the Old Testament says about when the resurrection of the dead will happen.

Q Do you personally believe we are in the worst days ever?

Q Do you, therefore, believe that the resurrection of the dead is imminent?

Q What makes you think these bad times are the ones Daniel prophesied?



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In the Gospel of John, Jesus offers a cryptic answer to the question of when.

Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment. – John 5:25-29

Look carefully at what Jesus said. He said that the resurrection of the dead is both now and later. How can that be? It's possible because resurrection happens spiritually first, then physically later.

Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live.

Spiritually dead people hear the voice of the Son of God, and they pass from death to life. Their dead spirits resurrect. Anyone born again experiences the resurrection of their dead spirit to new life. That is how Jesus could say that the hour is **now here**.

But then He said, an hour is coming where those in the tombs will hear His voice and rise. If the hour for spiritual resurrection is now, the hour for physical resurrection is later. And like Daniel, Jesus said that everyone in the grave – good and evil – will hear His voice and rise, the good to life and the evil to judgment.

When?

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats... And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life. – Matthew 25:31-32, 46

Commonly, Matthew 25:31-46 is called the parable of the sheep and goats, but this is not a parable. Jesus uses the metaphors of sheep and goats to represent saved and lost people. The sheep will be gathered, judged, and enter into eternal life. The goats will be gathered, judged, and enter into eter-

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Q Have you ever considered salvation as phase one of your resurrection?

Q How should having a resurrected spirit change your life?

Q Does looking forward to future bodily resurrection change your perspective?

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What is the end? The end is when Jesus hands the kingdom to the Father once all His enemies are destroyed. And the final enemy is death. The final defeat of death is the key. You may ask why the unsaved are granted a resurrection at all. The answer is that Jesus destroys death. The Bible describes death both as a consequence and a personified power.

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. – Romans 6:23

Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? –1 Corinthians 15:54b-55

Once the power of death is destroyed, the consequence of death is undone. Everyone remaining in death resurrects. However, the resurrected lost do not rise under the promise of Christ's firstfruits. They rise unredeemed.

Q Why is resurrection necessary?

Q Has your concept of eternity included a new, resurrected physical body?

Q How does the promise of resurrection affect your understanding of death?



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Q Have you given much thought to your personal judgment before the LORD?

Q How has your future judgment day before God affected your daily life?

Judgment of the Righteous

We should get a few things straight up front where believers are concerned. In Christ, your sins have already been judged. Christ's death on the cross canceled the record of debt against us when we believed.

And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. – Colossians 2:13-14

Paul goes on to say in Romans 8:1,

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. – Romans 8:1

Therefore, as believers, we confidently know that the LORD won't judge us according to our sins. But, we still will be judged, so the question remains: by what standard? The last sentence in Revelation 20:12 gives insight.

And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. - Revelation 20:12

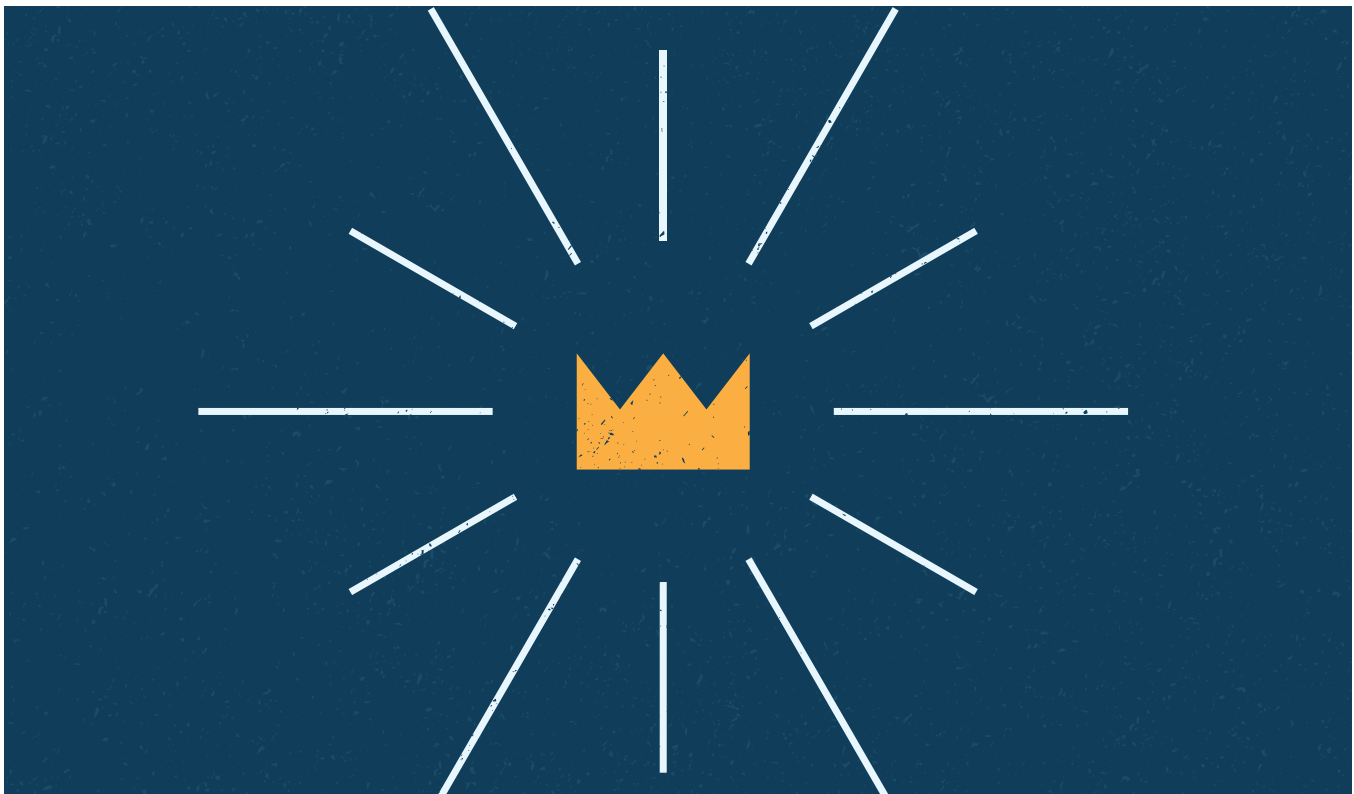
Paul wrote in more detail concerning the believer's judgment.

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Q Do you give much thought to pre-ordained works that you're supposed to do?

Q Do you give much thought to eternal rewards?

Q Would your life be substantially different if you considered these things more?



Judgment of the Unrighteous

Let's return to Revelation 20:12.

And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. – Revelation 20:12

Notice there are multiple books opened. First, some unnamed books are opened. Then another book is opened, the book of life. First, everyone is judged by what is written in the books. The books refer to the first books that were opened, containing details of what we have done. These are our works, and everyone will be judged by them, righteous and unrighteous.

But there's this book of life. The book of life is unique. It contains a list of people who will inherit eternal life, and if your name is not found in that book, you will be cast into the Lake of Fire, the second death.

And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. – Revelation 20:15

It seems harsh, and there are those who refuse to believe that this means what it says. But the teaching of Scripture is very clear. If your name is not in the book of life on judgment day, you will be sent to eternal punishment. The prophet Daniel was told this in one of his final recorded visions.

And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. – Daniel 12:2

Some of the disagreement surrounding this subject is about the eternal nature of the punishment. Some believe it is eternal, conscious judgment, while others think the sentence is conscious but eventual annihilation in the Lake of Fire. The argument for annihilation arises from the thought that eternal conscious torment would be contrary to the merciful, compassionate disposition of God. Therefore, the claim goes that it makes better sense to believe that those in the Lake of Fire eventually cease to exist by God's mercy.

However, Scripture supports the position that the Lake of Fire will be eternal conscious judgment, mostly because Death is put in the Lake of Fire. Death's destruction eliminates the possibility of any more death moving forward. Once Death is defeated, can people ever die again? It would seem not, so annihilation is off the table.

Many will counter this belief with a question like this: **How can a loving God send anyone to a place of eternal, conscious fiery judgment?** Jesus said something insightful about the purpose of the Lake of Fire.

Then he will say to those on his left, "Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels." – Matthew 25:41

Jesus referred us back to the beginning. Who started the spiritual war? Satan. From the moment of his rebellion, the LORD prepared a place for the eternal judgment of all rebelling heavenly hosts. The LORD didn't create the Lake of Fire for people. However, because Satan lured humanity into rebellion, we, too, will suffer his consequences. Everything between Genesis chapter two and Revelation chapter twenty-one chronicles the LORD's work to redeem humanity from their sin.

Adam and Eve's sin has affected every human since. Every human is born separated from God by sin. Unless the LORD forgives a person's sin, they will die in sin, their name is not added to the book of life, and they will be judged, along with Satan and the rebelling heavenly hosts, as rebels, and sentenced to the Lake of Fire.

A significant question remains. **How does one receive forgiveness and get their name in the book of life?**

[because], if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. – Romans 9:9-10

The LORD forgives those who believe in His Son, Jesus Christ. The simplicity of these two verses sums up what needs to happen: belief and confession. You must believe that Jesus is the LORD, that He died to forgive our sins, and that God raised Him from the dead. You must also confess that Jesus is LORD. That confession is prepackaged with repentance from your sins. Anything that challenges Christ's Lordship in your life must be stopped, or you haven't believed He is LORD.

Q Have you ever considered why a loving God sends anyone to Hell?

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Q Does God send people to Hell, or do people choose Hell?

Q What is the relationship between the cross and the Lake of Fire?

What is Hell?

Unfortunately, many Christians use the word hell as a blanket word. It's usually a general reference to where unsaved people go after death. But the Bible is more nuanced. The Hebrew words ***Sheol*** and ***Gehenna*** are frequently translated into English as Hell. Yet, Sheol and Gehenna do not speak of the same things. Likewise, in Greek, ***Hades*** and ***Tartarus*** are translated as Hell, and both have different meanings.

Then we have two things in Revelation that add to our pile of Hell concepts. There's the bottomless pit, mentioned in Revelation 9:1-2 and 20:1-3. And



there's the Lake of Fire, into which Hades is cast. That's not a metaphorical way of saying all those in Hades will be thrown into the Lake of Fire. The LORD will cast Death and Hades into the Lake of Fire first, and then those not found in the book of life.

Let's clear this up.

- **Sheol**
- **Gehenna**
- **Hades**
- **Tartarus**
- **The Bottomless Pit**
- **The Lake of Fire**

First, the Hebrew and Greek words **Sheol** and **Hades** refer to the same thing: the underworld or the holding place. When Jesus told the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, he was describing the holding place.

The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried, and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. – Luke 16:22-23

The Jewish understanding of the holding place was that it had two compartments, one for the righteous and the other for the unrighteous. In the parable, after dying, the poor man, Lazarus, entered rest with Abraham and the righteous, but the rich man entered torment with the unrighteous. For this discussion, we're focusing on the part of Hades reserved for the unrighteous, but it's noteworthy that before Christ, both the righteous and unrighteous went to Sheol/Hades, the holding place.

Second, the Hebrew word Gehenna and the Lake of Fire are synonymous. Jesus refers to Gehenna multiple times, referring to the final judgment.



And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell. – Matthew 5:30

And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. – Matthew 10:28

One part of these verses securely tie them to final judgment. Both of them speak of the LORD throwing the body into Gehenna. Today, when the unrighteous die, their bodies go to the grave, and their spirits go to Hades. The body is cast into Gehenna only after the second resurrection at the final judgment in Revelation 20:11-15.

Last, we have Tartarus and the Bottomless Pit. Tartarus only appears once in the New Testament.

For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell [Tartarus] and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment; - 2 Peter 2:4

Peter borrowed Tartarus from Greek religious beliefs. Tartarus was an abyss (bottomless pit) beneath Hades (the underworld) where Zeus imprisoned the Titans. Peter borrows the word Tartarus to tell the real story. God imprisoned the sons of God from Genesis 6:1-4 in Tartarus – the Bottomless Pit – because they rebelled and, according to Jude verse 6, left their proper position of authority. You can see the connection now. Tartarus and the Bottomless Pit are the same.

Recall that the LORD did not create Hell for humans.

Then he will say to those on his left, "Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels." – Matthew 25:41

The LORD created the Lake of Fire for the heavenly hosts who rebelled. Its purpose was for their punishment and imprisonment. This doesn't mean that the LORD didn't know that humans would end up there. It means Hell was designed for the punishment and torment of heavenly beings. It's a matter of magnitude, not intention. It needed a severity conditioned for powerful spiritual beings.

Mere mortals have no concept of the severity that awaits the unrighteous in the Lake of Fire.

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Q Have you ever considered the multi-faceted Biblical understanding of Hell?

Q How do these Hebrew and Greek concepts change your understanding?

Q Did you ever consider the magnitude of the torment that Hell requires?

What You Should Know...

Here are the big ideas you should have learned about eternal judgment.

- Eternal judgment is a core belief of the Christian faith.
- Satan, Death, and Hades will also be cast into the Lake of Fire
- The Lake of Fire was designed to imprison and torment the rebelling heavenly host.
- Because Death is cast into the Lake of Fire, it is an eternal judgment with no possibility of annihilation.
- Before the Great White Throne, all people will be judged.
- There will be a judgment of the righteous and unrighteous.
- The righteous will have their name recorded in the book of life and receive reward.
- The unrighteous will not be recorded in the book of life; they will be cast into the Lake of Fire designed for the devil and his angels.



PRESSING ONWARD

Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. Only let us hold true to what we have attained. – Philippians 3:13-16

The things we have covered are foundational. They will not change, and as the author of Hebrews wrote, we should move on to maturity and stop re-laying these foundations. Mature believers don't need constant retraining in elementary beliefs. Instead, we should do as Paul wrote: press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. As we conclude this study, let's briefly examine what it looks like to press onward into maturity.

God's Word uses a few helpful words and phrases to describe who believers are and what believers should do. We're going to examine three.

- **Ambassadors**
- **Sons**
- **Saints**

Ambassadors

Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. – 2 Corinthians 5:20

Ambassador appears once in the New Testament. The word servant appears much more often. Why use **ambassador** instead of **servant**? What is an ambassador? First, he or she is a servant, so the servant aspect is already covered. But unlike the broad label of a servant, an ambassador implies a more specific role. We are representatives of God's Kingdom in hostile territory.

Ambassadors represent the interests of their governments to other kingdoms. They enjoy diplomatic immunity within the borders of their host nations. They reside within embassies that become places of sovereign sanctuary on foreign soil. And when the time for diplomacy is over, ambassadors are withdrawn back to their home countries.

This is us.

First, we represent our King and His interests. He is interested in reconciling the world to Himself. We declare that message, the Gospel of Jesus Christ, to all who will listen. However, it doesn't stop there. Unlike earthly ambassadors, we do more than just share the Good News. The other part of our ambassadorial work is to live and love others like our King. We don't just have a message. We are also real-time demonstrations of the power of that message.

and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. – 1 Corinthians 2:4

For the kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power. – 1 Corinthians 4:20

Second, we enjoy a kind of diplomatic immunity.

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. – Romans 8:31-34

Now, let's talk about what this doesn't mean. This doesn't mean believers are exempt from suffering, sickness, poverty, persecution, or martyrdom. In fact, Jesus told us that we, indeed, would have trouble in this world. Our diplomatic immunity means that our tribulations will not stop the advance of the Gospel. As it turns out, suffering, sickness, poverty, persecution, and martyrdom often serve as rocket fuel for expanding God's Kingdom. To paraphrase the Apostle Paul, ***"If you kill me, awesome! I'll be with Jesus. If you let me live, that's wonderful because there's a lot of kingdom work to do!"***

Third, we reside in embassies. This is stretching the metaphor a bit, but it works. Our homes and our local churches are places of sovereign sanctuary.

Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? – 1 Corinthians 3:16

Paul wrote this as part of his rebuke of divisions within the church. The you in this verse is talking about the local church, not individual believers. Later, Paul says that individual believers are temples of the Holy Spirit, but not here. Here, he's referring to the church gathered. The point is this. The gathered

church and the homes of believing families should be places of sanctuary. Sanctuaries provide safety and create space for healing and growth. The saved can grow. The lost can find salvation. The hurt can be healed. Our embassies should be outposts of heaven.

Last, we'll be withdrawn when the time for diplomacy is over. Without entering an end-times discussion, let's just say that one way or another, before Christ returns in vengeance, He will withdraw His ambassadors.

*For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. –
1 Thessalonians 4:16-17*

Q How does the concept of being an ambassador challenge you?

Q Does this change how you view your trials and troubles?

Q Have you considered that your church and home are types of embassies?



Sons

The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. – John 8:35

For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” – Romans 8:15

Not only are we ambassadors, but we are also sons. It is not enough to simply serve. He must adopt us as sons. Ladies, don't be too concerned that Paul doesn't say, **sons and daughters**. In this case, son is a status, not a matter of gender. In Paul's day, sons received the inheritance, but daughters typically did not. The LORD adopts men and women alike into His family with **son status**. Keep reading.

The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. – Romans 8:16-17

God is building an adopted family who will co-inherit with His only Son, Jesus Christ. We, who were enemies of God and the crucifiers of His Son, are forgiven, adopted, and given an inheritance with Jesus, the one who died for our sins! It's an astounding proposition!

We don't only approach the LORD as Judge or Creator – although He never ceases to be those things. Now the Judge and Creator is our Father. As our Father, He desires intimacy and closeness with us. As our Father, He draws near

to us when we cry out to Him in suffering. He chastises us when we stray. He disciplines us for our good. He gives good gifts to us and equips us with the Holy Spirit, who empowers us to do everything He asks. He's a good Father to us because He's a good Father to Jesus. Whatever Jesus receives from Him, we too will receive!

Q What is the difference between a servant and a son?

Q How is your relationship with the LORD different as an adopted son?

Q Should this affect how you live? If so, how?



Saints

To the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father. – Colossians 1:2

The word saint needs rehabilitation. It has suffered religious, cultural, and commercial abuse. The Roman Catholics have made saints an elite status of believers. In their doctrine, not every believer rises to the rank of a saint. Culturally, saints are often portrayed as especially good people, do-gooders, and people of conscience, but not necessarily people of faith. Commercially, the National Football League has – at least for some – associated saints with a football team in New Orleans.

When the word saint is uttered, for many, one or more of these images come to mind. However, that is not what the Apostle Paul was thinking. Across the entire Bible, the word saint almost always means holy one. God's people are His holy ones.

What does holy mean? From Genesis to Revelation, holy means set apart, consecrated, sacred. In fact, in the New Testament, holy and saint come from the same Greek word.

Christ's shed blood makes us holy ones. His death on the cross grants us something we could never achieve through good works and the sacrifices of animals.

And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified. – Hebrews 10:11-14

He willingly bore the reproach and shame of the cross so that we could become new creations in Him, clothed in His righteousness.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come... For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. – 2 Corinthians 5:17, 21

We are holy ones in Christ, set apart for His family, consecrated for His purposes, and made righteous for His glory. We don't deserve it, nor could we ever earn it on our own. Yet, the LORD has made a way for us to become His saints in Christ. Why?

[and] to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things, so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him. – Ephesians 3:9-12

Now we have come full circle. We are exhibit A in the LORD'S case against the rebelling rulers and authorities in the heavens. Through the church, the LORD will demonstrate His manifold wisdom to the heavenly hosts. We began this study looking at the metanarrative - the big picture - of God's Word. The spiritual war sparked by Satan's rebellion will end with his judgment, and the church will be the LORD'S example of His unfathomable wisdom. Every believer is a living walking exhibit who will serve to condemn every rebel in heaven and on earth. This is why we are set apart as holy ones - saints.

Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, then, matters pertaining to this life! – 1 Corinthians 6:2-3

Somehow, in His manifold wisdom, the LORD will use His saints to render judgment. It seems inconceivable, but this is the Word of the LORD. This is why it is essential that we walk in the good works that He has prepared for us in advance. They serve both an immediate and ultimate purpose.

Q Until now, has your understanding of saint been accurate?

Q How does being a holy one change your approach to daily life?



Renewing the mind helps us move from milk to solid food. Discerning what is good is often a combination of knowing the Word and listening to the Holy Spirit. This is where unceasing prayer comes alive. While the Word is clear on theft and coveting, it isn't clear on which job you should take. The Word doesn't give us a precise timeline for reconciling wounded friendships. However, the Holy Spirit often does. Unceasing prayer will keep an ongoing conversation with the LORD, where the Holy Spirit often directs us in the timing and application of Biblical principles for things like reconciling a friendship.

Think of it this way. Bible study without unceasing prayer is the difference between surgery with an axe and a scalpel. You could chop away at an issue by pummeling it with Scripture or, through ongoing, unceasing prayer, the Holy Spirit makes us precise. In both cases, the Word is sharp, but Word and Spirit cut most precisely.

Feed yourself. Renew the mind. Pray in the Spirit. Eat solid food. Press onward to maturity.

And this we will do if God permits. – Hebrews 6:3





