

# *Bible Commentary*

*Paula Fether*



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# Preface

This commentary expresses the opinions and studies of Paula Fether. The author makes no claims to expertise but only seeks to share the results of lifelong Bible study. It contains references to many scholarly resources, some of which are listed here at the end for your convenience.

## Jews and Gentiles

While Jews and Gentiles are familiar terms to most people, the terms used in the New Testament are Judeans and “the nations” (sometimes also Greeks or Barbarians). Judea was the name of the area, not simply the name of the Hebrew tribe of Judah. All the tribes were represented there, as indicated in such passages as Mat. 19:28, Acts 26:7, Rom. 9:4, and James 1:1. There were no such terms before the twelve tribes of Jacob existed, since all before them were simply labeled by their ethnicity, whether righteous or wicked. The term for non-Jews, *Gentiles*, is from the Latin word for family, clan, or nation, and in the New Testament it refers simply to anyone who isn't a Jew.

## Calendar, Holy Days, Feasts, Festivals

Israel used a lunar calendar, meaning the beginning of a month was marked by the first sighting of the waxing (increasing) crescent moon. Thus the full moon occurred approximately in the middle of the month. The first month of the year was the beginning of spring (our March/April) and was called Nisan (or Aviv/Abib, after the ripening of the barley harvest). This was stipulated by God in the instructions concerning the Passover Festival in Exodus 12, which is

vital for understanding events and timing in Jesus' final week as a mortal.

That passage, which is about commemorating the passing over of the death angel when Israel was enslaved in Egypt, states that a flawless year-old male lamb (or goat) was to be selected for each family on the 10th. It was to be cared for until the 14th, when at twilight all the lambs were to be slaughtered and then eaten. This marked the start of a 7-day period beginning and ending with a "sacred assembly" (a.k.a. a special or "high" Sabbath), and all yeast had to be purged from every house for the entire 7 days. The 14th became known as Preparation Day, and the 15th was the actual Passover, though the whole festival was also called the Passover. So regardless of the Gregorian calendar dates, the Preparation was the 14th and the Passover was the 15th.

No work was to be done on any Sabbath except for certain types of food preparation (e.g., Ex. 20:9-10), and people were not to travel (Ex. 16:29). By the time of Jesus the rabbis allowed people to walk less than a mile. So if anyone is said to have worked, done business, or traveled more than a mile at some point in the Gospels, we can be sure that it was not a Sabbath day.

The Feast of Firstfruits (the first day of the week following Passover per Lev. 23:9-16), began a seven-week festival called the Feast of Weeks (Lev. 23:15-22). Firstfruits was known as "one/first of the Sabbaths," and this phrase in Greek is imprecisely rendered "the first day of the week" in most Bibles. The Day of Pentecost was a feast marking the final day of the final week.

## **Sacred Names**

Scripture commands that the name of God must be honored (e.g. Exodus 20:7), but does that mean there is a particular Hebrew name which either is not to be spoken/written or must be done precisely?

In Exodus 3, Moses encounters God in the incident of the “burning bush” and asks his name. God responds by saying “I am who I am”, which in itself is a description rather than a name. He goes on in that passage to say he should be known by whose God he is.

The Bible does not say or imply that there is a particular set of letters and syllables only to be said or written as the sacred name of God. In fact, those who disagree have changed the spelling and pronunciation of the alleged sacred name over the years. When the Old Testament was translated from Paleo-Hebrew to Greek before the time of Christ, none of the Hebrew names for God were kept intact (transliterated into equivalent Greek letters), but translated by their meanings. Honoring God is more about respect and reverence than syllables and letters. We do more dishonor to God by how we live, than what word we used to identify him.

## **Figures of Speech**

The writers of the New Testament were likely to have been Hebrew thinkers recording Aramaic speech in Greek. Thus we need to be especially careful about interpreting any given expression, considering all the factors involved. All three languages would have their own expressions and colloquialisms, and at times a Hebrew idiom may be expressed in Greek words for example. One such expression is typically “And he spoke to them, saying...”, instead of what English would express simply as “And he said to them....”

Regarding the phrases “son of God” and “son of man”: These are often Hebrew expressions for a member of a group. For example, “son of Israel” means an Israelite, “son of God” means one of the God class of beings, and “son of man” means one of the human class of beings. So when Jesus uses these expressions for himself, he is either emphasizing his divinity or his humanity. When preceded by the definite article (the), it is being used as a title.

The Koine (common) Greek of the New Testament also tended to use the male gender of words as inclusive; that is, “sons” could be either male or female, while “daughters” were only female. Likewise, “brothers” could also include females. In both cases the male form was used if there was at least one male in the group. It is a term of inclusion, not exclusion.

The word typically translated *Christ* (Greek) or *Messiah* (Hebrew) means the prophesied One who has been divinely identified via anointing.

## **Pronouns and Gender**

There is great controversy over the use of the third-person plural pronoun (they) when an individual’s biological gender is unknown. For example, “If anyone aspires to be an overseer, he or she desires a good thing” is more awkward than “If anyone aspires to be an overseer, they desire a good thing.” The word for “anyone” is ambiguous in the Greek; it does not specify male or female. Yet some accuse any translation that does not render it “he desires” of “emasculating” the text.

In Greek the Holy Spirit takes the impersonal pronoun (it), though it is clear from the entirety of the Bible that the Spirit is a personal entity. For example, the Spirit can be grieved (Eph. 4:30), and some were struck down dead for lying to it (Acts 5:3). Hebrew uses the feminine pronoun (she) for the Spirit of God, but again, this does not make God either feminine or masculine. God is spirit (John 4:24), not flesh, and thus not gendered. If we insist upon assigning biological traits to that which is not biological, we come closer to myth than scriptural truth. For this reason it is just as wrong to think of God as male as it is to think of God as female or an impersonal force.

## Faith/Belief/Trust

The phrase “believe in someone” carries the connotation of blind faith, as one might believe in the tooth fairy. The phrase “believe someone” means to mentally agree with something they said. But “to have faith in someone” or “to trust someone” adds the meaning of personal conviction, of mental assent plus emotional attachment and dedication. The Biblical languages did not have our English concept of merely “believing in” someone’s existence without additional contextual information, such as that used in James chapter two. Some Christians seem to view it almost as a force or power to be manipulated.

## Eternal

The Greek word translated “eternal” has the literal meaning of an age or a time of unknown duration. This does not require a limited time, since eternity is also of unknown duration. Jesus used the same term in Mat. 25:46 for both punishment and life. So if punishment must be limited in duration, then life in heaven is also limited in duration. Some contend that this is indeed the case, but this logically leads to an endless series of ages, which is indistinguishable from eternity.

## Church or Synagogue

The Greek word typically translated *church* actually means a congregation, assembly, or gathering. The Greek Old Testament used the term about a hundred times for various gatherings. The New Testament only means the community of Christians when the context makes that clear, since the same word was used also for the angry mob of heathen in Acts 19:32. The Hebrew equivalent is *synagogue*. Both words began as only referring to the people, but

later also to the meeting place itself. As for alleged heathen origins of the word *church*, see [this source](#), which shows nothing relating to the mythical goddess Circe. It may have been derived from a Greek expression meaning *the house of the Lord*. The point is that *church* is not an evil word as some allege, since intent is vital, regardless of any possible origin in false religions.

## Sin

Scripture uses many words typically just translated *sin*. In the New Testament especially, the various words often overlap in meaning and have more to do with the circumstances of the sin, rather than different degrees of sin. Some emphasize the laying of a trap or obstacle for people, some are more about unlawful violation of property, and some are unintentional. But all are ultimately offences against God.

## Basic Resources

- [Constable's Notes](#)
- [Bible Hub Commentaries](#)
- [The NET Bible \(using Hebrew Old Testament\)](#)
- [Hebrew Old Testament Interlinear](#)
- [The NETS Bible \(using Greek Old Testament\)](#)
- [Greek Old Testament Interlinear](#)
- [The Gift New Testament](#)
- [Greek New Testament Interlinear](#)

# **Genesis**

## **Introduction**

We begin our study of the book of Genesis with some general information about the first five books of the Bible, known as the Pentateuch or Torah, which the Bible itself attributes to Moses. There were about 560 years from the birth of Jacob/Israel to the Exodus. If the Exodus occurred around 1446 BC during the reign of Pharaoh Amenhotep II, then the Pentateuch was likely written around 1400 BC. If so, the language was likely to have been Proto-Sinaitic, which was followed by Paleo-Hebrew. This in turn was eventually translated into the Greek Septuagint (LXX). Yet on the other hand, there is substantial— albeit controversial— research that argues for Greek being the “mother of all languages”.

When we speak of Biblical texts ascribed to an individual, it's not necessarily that this person did the actual writing, but that they were the primary subject or authority. Thus when the New Testament writers quote from the Pentateuch and attribute it to Moses, it means by or about or on the authority of Moses. Consider also the book of Esther; certainly only Esther herself could know many of the details, but it's unlikely that she herself wrote the words, since in her position as queen she would certainly have had a scribe write down what she said. In addition, at least some of the material likely came from her older cousin Mordecai. This hardly invalidates the historical accuracy of the account, or she being the author, and the same holds true for the Pentateuch and the rest of the Bible.

## **On Alleged Two Creation Accounts**



Chapters 1 and 2 are not, as some claim, two separate creation accounts, but rather an introductory summary followed by details, per ancient near eastern custom. Please make use of the Resources links throughout the study of Genesis for comparison. Please also understand that the author makes no claims of expertise in Greek or Hebrew, but rather on understanding of the grammatical principles of language in general.

## **Paraphrase of Gen. 1:1 to 2:3**

We will include ch. 2 verses 1-3 here, because they really are part of the first account both grammatically and contextually.

1:1-5 In the beginning, God made the sky and earth. At first the earth was a vast and featureless watery abyss, dark and invisible. But the Spirit of God compressed the water, and God gave a command: "Let light appear!" It did, and God was pleased with this. So he divided light from darkness, calling them Day and Night. Evening and morning passed, the first day.

1:6-8 God then gave a command: "Let there be a strong support to divide the waters!" So he made the strong support, putting some water above it and the rest below. He called the strong support Sky, and he was pleased with this. Evening and morning passed, the second day.

1:9-13 God then gave a command: "Let the waters beneath the sky gather into one place, so that dry land can appear!" It happened as God commanded; the waters gathered themselves and dry land appeared. God called the dry land Earth, and the waters Seas, and he was pleased with this. Then God gave another command: "Now let the earth produce pasture plants with seeds to make more just like themselves. The same for trees; let them have seed-bearing fruit!" So it was done. Plants appeared with their seed to reproduce,

and trees appeared bearing fruit with seed to reproduce. God was pleased with this, and evening and morning passed, the third day.

1:14-19 God then gave a command: “Let there be luminaries in the strong support of the sky, to give light on the earth and to distinguish between day and night! Let them also serve as signs, and to mark off times, days, and years!” So it was done. God made the two primary luminaries— the greater one to mark the beginnings of days, and the lesser one to mark the beginnings of nights— and the stars. He put them in the strong support of the sky, to shine on the earth and mark the beginnings of days and nights, and to separate light from darkness. God was pleased with this, and evening and morning passed, the fourth day.

1:20-23 God then gave a command: “Let living souls that crawl emerge from the waters, and let creatures with wings fly on the earth under the strong support of the sky!” So it was done. God made huge sea creatures, along with the crawling things and winged creatures with feathers, each according to its own kind. God was pleased with this, and he blessed them with these words: “Grow and multiply, fill the waters in the seas! And let the flying creatures also multiply on the earth!” Evening and morning passed, the fifth day.

1:24-25 God then gave a command: “Let all of these living souls emerge from the earth, each according to its kind: those with four feet, those that crawl, and wild animals!” So it was done. God made all of these according to each one’s kind: the wild animals of the earth, the cattle, and all that crawl on the earth. God was pleased with this.

1:26-28 God then gave a command: “Let us make Human, like us, not only in form but also in function, having authority over the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the cattle all over the earth, and those that crawl on the earth!” So Human was made, male and female, resembling God. He blessed them with these words: “Grow and multiply, fill the earth and dominate it! Have control over the fish of

the sea, the birds of the sky, the cattle all over the earth, and everything that crawls on the earth!”

1:29-31 God added, “Look! I’ve given food from the earth’s seed-bearing plants, and trees with seed-bearing fruit. This is not only for you but also for the wild animals on the earth, the birds of the sky, and everything that crawls on the earth. Everything having the breath of life will have all the green plants for food.” So it was done, and God was very pleased with it all. Evening and morning passed, the sixth day.

2:1-3 This completed the sky and earth, the entire system. On the sixth day God finished the task of creation, so on the seventh day he rested from that work. That’s why God pronounced a blessing on that day and set it apart from the rest.

## **Commentary on Gen. 1:1 to 2:3**

1:1-5 The first sentence is essentially the introduction to the creation account. So any and all theories about whether earth started out this way or was ruined from an earlier state are inventing things that cannot be implied from the text. The Greek phrase rendered “compressed” here can mean either to come near or to press upon. Light as a thing or phenomenon did not yet exist, and of course it couldn’t have come from the sun at this point. But here and throughout the chapter, the phrase “Evening and morning passed, the nth day” leaves no room for speculation over its duration. Critics are challenged to present a case for how Moses could have made it any clearer that a normal solar day was meant.

1:6-8 The “strong support” (trad. *firmament*) in either Hebrew or Greek, along with its use in other passages and its context here, describes something hammered out and capable of holding something heavy. Here it holds up an unknown amount of water, which some try to claim can mean just about anything but literal

water. “Sky” and “heaven” are part of the semantic range of one word, whether in Hebrew or Greek, and here it is singular. The result is that earth is surrounded by water.

1:9-13 God separates water and land, then makes land plants.

1:14-19 The luminaries are in the strong support, not above it. Their stated purpose is to serve not only as lights but also as a calendar and clock, and as indicators of warnings or messages from God. There is no hint of earth orbiting the sun (which was impossible for the first three days), nor that earth spins or moves.

1:20-25 Notice that birds and creatures that crawl under water were made from the water, not the ground, in contrast to the land animals. Notice also that birds fly under the strong support, though the grammar *could possibly* allow throughout.

1:26-31 When it comes to the creation of human beings, notice first of all that no mention is made here about them being produced by either water or ground. Remember that this is still a summary, more concerned with sequence than technicalities, especially for the creation of mankind. So when it says that male and female were made, it is not saying that Adam was androgynous or that there was an entire race of humanoids(?) before Adam; that is pure speculation. Of course, to dominate the world is not a license to abuse, pollute, or destroy. As for diet, all living things ate fruit with seeds in it. There was no death or decay or suffering, but this would soon change.

Does God resting from the work of creation mean that all mankind for all time must rest on what we call the Sabbath Day? Not at all; nothing is said here about people having any such obligation, but only what God did. We should also be aware that the Greek word translated “God” is *theos* up to this point, the same word used throughout the New Testament.

Here is a depiction of how Genesis describes the heavens and earth.

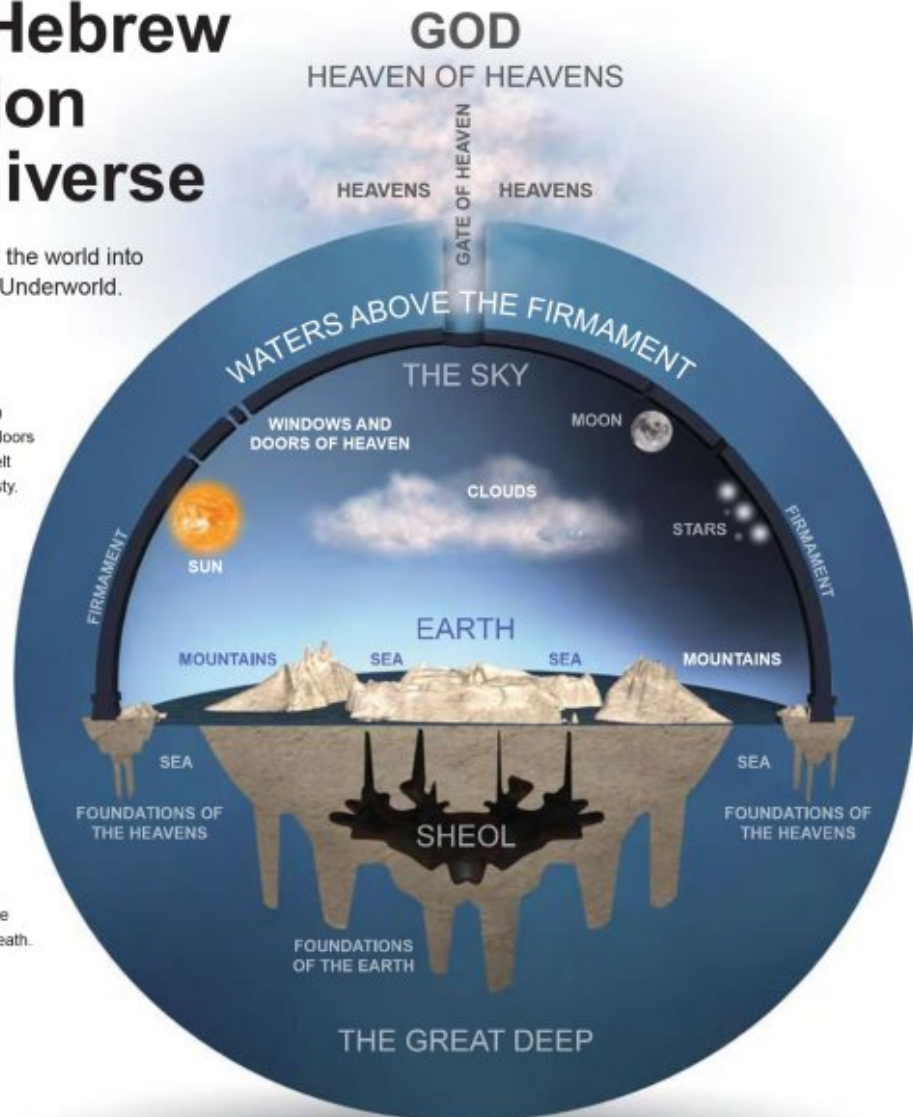
# Ancient Hebrew Conception of the Universe

The ancient Israelites divided the world into Heaven, Earth, Sea, and the Underworld.

They viewed the sky as a vault resting on foundations—perhaps mountains—with doors and windows that let in the rain. God dwelt above the sky, hidden in cloud and majesty.

The world was viewed as a disk floating on the waters, secured or moored by pillars. The earth was the only known domain—the realm beyond it was considered unknowable.

The Underworld (Sheol) was a watery or dusty prison from which no one returned. Regarded as a physical place beneath the earth, it could be reached only through death.



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## Paraphrase of Gen. 2:4-25

2:4-6 This is the book of when the sky and earth were brought into existence. On the day the Sovereign God made sky and earth, at first there were no fields of green plants, because the Sovereign God had not yet brought rain on the earth, and there was no human to work the ground. Instead, a spring came up from out of the ground and watered the surface.

2:7-9 Then the Sovereign God formed the human out of dust from the ground. He breathed the breath of life into the human's face, and the human became a living soul. Then the Sovereign God planted a paradise in Eden, toward the east, and there he put the human he had formed. Now the Sovereign God had caused the earth to produce every sort of beautiful fruit tree. In the center of the paradise grew the Tree of Life, and also the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

2:10-14 There is a river that goes out from Eden to water the paradise, and from there it separates into four branches. The first river is called Phison, which encircles the whole land of Havilah— a land of the finest gold, and of red and green precious stones. The second river is called Gihon, which encircles the whole land of Ethiopia. The third river is called Tigris, which goes across from Assyria. The fourth river is called Euphrates.

2:15-17 Now the Sovereign God took the human he had formed and put him into the paradise, to cultivate it and to guard it. The Sovereign God then gave Adam this responsibility: "You may eat from any tree in the paradise, except the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. If you eat from that tree, you will most certainly die!"

2:18-20 Then the Sovereign God said, "It is not good for the human to be alone. Let's make someone to stand as his equal." Now the Sovereign God had formed out of the earth all the wild animals of the field and all the birds of the sky. So he led them to Adam to see what names he'd give them. Whatever Adam called a living thing, that was its name. He named all the cattle, the birds of the sky, and all the field animals. But for Adam himself there was no one to stand as his equal.

2:21-25 So the Sovereign God put Adam into a state of deep sleep. He took part of one side of Adam and attached flesh to it, and then built that into a woman. He presented her to Adam, who exclaimed, "Now this is my own flesh and bone! She will be called Woman, because she was taken from the man." This is why a person leaves

his father and mother to join closely to his wife, and the two are to be one flesh. Adam and his wife were both naked, but they felt no shame.

## **Commentary on Gen. 2:4-25**

2:4-6 Here we see a slightly different wording for the beginning of creation: “the book (Gk. biblos, Heb. generations) of the earth and sky being brought into existence”. (Now no one can say that the word “Bible” doesn’t appear in the Bible!) Then we’re given details about how the earth was watered at first. Some say this statement about no rain only applied until Adam was made. But though it would be an argument from silence, we should be aware that scripture never speaks of rain falling before the Flood.

2:7-9 After a passing mention of the creation of the first human, we’re told that he was placed in the Garden of Eden, where the trees of Life and The Knowledge of Good and Evil were. Many call that second one merely “the Tree of Knowledge” and jump to the conclusion that it’s the Gnostic concept of enlightenment. This in turn is used to paint the serpent as the real savior from the bumbling demiurge who wanted to keep enlightenment to himself. Yet this is about a precise kind of knowledge, which essentially means the loss of innocence.

2:10-14 As for the rivers flowing from Eden, it’s significant that they’re described in geographical terms that would only have meaning after the great Flood, such as the territories of Ethiopia and Assyria. It’s often argued that the Flood wiped out Eden and its original river system, but why would Moses then describe the rivers in terms of post-Flood geography? Because he did, we can know the general area of Eden, and it describes roughly the area shown on this map. It takes more than picking out a few features to identify a land, which only needs to be mentioned because of the popular claim that Eden was really either at the Arctic Circle or somewhere on the



African continent. However, directions in scripture are from the land of Israel, so east means east of there— not north, south, or west. This map is a rough estimate of Eden's location:



Take a moment now to notice what we have not seen in this alleged second creation story: the luminaries, the firmament and what it separated, and the sea creatures. Starting a creation story with an explanation about why there weren't any plants is like starting a book on how to make a car with what kind of oil it takes. Now as for the "different" names of God compared to chapter one, which only used Elohim (Gk. Theos), this one uses a phrase: YHWH Elohim (Gk. Kurios Theos, though often without Kurios).

2:15-17 Here we're given more detail about the creation of the first human, who was given two primary tasks to perform: to cultivate and protect the Garden of Eden. What need could there have been for protection? First of all, we note that this is just prior to God giving the warning about the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Such knowledge would certainly include understanding what at the time must have been quite puzzling: the concept of death.



Yet surely there is more here than meets the eye, since the garden needed guarding from something. We're told in Rom. 5:12 that there was no death before sin, so we can rule out carnivorous animals. And we can rule out invasive plants, since that too only came after sin, as we'll see in Gen. 3. Is this when the enemy later known as Satan was found to be sinful, since at creation all the angels shouted for joy, per Job 38:7? Is this why God said it was not good for the first human to be alone? Always be careful with speculation though; scripture does not tell us God's reasons for these things. This becomes even more critical when we get to chapter 3.

2:18-20 The warning about the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil is immediately followed by the statement by God, not Adam, that the human should not be alone. The Hebrew text also shows that it isn't until Eve is made that new terms are introduced for both she and Adam; he is *eesh* and she is *esh-shaw*, though at the end of the chapter *Adam* is used for the man. We'll need to pay close attention to that in chapter 3.

Now if we're paying attention to the context, we should ask why it is that between the first ever "not good" thing and the creation of woman, God brings the animals to Adam to see what he'd call them. We'll elaborate on that in the final section. Some say that God created animals at the time he brought them to the human, because in both Greek and Hebrew the tense of the verb "formed" seems to indicate it being done at that moment. However, in the Greek text we see the word "yet" paired with "formed", which together indicates something done earlier. Otherwise we have a conflict with creation sequence as given in chapter 1, where the human was the last thing created. Simpletons to jump to the conclusion of two creation accounts, but they have to ignore a lot to do that, including the consensus of people who study linguistics for a living that "had formed" is the most likely rendering, and that this passage is not concerned with sequence.

2:21-25 Speaking of sequence, we now come to the creation of Eve. The fact that she was made last is often claimed to be proof of secondary status compared to Adam, but it's fallacious to ignore the fact that Adam was made after all the animals, yet put in authority over them along with Eve. And of course God has never mandated authority on the basis of first to be made; that is a purely human construct, and one that only appeared after sin entered the world. If the Bible shows us anything about the times God does directly intervene in society, it is that he chooses the young over the old, the weak over the strong, the inferior over the superior, and the despised over the honored. This is stated explicitly in 1 Cor. 1:27-28.

Notice also that when Adam first sees Eve, it's not her differences that he rejoices in, but her similarities. She literally had his flesh and bones! The stated purpose of God (remember, not Adam) was to make someone like Adam, not someone inferior like the animals—who, incidentally, were made from the dust just as Adam was. The sequence of “not good”, to naming animals, to Eve, tells us that God brought the animals to Adam to show him that none were his equal, not to show him he needed another subordinate. We must also ask which one is it that needs help, the weaker or the stronger? If one wishes to claim that helpers are weaker in spite of this, then they must say that God, as our helper, is weaker than us. There is no escaping this conclusion without committing a fallacy.

## **Summary of Gen. 1 and 2**

There is only one creation account in Genesis. Nothing in Gen. 1 or 2 meshes with evolutionary theory, or simulation theory, or gives us the impression that this is all just an allegory of the struggle between good and evil. Neither is there a hint of any form of hierarchy between one person and another, regardless of their attributes. This is written as literal history, and we must be careful not to read too much between the lines on one extreme, or to gloss over important details on the other. We will never understand how the creation

account will be used as an analogy for spiritual lessons until we first know what the real thing is. The only way to make the creation account an allegory is to call it fiction, which means everything else, including Jesus' resurrection from the dead, could also be fiction. If the Bible is all allegory, there's no point in studying it, and those who say it is have no right to tell other people that their interpretations are wrong.

## **Gen. 3**

This lesson will be about how the “very good” creation turned sour, along with the promise of redemption. But the details in the original languages are critical to our understanding, so as in prior lessons we will present the scripture and then analyze it.

### **Paraphrase of Gen. 3**

3:1-4 Now the serpent was the most perceptive among all the wild animals that the Sovereign God had made on the earth, and it spoke to the woman: “Why is it that God told you so sternly that you must not eat from any tree in the paradise?”

“We may eat the fruit of the trees in the paradise,” she replied, “except the one in the middle. God said not to eat from it or touch it, so we won't die.”

“That's not true, you won't die!” the serpent replied. “God really knows that in the day you eat its fruit, your eyes will be wide open and you'll be like gods who perceive both good and evil.”

3:6-7 The woman determined that the tree had good quality fruit, ripe for picking. So she took it and ate it, then gave some also to her husband who was with her, and they both ate the fruit. Their eyes were opened wide, and they realized that they were naked, so they

sewed together the leaves of a fig tree to make loincloths for themselves.

3:8-13 Then at dusk they heard the sound of the Sovereign God walking in the paradise. So both Adam and his wife hid from the Sovereign God's face, behind the tree in the middle of the paradise. God called out to Adam, "Where are you?"

"I heard the sound of you walking in the paradise," Adam answered. "I was afraid because I'm naked, so I hid."

"Who informed you that you're naked?" God asked. "Did you eat from that tree I told you not to eat from?"

"You're the one who gave me the woman!" exclaimed Adam. "She gave me fruit from that tree and I ate it."

Then the Sovereign God turned to the woman and asked, "What have you done?" She answered, "The serpent tricked me into eating it."

3:14-15 So the Sovereign God said this to the **serpent**: "Because you did this, you are accursed from among all the cattle and wild animals on the earth! You will crawl on your chest and belly, and you'll be eating dirt for the rest of your life! I will put hostility between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring. He will target your head, and you will target his heel."

3:16 To the **woman** God said this: "Your grief and groaning will be greatly multiplied; in grief you will bear children. You will turn away to your husband, but he will dominate you."

3:17-19 To **Adam** God said this: "Since you heard your wife's voice and ate from the one tree I told you not to eat from, the land is accursed because of you. All your life you will only eat its produce in grief. Thorns and thistles will make it difficult for you to get food from the field plants. You will eat your bread with sweat on your face, until

you return into the earth from which you were formed. You came from dirt, and you will return to dirt!”

Adam gave his wife the name Lifegiver (Heb. *Eve*, Gk. *Zoe*), since she was the mother of all the living, and then the Sovereign God made clothing out of animal skins for both of them.

Then God said, “Look, Adam has become like one of us, perceiving good and evil. We must prevent him from reaching out to take food from the Tree of Life and live perpetually.” So the Sovereign God expelled him from the pristine paradise and sent him to work the ground from which he had been taken. And after he threw Adam outside of the pristine paradise, he ordered cherubim with the flaming broadsword to turn away any intruders, to guard the way to Tree of Life.

## **Commentary on Gen. 3**

For some reason, Moses didn’t think it necessary to explain the serpent’s cunning, but simply to report it. Yet Rev. 20:2 identifies what it calls “the ancient serpent” as the same entity as the dragon, the devil, and Satan. Still, we can’t ignore the fact that snakes have always moved according to the result of the curse, so this seems to be a both/and situation. Moses emphasizes the serpent’s cunning rather than its nature.

Now notice that in the Greek text the serpent does not say “Has God really said”, but “Why has God said”. The Hebrew text has the serpent sowing doubt about what God said, but the Greek text has the serpent getting Eve to ask why God said it, a question she certainly would never have asked without the serpent’s influence. To me, that strategy seems more aligned with the serpent’s cunning and calculating, and Eve’s response is the key: she gave the reason for the rule. Not one place in the entire Bible faults Eve for changing the wording of the rule, or being mistaken about it.

The serpent's tactic is familiar in our everyday lives, in the form of steering and manipulation, which is an effective strategy because it's very subtle, planting ideas rather than forcing them. It had never occurred to Eve that God would withhold something good from her, so she was unprepared for such a thing. She thought the reason for the rule was that she would die, but the serpent made up a new reason, and she had no experience to tell her that the serpent, or anyone else, would lie to her.

Can we really fault Eve for having no concept of deception? Scripture never tells us why it was Eve rather than Adam that was targeted for this deception; we can only speculate, and again we must use extreme caution in doing so. But per the question asked in the analysis of ch. 2, why did God say it was not good for the first human to be alone, and why was that human charged with guarding Eden? All we can speculate at this point that Eve was targeted because she had no direct observation of God's creative power, and she was the guardian's guardian, so to speak.

What the serpent was offering was the promise of being not only like God, but also what today is called being enlightened or awake. This is the very definition of Gnosticism: hidden knowledge given only to those who are made worthy by taking a certain path of discovery, marked out by those claiming to be wiser. There are variations within Gnosticism, but the teaching that the serpent was trying to free mankind from the clutches of the evil demiurge creator is at the core of Gnosticism in general. This is what fooled Eve, and what continues to fool many others to this day. At least she had a valid excuse.

Keep in mind that none of this has to do with any fictional story about Eve lusting after some imaginary authority Adam held over her, and especially not with the vulgar Gnostic (or Talmudic, or Kabbalistic) belief that Eve had sexual relations with the serpent. In order to allegorize the fruit in this context to mean lust, one would have to allegorize the entire creation account with its description of trees and fruit. This is a dishonest and prejudiced approach to scripture, and

one which renders all Bible study pointless since allegories can mean just about anything.

Notice also that Adam was there with Eve when she was being manipulated by the serpent's cunning, per verse 6. So by the absurd theory about Eve mating with the serpent, we could also lay the same charge against Adam, who also ate the fruit. Yet neither of them got the fruit from the serpent, but from the tree. This particularly vulgar teaching is known as the serpent seed theory, one that only the vile serpent could invent, and it's easily debunked by Gen. 4:1.

Now we must put to rest the equally absurd notion that Eve tempted Adam to eat the fruit. Scripture never hints at such a thing; rather, it clearly portrays Eve as the victim of temptation and deception. Only a sinful desire to make Eve the real villain can result in such victim-blaming. The text states that she handed the fruit to Adam who was with her, and he ate it without having to be fooled as Eve was. Many try to take the phrase "listened to the voice of your wife" as proof of her enticement of Adam, but no part of scripture ever gives it that meaning. In the few instances where Eve is mentioned outside of Genesis, she is the victim of the serpent's trickery.

Rom. 5:12 states that Adam, not Eve, is the reason death entered the world. But how can this be, since both of them ate the fruit and both eventually died? Again, there is more going on here than meets the eye, and again we must be cautious. We will see the probable reason shortly.

Some claim that Adam was charged with sin and confronted first because he was "the federal head of humanity", which of course is not found in scripture. The real reason is the structure of this confrontation, namely that it is in the form of a chiasmic argument, pictured by the Greek letter *chi* which looks like an X. Someone makes a series of points toward a central point, then traces back through the points in reverse order. Thus we can find the central point being made by watching for where the pivot point begins. In this

case the pivot point is the curse on the serpent and subsequent remedy through the seed of the woman. The order is man / woman / serpent / woman / man. So this order of confrontation has more to do with making a point than with some alleged Adamic authority.

But notice Adam's reaction when God asks him about the fruit; he blames Eve directly and God Himself indirectly, by saying "the woman you gave me"! The serpent and the temptation are never mentioned by Adam; he takes no responsibility and shows no remorse or compassion for Eve, as some claim. He had stood silently by while listening to the serpent deceive his wife, and he took the fruit from her without comment or question.

When Eve is confronted she simply states the truth: "The serpent deceived me and I ate." No passing blame to Adam, no argument about what a great idea eating the fruit was supposed to be, no protest about it being unfair that she was beneath Adam... just telling what happened.

At this point God doesn't even ask the serpent any questions but simply curses it. But notice that God begins with "Because you have done this". And in this context of cursing the serpent, God pronounces the ultimate remedy: the seed of the woman. No one has thought to ask why it would be the seed of only the woman that would bring the remedy for this disaster. Why was Adam not to be a part of this? Scripture never says. But it's a question everyone should ponder.

God never says to Eve, "Because you have done this". And what God *does* say is disputed: Was it "I will multiply your suffering in childbirth", or "A snare has increased your sorrow; in sorrow you will bear children"? Regardless, the point is that Eve is never told that something she did is the reason for this, as was the case with Adam and the serpent.

Then God makes a prediction (not a command): Eve would turn toward her husband. The Greek word is *apostrophe*, but many study



tools give the wrong definition. This *turning* is lifted from context and given all sorts of imaginative meanings, such as that it must be sexual desire or lust for power, but scripture says no such things. Whatever anyone insists, the fact remains that it did not exist until after the serpent tempted her. Genesis 2-1/2 is pure fiction.

God is telling Eve that she is about to make a critical choice, and that this choice would result in something that did not exist before, or it wouldn't be predicted: her husband would rule over her. Had this rule already existed God would have only said that it would be stronger or harsher, but since no such rule is stated anywhere before this in any form, the context only supports the existence of rule by Adam over Eve after sin. It is the man who will now usurp authority over the woman, whom God had created as his equal. Ironically, today many men accuse women who want equality of attempting to usurp the very authority they themselves got by usurping.

We must also consider the fact that God had just finished telling the serpent that the woman he beguiled would be his ultimate undoing, and that God himself would put hostility between them. This is no physical fear of snakes (besides, fear and hostility are two completely different things) on the part of only women, but a special seething hatred between the forces of Satan and the progeny of only Eve, since from her seed alone would come the promised Savior. Eve was clearly being compensated for her having been the victim of a cruel deception, and Adam was truly in need of her help.

Finally we come to Adam. God begins with "Since you did this", so we know that Adam is being held responsible for his actions, just as the serpent was. But remember that the only penalty God had stated for eating the fruit was death. Both Adam and Eve ate the fruit and eventually died, but no other penalty was stated. So why were there additional penalties for Adam alone, whom the text clearly and repeatedly aims at? The only option the text gives us is that it was for his open and unprovoked rebellion against God, his blaming God for making Eve.

Notice that it is not Adam himself but the ground he was made from that is cursed; there is no curse on Adam, Eve, or human nature. Then Adam is told he would have to work hard to get this cursed ground to produce food, and it is only to Adam that God says “you came from dust and will return to dust”.

Eve, just as God predicted, chose willingly to share in Adam’s fate and follow him out. Tragically, many teach that Christian women should make the same mistake and follow men rather than God, because they are all temptresses who need a sinful, blame-shifting man to keep them in line.

As for the class of angels called cherubim who were put there to guard the way to the Tree of Life, we have little to explain any details, other than that scripture seems to portray them as having very high rank.

## **Summary of Gen. 3**

There are few passages of scripture more badly twisted than Gen. 3. Because of this, any New Testament references to it are also badly twisted. Everything that was to happen after this point would be the result of rebellion against God, not what God would call “very good”.

## **Gen. 4**

Genesis 4 begins the second great epoch of human history, the first of course being from creation to what is called the Fall of Man. God had given Adam and Eve dominion over all the earth, but the serpent conned them out of it. Treachery and death would be the common experience of all their progeny, and Cain and Abel the pattern of violence and victimization.

## **Paraphrase of Gen. 4:1-7**

Adam was intimate with his wife Eve, who conceived and gave birth to Cain and said, “God has given me a man!” Later she gave birth to his brother Abel. He grew up to be a shepherd, while Cain worked the land.

After some time passed, Cain brought a sacrifice to the Master from the produce of the land, but Abel brought the first and best of his sheep. God looked favorably on Abel and his offerings, but he did not accept Cain and his offerings. So Cain was extremely disturbed and became depressed. But the Sovereign God said to him, “Why are you dejected and depressed? Isn’t it still a violation if you indeed brought a sacrifice but not a proper one? Calm down; it is being returned to you, so you can decide what to do.”

## **Commentary on Gen. 4:1-7**

The first thing we see in this chapter is that children began to be born, the first of whom was Cain. Recalling the debunking of the serpent seed theory in the previous lesson, it states clearly in verse 1 that it was Adam, not the serpent, who fathered Cain. Some claim that the serpent fathered Cain and that this bloodline was what Jesus meant in John 8:44 when he told some people that they were of their father, the devil. But not only does the context there clearly speak of spiritual matters rather than genetics, verse 1 here explicitly states that Cain’s father was Adam.

Another question to address here is the claim of some pre-Adamic race that was wiped out between Gen. 1:1 and 1:2, since when Cain later went to a distant city and married, there had to be prior civilizations for him to go to. But Rom. 5:12 says that sin entered the world through one man, that being Adam. If there had been a pre-Adamic race or un-named children from Adam and Eve, any who

lived before Adam's rebellion would be sinless and probably immortal, since none of them would have been part of God's curse.

Adam and Eve certainly had many other children after Cain and Abel, who were simply not mentioned because they weren't key personages in the Bible's overarching theme and purpose. And if anyone objects to the practice of what we now call incest, which had to be the case when the human race was just beginning to multiply, such a law was not yet given nor needed. The reason God would later prohibit it is because of the ever-degrading nature of our genome, and the errors that had built up by then.

God's conversation with Cain is significantly different in the Greek compared to the Hebrew, but either way it's the first failed attempt at persuasion, and no less than God who was rejected. The Hebrew text has God saying to Cain that sin was crouching at the door but that Cain would need to resist it. But the Greek text has God telling Cain that he would have his offering returned to him so he could have another chance at doing the right thing. We can only speculate as to the reason for the rejection, but it seems that since the text points out that Abel brought the best he had, then Cain did not. I don't believe it was that Cain didn't bring an animal, but that the produce he brought was of inferior quality. Admittedly, the Greek wording is difficult to follow, but I think this interpretation makes better sense of the immediate context, though most seem to view it as the reason for what happens next in the chapter.

## **Paraphrase of Gen. 4:8-16**

Now Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let's go out to the field." After they got there, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him. Then the Sovereign God confronted Cain: "Where is your brother Abel?"

"How should I know?" he retorted. "I'm not his guardian."

“What have you done?” the Master demanded. “Your brother’s blood shouts to me from the ground! So now you are accursed from the earth that opened up its mouth to take your brother’s blood from your hand. When you work the ground and it no longer yields good produce for you, you will be miserable and weak.”

Then Cain replied to the Master, “My crime is too great for me to be forgiven. If you banish me from the earth and from your presence, I will hide in misery and weakness on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me.”

“Not so,” replied the Sovereign God. “Anyone who tries to kill Cain will suffer seven times as much punishment.” So the Sovereign God marked Cain, so that any who would find him would not kill him. Then Cain left God’s presence and settled in the land of Nod, across from Eden.

## **Commentary on Gen. 4:8-16**

What is particularly striking about Cain’s retort to God is the dripping sarcasm of not being his brother’s guardian. His father Adam failed at guarding Eden, and his mother Eve failed at guarding Adam. He seems to be trying to shirk responsibility for his actions by rubbing in God’s face the fact that he, unlike his parents, was not charged with protecting anyone. But just like his father Adam, he shifted blame from himself to God. This attitude was already evident in his prior attempt to appease God with a substandard offering.

Of course, God wasn’t having any of that, and he pronounced a curse on Cain himself, as opposed to when God cursed the ground on Adam’s account. Here again, the Greek wording is significantly different from the Hebrew, which has Cain saying his punishment was greater than he could bear, rather than that his crime was too great to be forgiven. The Hebrew almost seems to try and garner sympathy for Cain.

## Gen. 4:17-26

First off we see that Cain marries, and we've already addressed the issue of where his wife might have come from. But keep in mind that names are often given to more than one person, just as people have always done since then. We see the name Enoch, but we know this isn't the Enoch mentioned by Jude 1:14, because that Enoch was in the 7th generation after Adam, while this one is only the 3rd.

Then we see that Noah's father Lamech traces his genealogy back through Methuselah, to Mehujael, to Enoch, to Cain. Then what becomes of the serpent seed theory from the line of Cain, since Noah is in Cain's genetic line?

Some claim that the Dead Sea Scrolls cite Satan as Cain's father, but you can see the text yourself [here](#). [This source](#) shows that "the man" fathered Cain.

The rest of the chapter is genealogy, but it includes some interesting remarks about the originators of things like music and instruments, metalurgy, and raising cattle.

Verse 23 begins the account of Lamech, who killed a young man. Though it isn't clear in the Greek text whether the young man was killed for wounding Lamech or that Lamech was grieving over the youth's death, it's interesting that he claimed even more protection for himself that God gave to Cain, though God doesn't say so here.

The last two verses name Seth as another of Adam and Eve's children, and then Seth fathered Enos. Notice that it's been Eve naming her children, and that she considered them blessings from God. The Greek text differs from the Hebrew in the final sentence. The Greek says that Enos "hoped to call on the name of the Sovereign God", but the Hebrew says "then men began to call". Neither reading is actually very informative; we have no details on what that meant.

## Gen. 5

This chapter, like the first, begins with a subtitle, this time saying that what follows is focused on genealogy from Adam to the three sons of Noah. Some information is repeated from ch. 4 but with added detail such as ages and lifespans. The famous Enoch, called by Jude the 7th from Adam, must include Adam as the 1st if you check the number of generations here. Aside from being the father of the longest-lived person ever, Methuselah, Enoch was taken alive at the age of 365 years to be with God. The Greek word there is also in Heb. 11:5 when it reports on this event. It indicates that he was transported, not simply that he disappeared.

Everyone wants to know if this Enoch wrote any books, and if so, whether those books have survived intact. But rather than try to settle the impossible here, the reader is encouraged to study [this source](#) on the subject. There books called Enoch 1 through 3, but 2 and 3 are so much lower in quality and substance as to be easily dismissed. That leaves us with 1, but we have to be careful whether we have the one deemed “authentic”. Even so, there is nothing in it to give the impression that it contains hidden or secret knowledge, or that it supplies information vital to our understanding of the things of God. It may be an interesting historical book, if accurate, but there is no justification to force it into the Biblical canon.

## Gen. 6

This is where we first encounter the term “sons of God”. Many approach the text with the presumption that this cannot refer to angels, based on two points: that angels aren’t physical so they can’t mate with people, and what Jesus said in Mat. 22:30: that marriage will no longer apply to the dead because they will be like the angels in heaven.

The claim that spirit beings cannot be physical is refuted by Gen. 18, where Abraham is visited by what appeared to be three men, who ate and drank with him. The context clearly indicates that these men were really God, in what is called a theophany. God has no physical form, and Jesus would not incarnate for thousands of years after this. One may object that only God can do this and not angels, but Heb. 13:2 says that some have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it. To this we could add the account of Balaam in Numbers 22, where God allowed him to see the angel blocking his way, or Luke 24, where the women at Jesus' empty tomb saw two men who gleamed like lightning, or Gen. 19 where the men of Sodom wanted to rape the angels who came to rescue Lot, but referred to them as "men".

[This source](#) is a good study on angels in the Bible. It points out that though they always appear to people as adult male humans, they are only doing so temporarily and for our benefit. The point is that they can take on real physical flesh that can eat and drink as any human. As for the other point referencing what Jesus said, he specified that the angels in heaven don't marry— not the fallen angels, and not by inability but by choice.

We might wonder why this is even an issue until we remember the serpent seed theory. The presumption that no angelic being could mate with humans leads to what is called the Sethite theory, which developed in the 5th century a.d. This theory claims that while the line of Cain was wicked, the line of Seth was righteous. So they equate "sons of God" with the Sethites, and "daughters of men" with the Cainites (not to be confused with Canaanites). But it is based on nothing but presumption and poor logic.

Why would only the daughters of Cain be wicked, and the sons of Seth be righteous? Why would the children of such unions result in what Gen. 6 describes as giants, who were renowned from ancient times, from Moses' perspective? And why would Jude later describe the fallen angels as having left their proper place and chased after



“strange flesh”? The ancient myths of godlike beings, some apparently part animal, likely came from these hybrid offspring of the fallen angels and human women and animals. And when they died, being part angel, they would not go to the grave as human souls did, but would wander the earth and become known as demons. This might also explain why demons seem to crave taking over the body of a person or animal. At least the argument for “sons of God” being angels has some support in scripture and history.

In verse 5-7 and 11-12 we see the reasons God decided to flood the earth: everyone’s mind was continually focused on evil, and the earth was filled with corruption. The Greek text has a word meaning “sin” in verse 11, but the Hebrew has the word for “violence”. And what does it mean that Noah was found to be “perfect in his generation”, per verse 9? Some say that it means he was the only good person of his time, but generations overlap and all the rest of humanity was wiped out. Others say that it means he was genetically pure, having no mixture with the fallen angels. This idea fits better with the context regarding giants.

Now to the building of the Ark. Check [this web archive](#) of a site dedicated to studying the dimensions and seaworthiness of the Ark itself. Keep in mind that the Ark was not built for speed or distance, but simply to stay afloat in rough seas. There is no problem fitting the pairs of animals onboard, and we can’t assume all of them were fully grown at the time. Keep in mind also that there would not need to be every variation within a “kind”. For example, one pair of wolves could result in all kinds of what we call “dogs” without requiring millions of years. And compared to the evolutionary fable about life arising from electrified pond scum, the Bible’s account is much more believable.

## **Gen. 7**

This is when God finally tells Noah to enter the ark along with his wife, his three sons, and their wives. As for the mention of clean

animals, remember once again that Moses is using the word “clean” during a time when such a term had meaning. All of this preparation likely took place during the 120 years God marked out in 6:3. But now they are told that the rains will come in 7 days, when Noah was 600 years old.

Verse 11 states that the fountains of the abyss were broken up, and the torrents (or the flood-gates to release them) of the sky were opened. The traditional interpretation is that “torrents of the sky” simply refers to rain, but we can’t rule out a supernatural release of at least some of the waters above the sky per Gen. 1. The objection to this view is that there could not possibly be waters coming from beyond the stars to the earth. Yet who is to say that the stars are that big and far away? Few are aware of just how much guesswork and imagination goes into what is passed off as the science of cosmology or astronomy. And we should ponder the question of how the surface of a ball could flood.

Verse 19 states that the Ark was lifted by the waters over the tops of the highest mountains, though we can’t be sure how they compared to the mountains as we know them. Since the waters below ground were released by it being broken up, the land mass and everything on it was likely to be changed in significant ways. The fossil record and the layers of strata in which they’re found are best explained by the processes of floods, including the rapid deposition of silt and other debris. Smaller creatures would be the first to die while larger ones could get to higher ground at first, explaining why smaller, simpler creatures are found in lower rock strata. Flood geology is a much more straightforward explanation of what we observe, than any gradualistic story.

The issue of Flood aftermath and why evolution is a fable are beyond the scope of this lesson, so please visit [this website](#) for a thorough debunking of evolution. Also visit the Youtube channel [Wise Up](#) for evidence of the level of technology wiped out by the Flood— which of course was the Flood’s purpose. Much of what we have been told is

alien rock-cutting or people wearing out simple copper tools to carve rocks with great skill, is really just wood, straw, concrete, metal, and other materials buried under salt water for a year or more while the earth went through violent changes.

## **Gen. 8**

This chapter reports on the end of the great Flood, which according to verse 13, lasted about a year. Noah then built an altar to God and sacrificed some of the clean animals. This is when God made the first Covenant or Promise, and you may want to study this chart of Biblical covenants. God promises to Noah that he will never again wipe out the earth with water, though in 2 Peter 3:7 he will wipe it out in the future with fire. Until then, God promised that the seasons will continue.

## **Gen. 9**

This chapter explains why animals seem to have a natural fear of people, that being because God commanded it. We may wonder why God would do this, until we read in verse 3 that the animals themselves would become food for humans. Keep in mind that God is blessing Noah, and the eating of meat is part of that blessing. God further commands that if anyone, human or animal, takes a person's life, that human or animal must pay with its own life. And as God's habit is throughout the scriptures, he puts a seal on this Covenant with a sign: the rainbow.

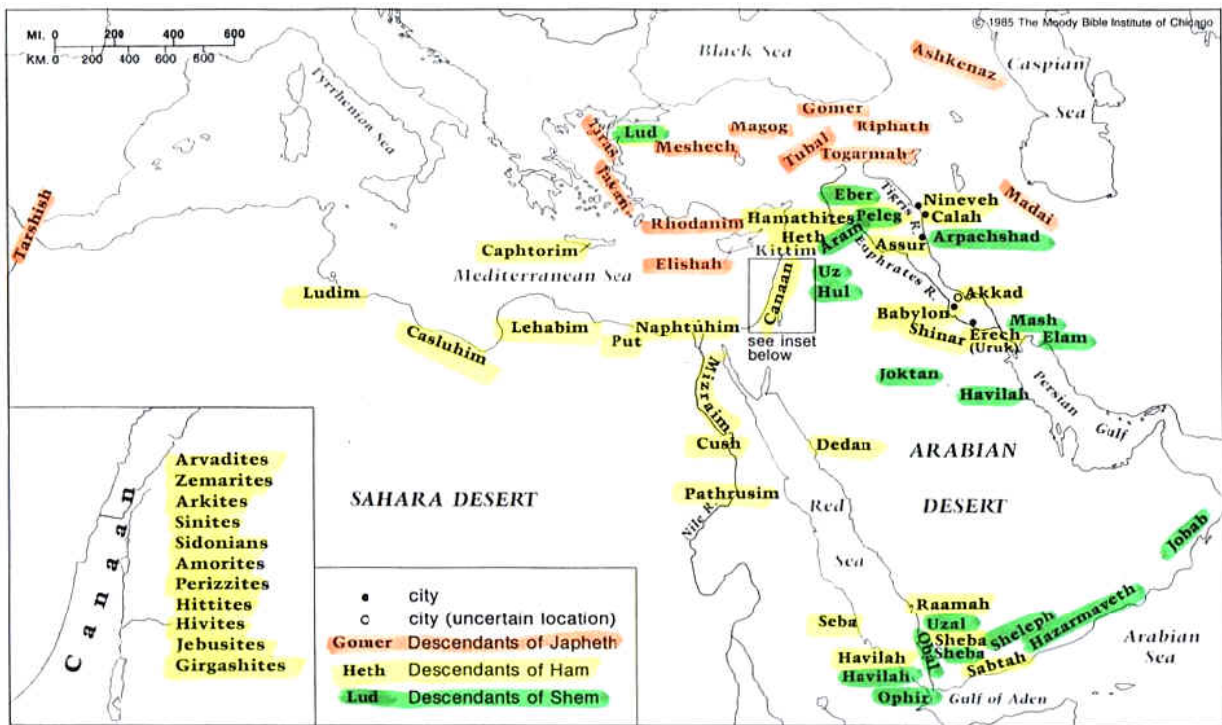
Verse 20 begins the account of Noah and his son Ham. Some commentators interpret the incident to mean that Ham actually violated the body of his drunken father, while others only take what's actually stated in the text, though pointing out that an accidental glimpse of his father's body would not in itself be sinful. Rather, they

think it's reasonable to infer that Ham went out and mocked his father to his brothers.

But why is it that when Noah became sober and found out what had happened, he cursed Ham's son Canaan rather than Ham himself? Scripture doesn't tell us, but perhaps it was because the son of Noah would suffer the experience of having a wicked and cursed son of his own.

## Gen. 10

Gen. 10 details the expansion of the human race after the Great Flood. The reason this information is important is because scripture refers back to it in historical and prophetic passages, so we should be familiar with key names and places. God had commanded people to multiply and cover the earth, and this is the account of how that began. Here is a map of where the various people groups went after the Flood:



But before we look at the Table of Nations, one issue needs to be clarified: the meaning of the Greek word *ethnOn*, which is typically translated as Gentiles. In the New Testament the context always tells us that it refers to all who are not Jews, hence the translation Gentiles. But this has no meaning before Israel as a nation existed, so before Abraham at least, the literal meaning *nations* should be used.

Take a moment to study this [Table of nations](#) document, and notice some of the key names and concepts. Nimrod is the first person scripture cites as having a kingdom, and he tried to prevent the spread of people over the earth to consolidate his power. But Nimrod was said to have become a giant; is that a physical giant, or just a human tyrant? There are 3 points to consider in answering that question, as posed by [this source](#):

1. Nimrod became a giant, so how could it refer to his body size?
2. Gen. 6 says the giants' fathers were fallen angels.
3. Nimrod descended from Cush, not fallen angels.

Now there is ample historical evidence that physical giants have existed. However, Greek mythology describes them as having super-human strength, but not always super-human size. Either way, there would be no reason for only one line of people to produce ordinary human tyrants. Yet all the physical giants were also tyrants, and it's reasonable to conclude that in time the word for physical giants came to just mean powerful tyrants of any size.

Now let's look at [this source](#): "The hunter becoming king" is a common pattern in history, likely after Nimrod's example. All things considered, the context paints a picture of the first world tyrant defying God, not that he was a physical giant.

As for Magog, that is covered in the study of Ezekiel 38 regarding a once and future enemy of God and the Chosen People.

## Gen. 11

As we move on to ch. 11 we come to the account of the Tower of Babel. Most researchers see evidence that the instigator of this project was in fact Nimrod. This was a defiant gesture against God, not only to prevent the spread of the population over the earth, but also to set up a world government. Some speculate that it was meant to literally reach the sky so they could storm the abode of God and destroy him. But the text simply indicates that the purpose was to unify the world and keep everyone in one place. So God instantly created numerous languages to prevent the builders from communicating, and the project was abandoned. The [Table of nations](#) document includes a brief discussion (in the blue box near the end) of the secular evidence for such languages having their own origins, rather than all evolving from one source.

Before going on to verse 12, study this image regarding the corrected timeline of the descendants of Shem. Compare the Greek and Hebrew for that verse and following, and you'll see the missing 100 years each from Arphaxad, Shelah, Eber, Peleg, Reu, and Serug.

The end of ch. 11 reports the death of Terah, father of Abram (whose name wasn't changed to Abraham until later). This is the likely event God waited for before telling Abram to go to what would become known as the Promised Land, which we'll study in the next lesson.

## Gen. 12

This is where God first speaks to Abram. He tells him to pick up everything and everyone who belongs to him, and go someplace without knowing where he's going. Then God promises to make a great nation out of him, in spite of the fact that he was 75 years old and childless. On top of that, God promises that whoever blesses Abram will be blessed, but whoever curses him will be cursed.

That last part is where a lot of controversy comes from, regarding how Christians should treat Jews. This isn't limited to Abram himself but extends to all his progeny, the "great nation". Recalling the previous lesson regarding *ethnos*, it would seem silly to say that God was going to make of Abram a great Gentile. Does this mean Christians can never criticize the nation of Israel? On the other hand, does it mean we can wish to wipe them off the map without suffering the curse of God?

Those who believe that God is finished with the physical nation of Israel will dismiss details such as "a great nation" as now only referring to some vague spiritual state. But there are three specific elements of this promise, which will be repeated and expanded in chapters 13, 15, and 17, and none of them depend on any conditions.

1. Abram himself is promised that his name will be held in high regard.
2. Abram will have uncountable numbers of physical children that will become a great nation, and this includes a physical land with physical borders. Nothing in this promise hints at anything spiritual or allegorical. Later God will narrow down the blessed line of descent to be through Isaac and Jacob, such that not all of Abram's descendants are part of this promise. This is made very clear in Gal. 4.
3. Through Abram all the nations of the world will be blessed. We aren't given the details of what this means, but in hindsight we know of course that at the very least it includes redemption through the Messiah. Yet this blessing to the nations depends on whether they bless or curse Abram and his descendants. This is the only part of the Promise that is conditional. We can see throughout the Old Testament that nations mistreating Israel suffered God's wrath, but this seems to have held true for the modern nation as well.

This map shows the area of land promised to Abraham:





The Promise is reduced to nonsense if we treat all this as merely allegorical or ultimately only spiritual. What sense can we make of the phrases “great nation” and “all the families of the earth”, if they’re all the same in the end? What is the meaning of a land with boundaries marked by rivers and mountains, if it’s only spiritual? To take a context that is literal in every sense of the word, and blur it into undefined and arbitrary spiritual fulfillment, is to render Bible study pointless. On what basis do we believe that Jesus rose from the dead, if the scriptures are only codes or allegories about good and evil? Some argue that since people not of Abram’s line could become members of Israel, then literal genetic bloodlines are irrelevant. But this again robs God’s promise of all meaning, of a literal son from Abram’s own body. What’s the point of such a miracle?

This is not to say that no spiritual blessing is involved at all; we have explicit statements of this in the New Testament, such as in Rom. 4:11 and Gal. 3:7 and 29. But there is no warrant to throw out the physical just because of the spiritual. Even within the physical line of Abram, individual faithfulness was required, and it is those physical descendants with faith who are “spiritual Israel”— not the church. This is the point in Gal. 3. The three recipients of God’s promise to Abram cannot be blended into one without twisting the scriptures beyond recognition.



So what should the church do with modern Jews and the modern nation of Israel? The answer depends on whether we take the scriptures literally, or whether we take them as cryptographic and bendable to every possible interpretation. For both approaches, it is never proper for any Christian to hate, or to wish destruction, or to ignore the sins of our own people while pointing out the sins of Israel. But the literalist must find the balance between blessing them as a people and blindly supporting everything their secular government does.

After such a promise from God, one might expect Abram to live a nearly flawless life. But the rest of ch. 12 tells of his plot to pawn off his wife Sarah just to save his own skin when they passed through Egypt. Even so, God made sure the Pharaoh never touched her, and he sent Abram out with a lot of wealth. God is very patient and merciful!

## **Gen. 13**

This chapter tells of the parting of the households of Abram and his nephew Lot, and the fateful choice of Lot to settle in Sodom. But we see again, in the last half of the chapter, God's repeating of his promise, which once again concerns physical land and descendants. The fact that the New Testament often uses these real, physical, literal people and events as object lessons, cannot mean they have no literal and physical fulfillments.

If these chapters show us anything, it's that our approach to scripture has wide-ranging implications. The allegorist could get as much life advice from any other source, yet cling nonetheless to a literal Jesus rising physically from the dead. This is inconsistent at best. But the literalist enjoys all the riches of the unfolding plan and mercy of God through the ages, which also gives us a concrete hope for the future and a mature, confident grasp of the times in which we live. This does take much more effort than required of the allegorist, but things

of great value are rarely easy to obtain. Through the centuries, many have suffered and died to preserve the pages of the Bible; will we honor them by considering it precious, or will we treat their sacrifices with contempt? People don't suffer and die for an allegory.

## **Gen. 14**

This chapter begins by introducing the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, who were allies in various battles against surrounding armies near the Dead (Salt) Sea. But the enemies won, and 14 years later the conquerors also decimated the Rephaim per the Hebrew term, which the Greek text simply gives as giants.

From what I could find, the figurative meaning refers to the spirits of the dead, but the literal meaning is of fierce, strong people of tall stature who lived in Canaan. Deut. 2:20-21 is one source for this, and 3:11 describes King Og of Bashan as the last of them, and that his iron bed was 13 feet long and 6 feet wide. From the various names in scripture, it seems that they referred to different tribes or family lines of angel-human hybrids, just as people are separated by tribes or family lines. This is likely where some popular conspiracy celebrities got the idea that there are races of space aliens. But such beings don't come from space; their fathers fell from heaven, and they are the demons, the disembodied spirits of the giants of long ago.

We see in verse 12 that Lot was among the captives when Sodom was defeated. Someone ran to tell Abram, who mustered an army of his own servants and recovered all the captives from Sodom. This takes us to verse 18, where Abram meets the mysterious Melchizedek, king of Salem and priest of the Most High God. As was the custom of the time, Abram gives this person a tenth of the spoils of war. This is the one and only time Abram is said to "tithe", and it was not from his own crops and herds but from those of his defeated enemy. Some try desperately to use this as a proof that Christians must tithe to churches, since it predates the laws of Moses. But so

also does the law of circumcision, and we don't see those same people clamoring to make that binding on all Christians.

## **Gen. 15**

This where God appears to Abram again and reminds him of his promises. But this time, Abram asks God how this will happen, since he has no child. The closest legal heir would be the son of one of his slaves, but God states again that the promise was that the child would come from him. Verse 6 is where we find the famous statement that Abram was considered righteous solely on the basis of his choice to believe what God promised him.

But right away, Abram asks God for proof that he will inherit the land. Why this required proof, and the promise of physical descendants did not, we aren't told. But God granted his request anyway, and in verse 13 God tells him that his descendants will travel to a foreign land where they will be enslaved for 400 years, after which they'll leave with great wealth. Verse 16 has a curious statement as well: that the sins of the Amorites needed time to reach a certain point. We should remember this whenever God seems to let a lot of time pass when to us it seems inexplicable.

We also see in this section the practice of making a covenant by killing animals and dividing the pieces into two rows, then having the parties to the covenant pass between the halves. It's a literal cutting of a blood covenant, meaning "may this happen to me if I don't keep my oath". But it was only God, represented by the flaming torch and pot of smoke, who passed between the halves, so only God was responsible for keeping the covenant. This is what Heb. 6:13-18 refers to.

God also gives specific details about what Abram and his descendants would receive: land from the Nile to the Euphrates, where many people groups lived, including the Rephaim. Critics cite

the eventual genocide of these people as an indictment against God, but the presence of the Rephaim, known for their viciousness as all the giants were, should tell us that God was doing mankind a service. Many who fault God for violence would gladly commit violence against God and all who worship him.

## **Gen. 16**

This chapter focuses on Abram's wife Sarah, who also would eventually have her name slightly changed. But she became impatient regarding God's promise, so she decided what social norms would advise for reasons of legal inheritance: She told Abram to have a child with her handmaid Hagar. To say this was a big mistake is quite an understatement, just as Eve made a big mistake in following Adam out of Eden. From this union would come people groups that would be thorns in the side of Israel right up to the present day.

So Abram agreed, and nothing is said or implied that Sarah nagged or manipulated him. But when Hagar actually became pregnant with the child Sarah wanted, she flaunted her success in front of Sarah, setting the tone for the rest of middle eastern history as we know it. Once again we see why taking the Bible literally helps us understand the times we live in, particularly the deep, underlying causes of middle eastern conflict being ancient and supernatural.

Of course, Sarah was irate about this, but she goes to Abram and says "This is all your fault!", in a kind of echo of Adam's blame-shifting against Eve. So Abram tells her she can do as she pleases with Hagar, and she proceeds to mistreat her. Then Hagar runs away, but verse 7 says that an angel of God comes to comfort her and tell her to go back to Sarah, apparently since Sarah was really the instigator of all this.

But is this merely an angel, or a phrase many interpret as referring to the pre-incarnate Christ? The wording would suggest that this is the latter. So God himself has appeared to a mere slave woman, and he promises her that she too will be the mother of uncountable descendants. Notice that verse 10 speaks of her seed. Some claim that scripture never speaks of women having seed with the lone exception of the virgin Mary. Curiously though, the rest of scripture speaks of only male lines of descent.

Now this promise is not all rainbows and lollipops; her child, whom God tells her to name Ishmael (God Hears), will be wild and antagonistic. But then in verse 13 it is the lowly woman who gives God a name: Beer Lahai Roi (God Sees Me). So much for the claim that Adam naming Eve was proof of his authority over her.

The chapter ends by noting that Abram was 86 years old when the child was born, and again we would ask why this matters if this were all an allegory.

## **Gen. 17**

This chapter states that Abram was 99 when God appeared to him again, 13 years after the birth of Ishmael. This is when God changes his name from Abram (Exalted Father) to Abraham (Father of Many Nations). God adds that kings will be among his descendants, and again one wonders what the allegorists do with such details.

Let's pause at verse 7 to address a teaching known as Fulfillment Theology, taught in recent years by people such as Dr. Gary Burge at a conference in Bethlehem called *Christ at the Checkpoint*. This view claims that since Paul in Gal. 3:16 says the promises were only to one particular descendant of Abraham, that being the Messiah, then either the promises are completely fulfilled and nothing remains, or Paul contradicts Moses; after all, verse 7 says that this covenant is not just with Abraham himself but also his descendants forever. This

sort of teaching underscores the importance of “the whole counsel of God”, of knowing all the scriptures so we don’t twist Paul’s words, which Peter said was already happening in his time.

Didn’t this same Paul also state in Rom. 11 that God has not rejected his people, whom he defines there as the family of Abraham, and that God chose the people of Israel before they were born? Paul calls himself an Israelite from the seed of Abraham. The context makes it clear that he is referring to physical Israel. In fact, the entire letter to the Romans is about the unity of two groups, not the abandonment of one, and ch. 11 is a warning to any who would boast over the natural branches. The wild do not replace the natural; they are both joined to the vine, not to each other.

So is there a conflict between God’s promise to Abraham that his physical descendants would be uncountable and have a specified land, and Paul’s statements in Galatians 3:16? See [this article](#) on the issue. Whether or not one agrees with the rationale there, the fact remains that God’s promises to Abraham were undeniably physical and included countless physical descendants, and that Paul would not contradict such clear statements. Certainly Jesus did fulfill everything, and all the promises and prophecies point to him. But it is terrible theology and logic to leap from there to turning God’s promises to the nation of Israel into allegorical mush. Does the Messiah need the land God promised so clearly in Gen. 17:8?

Then in verse 10 we see the sign of circumcision. Why is the sign only for males? Scripture does not tell us, and it also applied even to men who were not Abraham’s direct descendants. From that it’s clear that this covenant includes a nation, which is more than just Abraham’s own descendants. Other nations also practiced this, so again we ask why God ordered it. The only difference is the precise physical land, and the nation in that land. So the first point we can make is that it signifies the covenant with the nation of Israel.

A second point we could make is that it may be because Abraham should not have fathered Ishmael in the first place, and this would

remind them all of the dire consequences of breaking faith with God. But speculation aside, what we cannot say is that this is some kind of sign of male entitlement, or that it was replaced by water baptism, especially since women can also be baptized.

Now in verse 15 God renames Sarah as well, but this change is more subtle since both forms meant Princess. It is believed that her former name meant My Princess, as if God was expanding her royalty to many rather than one.

When Abraham heard God say that Sarah, who was 90 years old, would physically bear a child, he laughed. God seems to have ignored that for now, but later he asks why Sarah also laughed, and she was embarrassed at being called out for it. Why God only did that to her and not Abraham, scripture doesn't say. But it does say that God would also bless Ishmael, though he would only establish his covenant with Isaac.

In time it would turn out as God warned: Ishmael would be a wild and hostile man, who would not be included in the covenant with Abraham. Thus we see the separation and distinction even among Abraham's physical children, and the importance of the promise extending through only the line of Sarah to Isaac.

Knowing all this, the term "Abrahamic religions" should make us cringe. Abraham did not pass on any religion, and his obedience to the one true God only continued with Isaac and his line, not Ishmael and his line. We will see elsewhere in the Old Testament that only Israel could trace physical lineage back to the faith of Abraham through Isaac and his son Jacob— but not through Jacob's twin brother Esau. Only Torah Judaism and Christianity can remotely be called Abrahamic religions.

## **Gen. 18**

This chapter begins with what most interpret as a theophany of the Trinity. Abraham sees what he treats as three ordinary men, but the context is clear that this is God. Remember in the previous lesson that Abraham laughed to himself at the prospect of Sarah bearing a child in her advanced years? Now in verse 12 we see that Sarah laughs as well, also not out loud, yet God calls her out for this. But God's response in verse 14 is one we all should remember: "Is anything impossible for God?" Trust is everything. And that's pretty much the gist of ch. 18.

## **Gen. 19**

In this chapter, instead of God appearing as three men, there are two angels, and instead of going to Abraham they go to Lot. The reason for the visit is immediately clear: The men of Sodom are so evil that they want to rape the angels. As mentioned in an earlier lesson, these angels appeared to be ordinary men, because that's what the Sodomites called them.

Lot goes out to try and dissuade the crowd that had surrounded his house, but what he offers them in place of the visitors are his own daughters. The casual reader recoils in horror that any father would say such a thing, especially one that in 2 Peter 2:7 is called a righteous man who was distressed by the depraved people around him.

Commentaries on this incident generally argue that Lot was either bound by the social custom of protecting guests at all costs, even by only trading one sin for another deemed less offensive to the culture. They note what Peter said about Lot, but make excuses for Lot being less than perfect, since after all he had chosen to live there. Some commentators are brave enough not to buy that excuse, but the fact is that we have nothing in this context to defend Lot— though Peter defends him.



To add my own speculation to the mix, I would go with the minority view that Lot was only buying time, since he knew the men of Sodom were not interested in his daughters. If that was the case, it would be like insulting someone who demands your car by offering your child's tricycle instead. The reaction of the men of Sodom seems to support this scenario, since they say that not only will they defile the visitors, they'll do even worse to Lot. By this time the city had chosen to forget that it was only by virtue of Lot's uncle Abraham that they were still there at all, but that's also probably the only reason they had tolerated him living there, since they were known for hating all outsiders.

At this point, the angels pull Lot back into the house and strike the men outside with blindness, who wore themselves out trying to find the door. They gave Lot a chance to plead with the men pledged to marry his daughters, but the men thought he had lost his mind. By morning, the angels had to literally drag out Lot, his wife, and his daughters by the hand so they wouldn't be destroyed. Even so, Lot begged the angels to let him stay in a little town nearby, in spite of what the Sodomites had just tried to do to him. Remember, the Bible just honestly reports things.

Then the fire and brimstone rained down from the sky over the whole area, but verse 26 is where we read about Lot's wife becoming a pillar of salt. Some take "looked back" as not just a quick glance but rather a case of having second thoughts, as if she considered returning after the destruction was over. Either way, scripture doesn't say that she was being punished by God for looking back. What Jesus said in Luke 17:32 about remembering Lot's wife only states the folly of looking back after a person has chosen a path, especially of following him.

Meanwhile, we're told in verse 27 that Abraham woke up that morning to see in the distance flames shooting up from the land, and smoke as if pouring from a furnace. But instead of saying more about what Abraham might have been thinking, the narrative turns to Lot

and his daughters. Remembering that these women were raised in Sodom, their solution to the problem of hiding in a cave without any real prospects for finding husbands was both desperate and ill-advised. No mention is made as to what Lot thought of this after it became obvious that his daughters were pregnant, not here or anywhere else in scripture. What it does say is that the older daughter's son was called Moab, who would be the ancestor of the Moabites, and the younger daughter's son was called Ben-ammi, ancestor of the Ammonites. These would turn out to be nations suffering God's wrath for their wickedness.

So again we see that when people act on what seems best to them at the time, without bothering to ask God or at least people who seem to be wise, they can't complain about the consequences, which can be much more long-lasting and far-reaching than we expect.

## **Gen. 20**

Now the narrative goes back to Abraham, who at times seems to have the memory of a goldfish. He moves away to a new area, but along the way he comes to a city where he's again afraid they'll kill him to get Sarah for themselves. So he repeats his plan to pass her off to the local king as his sister. Not surprisingly, he gets the same result: The king is irate at Abraham for bringing potential disaster upon him and his kingdom. But maybe Abraham isn't so dumb after all, since once again he leaves the place with riches from the king. Not the kind of business plan I'd recommend, but it worked for him.

It's interesting, though, that the king admonishes Sarah and her handmaids to tell the truth from then on, after Abraham said that he told her to tell this half-truth wherever they go. This heathen king seems to have more moral and practical sense than Abraham in this instance.

## Gen. 21

This chapter begins with the birth of Isaac, whose name means “laughter”, which the text says is about people rejoicing with Sarah, but is also certainly a reference to the fact that both Abraham and Sarah laughed at the prospect of having their own child in their old age.

But one day the older son Ishmael was caught mocking Isaac, just as Ishmael’s mother had mocked Isaac’s mother, so Sarah told Abraham to get rid of him and his mother. This time Abraham didn’t want to do what Sarah wanted, but God told him to listen to her, which no self-respecting man would tolerate in today’s Christianity. And the reason God gives is Abraham’s offspring had to be traced through Sarah’s son Isaac. Again we see that not all of Abraham’s natural children are heirs of the promise and covenant, which is confirmed in Gal. 4:30.

So Abraham sends them off with provisions, but when those run out, Hagar expects they’ll both die. Yet God, still showing mercy, and still showing that he keeps his promises to even a slave woman, showed her where water was. They stayed in the wilderness, while Abraham settled in the land of the Philistines.

As a historical note, when the nation of Israel was expelled from the land late in the 1st century a.d. by the Romans, they further humiliated the Jews by naming the land after their arch-enemies the Philistines— which in their language was pronounced Palestine.

## Gen. 22

This chapter is where we see an incident widely condemned by Bible critics and anti-theists: God tests Abraham’s faith by telling him to sacrifice Isaac. But before we go over that, we need to clarify that

Isaac was likely not a small child by this time, so please take a look at [this article](#).

So God tells Abraham to take his nearly full-grown son, the one he kept promising him, to go to a certain place to kill him in sacrifice. But while the text here tells us nothing of what was going on in Abraham's head, Heb. 11:19 does: "Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the dead." This is Abraham's deep faith: that God will keep his promises, even if it means raising someone from the dead. We do have a hint of that in verse 5, when Abraham tells the servants that came with them: "Wait here while we go off to worship, and then we will return."

Be careful not to gloss over verse 8, where Abraham answers Isaac's question about needing an animal for the sacrifice by replying, "God will provide himself a sheep for the offering." This is clearly a prophetic reference to the eventual sacrifice of the Lamb of God, to which the later Passover feast would also point in more detail. Not only is this a test of Abraham's faith, it's a type and shadow of the Messiah. That's the purpose of this incident— not to appease a bloodthirsty demigod as the critics allege, but to illustrate Abraham's faith in the God who raises the dead.

Notice also that verse 11 says no sacrifice actually took place anyway. God waited till the last second, when Abraham had raised the knife in the air, to stop him. Abraham had passed the test, one that must also have been for the benefit of the angelic beings who always watch what goes on in the world. God needed no test to know what was in Abraham's heart, but others need something tangible to point to.

To make a quick side note, isn't this the essence of what the book of James is teaching? James doesn't say that someone is unsaved if they don't do certain good works, which "works salvationists" can't agree on anyway. Rather, he's saying that a hidden and inactive faith does no one any good. If God tested Abraham for the benefit of angels and people, then we too should demonstrate our faith in

tangible ways— not to become saved or stay saved, but because we are saved. If we grasp the essence of the Gospel, we will naturally want to act on it. James is simply warning those who fail to do so, that they need to ask themselves if they really are saved.

Now back to Genesis, starting in verse 13. Not only does God prevent the sacrifice of Isaac, he also provides the animal: a ram caught in a thicket nearby. And when God repeats his promise of making a great nation out of Abraham, he refers to Isaac as his only son, even though he also had Ishmael. God also swears this by himself, so it can never depend on what anyone would do or fail to do in the future. But notice that starting in verse 11 God is described again as “the angel of the Lord”, and as noted in an earlier lesson, this is clearly a Person of the Trinity, and likely the pre-incarnate Christ. Who better to provide the sacrificial sheep?

## **Gen. 23**

The rest of ch. 22 lists the children born to Abraham’s brother, so take a quick look at ch. 23 in this [parallel Greek and NIV](#) source, which is all about the death of Abraham’s wife Sarah at the age of 127.

## **Gen. 24**

This chapter is about Abraham not wanting Isaac to get a wife from the local Canaanite women, so he sends his servant to get one from his relatives. But she is not to be taken by force; if she (or her family, per social norms) refuses, then the servant is released from his oath to carry out Abraham’s wishes.

So the servant asks God to help him identify “the one”, and the prayer was answered even before he finished it. He learns that the woman, Rebecca, is among Abraham’s relatives, and he is invited to

spend the night among them. Her brother Laban will turn out to be a conniving man, but we'll learn more about that later.

In verse 63 we see that just when the servant reaches home with Rebecca, Isaac has gone out to a field to meditate. Some commentaries take the word to mean *pray*, but since verse 67 tells us that his marriage to Rebecca comforts him after the death of his mother Sarah, the meaning may lean more toward him just processing his grief by walking alone in nature. The idea that this meditation resembled in any way the heathen practice of silencing the mind or opening chackras is complete nonsense.

## Gen. 25

This chapter states that after Sarah's death, Abraham took another wife named Keturah, who bore more children. These would be seen as legitimate by the culture, since they were by his legal wife and not a servant or concubine. Even so, they still weren't in the line of promise through Sarah's son Isaac. But God did include in the promise the fact that he would be the father of many nations, not just one.

Notable names of clans here include Sheba and Dedan. There are two sets of these names, one descending from Ham and the other from Abraham and Keturah, who according to Josephus settled in the Arabian peninsula. Some say that the queen of Sheba who visited King Solomon was from sub-Saharan Africa, but Sheba was in the area of modern Yemen. You can read more about it at [this source](#), which includes more insight into modern political alliances with the Saudis and the US and UK— all of which is significant in Bible prophecy.

But as verse 5 states, Abraham's entire estate went only to Isaac, not any of the children of Keturah. Even so, he did give some gifts to them, before sending them off to eastern lands. Then Abraham died,

and we see the phrase “gathered to his people”. We should be careful not to read too much into ancient statements of the afterlife, even from the Old Testament, which doesn’t give a lot of detail about it. They certainly understood that their souls would rise at a final judgment, since even Job knew this and lived around this time.

Then God blessed Isaac, who certainly knew first-hand about God, seeing that God stopped him from being sacrificed when he was a young man. But the text first turns to chronicle the line of Ishmael, who according to the promise to Abraham, God also allowed to form 12 clans. Though the Greek text merely says that his descendants lived “in the presence of” his relatives (verse 18), the Hebrew text says they lived in “hostility toward” them. Remembering the prediction God gave about Ishmael being a wild and antagonistic man, this would seem to make sense.

In verse 19 the text turns back to Isaac, and his wife was barren just as his mother had been. But he prayed for her and she became pregnant with twin boys, who literally fought each other before they were born. It got so unbearable for Rebekah that she asked God why this was happening, and God replied with something every Bible student should know in order to fathom the endless feud between Arabs and Jews.

God told her that two nations were within her, one stronger than the other, and that the first one born would serve the younger one. The first was called Esau because he was covered in red hair, and the second was called Jacob because he was grasping his brother’s heel. Esau grew up to be a skilled hunter, while Jacob was a quiet man who preferred to stay home— another example of how God does not define a “real man” as people do. As God will point out much later when choosing a replacement for the first king Israel demands, he looks on a person’s heart, not their flesh.

Verse 28 is probably the first recorded example of Parenting Blunders 101: Each parent had their favorite child. Dad preferred the rugged outdoorsman, and mom preferred the quiet, thoughtful man. This set

the stage for what is arguably the the most influential family rift in history.

Esau comes home from hunting and is famished, and homebody Jacob is in the kitchen with a freshly-made pot of red stew. This earned Esau the nickname Edom. It mainly means “to boil”, which was also used figuratively for someone who is arrogant or aggressive. But it’s also very similar to a word meaning “red”, which is why it also sounds very much like the name Adam, for the red dirt he was made from. The stew being red as well makes this nickname for the red-haired man rich with meaning. Edom would also become a tribal name, sometimes in the form *Idumean*.

But Jacob seizes this opportunity to make a trade for something with a priceless quality that Esau despised: his birthright as the firstborn son. The chapter ends by pointing out that Esau can’t really blame anyone but himself for this, though later he will try.

## **Gen. 26**

Due to a famine, Isaac went to the land of the Philistines. But God told him to stay there and not continue on to Egypt, and he repeated the blessing he had given to Abraham. Now since God had directly spoken to him, you’d think that would assure him that he and his family would be safe. But you’d be wrong, because Isaac decides to carry on the family business: Since he, like his father, has a beautiful wife, he thinks the men of the land might kill him to get her, so to save his own skin he passes her off as his sister. Lather, rinse, repeat; even God must be face-palming by now. But again, he will leave there with great wealth because of this, so go figure. But the difference here is that they had been in the land for a long time before anyone finds out the truth, though somehow none of the men had touched her.



Another difference is that in this case the king didn't give him his wealth, God did, by blessing his crops and herds. Again, go figure. But this blessing was not without cost: The Philistines became envious and tried to hurt him by plugging up all the wells his father Abraham had dug in the area. So he moved away by the king's request, but he also reopened the wells.

Yet after discovering another well, the locals claimed it was theirs, so he moved on and dug another, with the same results. Finally he digs a well nobody else claims, and he's able to settle. But later the king who had sent him away out of envy came to him and wanted to make an alliance, since it was clear that God was blessing him.

The chapter ends with a return to focus on Esau, who marries two Hittite women who bring endless grief to Isaac and Rebekah. And now we'll see who else brings grief, at least to Isaac. Esau already has lost his birthright to his younger brother, but now he will lose much more.

## **Gen. 27**

Isaac realizes that his end is near, so he calls for his favorite outdoorsman and asks him to go hunting and bring him venison to eat, after which he will give him his final blessing. But Rebekah has been eavesdropping, so she hatches a plan to make sure her favorite son gets the blessing instead. She makes a meal to taste like the venison Isaac loves, and then dresses up Jacob in animal skins to mimic Esau's hairy arms and wild game smell, since Isaac had become blind.

So Jacob goes to Isaac, and when Isaac wonders how he got back so soon, Jacob quickly comes up with a clever excuse: It was a miracle! But the voice made him suspicious, so Isaac tells him to come closer. He still identifies the voice as Jacob's, but the touch and

smell convince him it's Esau. Again he asks if this is really Esau, and again Jacob lies through his teeth.

Finally Isaac goes ahead and gives the blessing, but no sooner than Jacob leaves the room, in comes his brother Esau with the meal his father asked for. When they both realize what happened, Esau becomes hysterical and reminds Isaac that Jacob, the literal “heel grabber”, was also the figurative deceiver. Now he piles on the past incident of losing his birthright and cries some more, but still manages to get a mixed blessing from Isaac: He will be a fighter who nonetheless serves his brother, but in the end he will be free of him.

So Esau lives with a death wish on Jacob, biding his time until Isaac dies. But again, Rebekah finds out about it, so she sends him off to her brother Laban, a name you might recall from an earlier lesson. But she needs a cover story, so she tells Isaac that she's sending Jacob away to get a wife from elsewhere because the Hittite women are despicable— which is technically true, but a cover story nonetheless.

## **Gen. 28:1-9**

In spite of everything, Isaac sends off Jacob with his blessing. Esau sees this so he knows where Jacob is going. But he also sees that both his parents despise the local women, so he goes to his father's brother Ishmael to get another wife. You can check [this source](#) for a discussion of the names and numbers of Esau's wives, due to differences between this passage and the genealogy in Gen. 36.

## **Gen. 28**

This is the account of Jacob's dream of seeing a stairway reaching into the sky, with angels ascending and descending on it, and God Himself at the top. God then repeats to Jacob the blessing that had

been given to Abraham and Isaac. The phrase “the ground you’re lying on” can’t be taken any way but literally, and neither can the references to all four compass points and the families of the earth. Notice also note #23, how the Hebrew expresses this in much more engaging terms than what is typically considered a technically accurate translation, and the Greek does the same. Ancient historians put the reader into the scene, whereas English translators tend to make it as dry and boring as possible, in a misguided effort to achieve technical accuracy.

So Jacob, who for some reason had not yet formally accepted his father’s God, decided that if the journey went well for him, he would do so. It’s possible, per the first note on the next chapter, that Jacob stole his brother’s blessing because he was trying to get it by his own efforts, rather than by accepting and trusting his father’s God.

Notice also that he vows to return a tenth of everything God gives him. Is this a command for all people of all time to “tithe”, since it predates the laws of Moses? As we noted before in the account of Abraham giving Melchizedek a tenth of the plunder of war, nothing is said here about a continual practice, nor that it would be binding on the wages of all his descendants.

## **Gen. 29**

Remembering that Jacob knew his brother was waiting for the chance to kill him, the encounter with God certainly changed his life from that point on. So his frame of mind is quite different as he meets his future wife Rachel, who was tending sheep. He is overjoyed, and she runs home to tell her father Laban, who rushes out to meet him.

Jacob had spent a month with Laban’s household, during which time he fell in love with Rachel. But she had an older sister named Leah, and the custom was for the older daughter to be married before the

younger. But Laban neglects to tell any of this to Jacob, who accepts his offer of working for him for 7 years and then being given Rachel as his wife. Laban is deliberately deceiving and defrauding Jacob, because he has no intention of marrying off Rachael before Leah.

So when Jacob finds out seven years later that Laban had done a “bait and switch” on him, he confronts Laban, who only then tells him about the custom. Verse 30 tells us that though Jacob grudgingly agrees to work seven more years to get Rachael, he gets her at the end of what was called the “bridal week” for Leah, rather than having to wait another seven years.

We could rightfully ask the sarcastic question, “What could go wrong?”, especially when verse 30 also tells us that Jacob loved Rachael more than Leah. Like the “Bad Parenting 101” we learned about in the account of his parents, this is another disaster waiting to happen. In our culture and time, we might wonder why such problems weren’t more common, since men often slept with concubines and servants as well, with the blessing of their wives. But we should also remember that God often tolerates what he never intended or ordained and lets us deal with the consequences of our choices.

Now as if things aren’t bad enough already, God intervenes on behalf of less-loved Leah by making her fertile and Rachael barren. Leah’s first four sons would turn out to be the heads of tribes to be known eventually as the tribes of Israel, and two would be the subjects of later covenants: Levi and Judah.

## **Gen. 30**

Shockingly, Rachel gets jealous. So she demands children from Jacob, who, again shockingly, asks her if she thinks he’s God or something. So in a familiar move with predictable results, she

decides to solve the problem by having her servant bear children for her. Thus were born the heads of the tribes Dan and Naphtali.

Now begins Round 2 of the sister feud. Leah, who by this time had stopped having children, decides to have them through her servant, who gives birth to the future tribal heads Gad and Asher.

Verse 14 starts a section that makes no sense to us today: that somehow mandrake plants could make women fertile (see [this discussion](#) on the use of mandrakes as possible witchcraft). Coincidence or not, the sisters wheel and deal over them, and Leah conceives again and gives birth to Issachar and Zebulun. Her last child would be a girl named Dinah, who will turn out to be the catalyst of bloodshed later on.

After all those babies from Leah and her servant, God decides to have pity on Rachel and she gives birth to Joseph—who will turn out to save their entire clan from extinction. One more son will come from Rachel, but first the text turns to the matter of tension between Jacob and Laban on the occasion of his completing the second set of seven years of work.

But Laban wants to keep him around because he realizes that he has only become wealthier due to God blessing Jacob. Jacob agrees to stay, but he has an ulterior motive, a plan to benefit from Laban's greed, per note #84 in the NET notes. "It's complicated" indeed. You can read the details in the section starting with verse 32.

## **Gen. 31**

Now Laban's sons see how it's mainly Jacob who is getting richer, and they turn Laban against him. So God tells Jacob to return to his homeland, and this is where we find out what else has been going on: Laban has changed Jacob's wages ten times and made a fool out of him. In spite of everything, Jacob credits God for his success, rather than his own conniving.

He pleads with his wives to come with him rather than staying with their father's clan, and they are more than willing since Laban treated them like garbage and squandered what should have been their inheritance. But verse 19 tells us that before they all took off, unbeknownst to Laban, Rachel stole her father's idols.

It takes Laban three days to even notice that Jacob had left, so he quickly musters an army from his clan and goes after him. But when he catches up to Jacob, God tells him to do nothing. So instead, he has a shouting match with Jacob, but Jacob had known nothing about the stolen idols. He allows a search to be done, but Rachel keeps them concealed in an ingenious way, per verse 35. The shouting match continues in verse 36, until they finally call an uneasy truce in verse 45, and Laban returns to his home.

## **Gen. 32**

Jacob continues his travels, and along the way God appears to him again. But he knows he will have to deal with his brother Esau, so he sends messengers ahead to try and soften him up. But they return from the mission with the news that Esau is coming for them with a force of 400 men. As a precaution, Jacob divides his people into two camps, so that if one is attacked the other will escape. Then he prays to God for protection.

Still trying to appease Esau, Jacob sends ahead a gift of many animals but tells the servants to keep distance between the various herds, in the hope that a string of surprise gifts might work. Meanwhile, he sends his family and possessions to another place so he would face his brother alone and his family might have a chance to escape.

Now as we see in verse 24, he was met that night by a mysterious man who fought with him until daybreak. But the man couldn't defeat him, so he struck one of Jacob's hip sockets and dislocated it (this

might be the first recorded case of sand-bagging). Even so, the man finally asks Jacob to let him go since the day was dawning, but Jacob responds with a very curious request for a blessing, without even knowing who this was.

But instead of a blessing, the man asks Jacob his name, and then changes it— to Israel, which means “God Fights”. So Jacob then asks the man who he is, but the man finally blesses him, and only then does Jacob realize that this was God appearing in human form. The timing certainly pertains to Jacob’s impending meeting with Esau.

Ch. 32 ends with Jacob limping due to his dislocated hip, and it explains that this is why the Israelites wouldn’t eat the tendon attached to the hip of any animal they ate. The text still refers to him as Jacob for a while, even though God changed his name to Israel.

## **Gen. 33**

Finally the big day comes when Jacob meets up with Esau, who is coming toward him with 400 men. His last effort at appeasement is to divide his people into three groups in a line: servants first, Lea and her children second, and Rachel and Joseph last, with Jacob himself at the front of the line. Notice that Jacob puts his least-valued people first, in case Esau attacks. We can assume that jealousy continued to grow in Jacob’s household because of his obvious favoritism. And we should learn the lesson that the first in line isn’t necessarily the most important, but the most expendable.

The resource Constable’s Notes has a great statement about faith: “Faith does not mean trusting God to work for us in spite of our irresponsibility; that is presumption. Faith means trusting God to work for us when we have acted responsibly, realizing that without His help we will fail.” Many Christians today think that faith is practically a means of controlling God and putting him under obligation to us, and

if we don't get what we want, it's because we lacked enough faith. This leads to blaming the victim when it comes to healing or deliverance. Rather than such presumption, faith is trust in God to do what we cannot, after we've done what we were responsible for doing.

So on his way to meet Esau, Jacob stops seven times to bow before him, not knowing what will happen. But to everyone's great surprise, Esau gives Jacob a big hug and they both cry. Talk about an anticlimax to a story! But then, maybe all that preparation actually worked... or maybe this was God's doing.

So after a big meet-and-greet, Esau returns home to Mt. Seir, while Jacob moves at a slower pace due to all the young people and animals, but to a place called Succoth. As NET note #34 explains, God wants him to go to the family homeland, and he still doesn't know if Esau has genuinely forgiven him or is just luring him to let down his guard. Eventually he arrives in Canaan and camps near a city called Shechem.

## **Gen. 34**

Do you remember that daughter of Leah named Dinah? She decides to try and make friends with the local women, but a Hivite man, named the same as the city for some reason, sees her and rapes her. Then he decides he's in love with her and wants to marry her, and only then does he decide that things should be done properly according to custom. Selective morality is nothing new.

But when Jacob found out what had happened to Dinah, he waited till his sons came in from tending the livestock to decide what to do, if anything. Constable points out the contrast between Jacob's passive non-reaction to Dinah's rape with his later bitter lament over what he believes to be Joseph's death. If actions speak louder than words, inaction shouts. Far too many Christians in positions of influence



show no concern for sins or heresies committed by either their followers or their associates. They should not think that just because God delays his judgment, that it will never come, or that he approves of them and their “ministries”.

Now Jacob and his sons were all together when Shechem and his father arrived to try and offer a large sum of money to appease them and still keep Dinah, but Jacob’s sons followed in their father’s footsteps by making up false pretenses for the deal: All the men of their city would have to be circumcised, and only then could the two groups of people intermarry.

Verse 24 is where the true intentions of Jacob’s sons are made known: All the men of Shechem were in pain and unable to defend themselves when Dinah’s brothers went there and slaughtered them all. But neither the brothers nor Shechem had considered the consequences of their actions. In verse 30 Jacob tells them that not only have they made his people a stench to the locals for breaking an agreement made in good faith, they have also just motivated the much larger forces of the area to attack them. Even so, the brothers justify their actions in defending the honor of their sister.

At least the brothers showed some indignation on behalf of their sister, but they should not have used such deception, and they should have warned everyone else so they’d have time to get to safety or muster an army. The great irony here is that Jacob’s main objection was to this deception, when they likely learned it from his examples.

As Constable points out, this is the likely reason Jacob will eventually skip over these two of his sons when giving his final blessing, which will go to Judah— the tribe from which David and then Jesus would come. Time and again we see how God works through and around his chosen people to keep his promises, in spite of all they do to thwart them. This holds true for us today as Christians; we should never take God’s blessings and mercies as tacit approval of our choices.

## Gen. 35

Now God has to step in, so he tells Jacob to go immediately to Bethel. Curiously, many in his entourage had still been holding on to their idols, but now they have to give them up. As they travel, other towns along the way leave them alone because they know enough to fear God. Eventually they come to the place where Jacob had that vision of the stairway reaching to the sky, and it is there that Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, dies and is buried.

In verse 10 we see God reinforcing Jacob's name change to Israel and his promise to Abraham and Isaac, which again has to do with physical land and genetic descendants. In verse 16 Rachel goes into labor before they reach what would become known as Bethlehem, and she gives birth to another leader of the tribes of Israel. But her labor is very difficult, and with her dying breath she names her son Ben-Oni meaning "son of my suffering". Jacob decides to name him Benjamin instead, meaning "son of my right hand". It's from this point on that Jacob is, at least sometimes, called Israel in the text.

After this is when we begin to see the character of Israel's sons: Reuben decides it'd be a great idea to sleep with his father's concubine Bilhah. Per NET note #44, this was likely more than what we think: He was trying to establish leadership over the clan. But the text itself simply reports the incident, and that Jacob knew about it but again did nothing, then abruptly moves on to a genealogy.

What we're seeing so far in all these accounts of multiple wives and concubines, is that to the ancients, sex was mostly about power and property. Women, being physically weaker in general, and vulnerable due to the bearing and weaning of children, had no real choice in the matter and seem to have just accepted their lot in life. But we must not accept the leap from there to the trite phrase, "God's natural order", since God cannot be blamed for what human society decides is proper. When Moses wrote at the end of ch. 2 that "a man leaves his parents to join to his wife, and they become one flesh", he was

only talking about two people, not a man with a harem, and that rather than owning or possessing or controlling his wife the man joins to her. That is God's natural order. And we've seen plenty of evidence so far why God's way is better, though he makes many concessions and helps us through our unwise decisions.

At the end of ch. 35 we learn that Isaac was still alive when Jacob arrived home, but he finally died and both Jacob and Esau buried him. And this is the time Jacob has likely been dreading, since Esau had said long ago that he would kill him after Isaac died.

## **Gen. 36**

Finally, in another anticlimax, Esau just moves away with all his people, and the rest of the chapter is his genealogy. Though many names are listed, we aren't given their ages or lifespans. But two of the names— the Edomites and the Amalekites— will appear again in the recorded history of Israel. At last, by Esau's leaving and Jacob's staying, Jacob does indeed inherit their father's estate.

## **Gen. 37**

Ch. 37 begins the detailed account of Jacob's son Joseph, whose life would turn out to be an amazing type and shadow of the coming Messiah. Though Judah son of Leah will inherit the promise, Joseph son of Rachel will foreshadow the ultimate salvation of his people. Again referencing Constable's notes, Joseph will eventually get a double portion of his father's inheritance, but it will be Joseph's sons Ephraim and Manasseh who become tribal heads of Israel, completing the twelve. In addition to the Resources, you might also want to visit [this study](#) if you're curious about J-names starting with I in the Greek text.

The chapter begins in verse 2 by saying that Jacob's son Joseph is 17 years old and helping his older brothers by shepherding the sheep. But the family tradition of favoring one son over another has made his brothers hate him, and all the more since their father gave him a special tunic that signifies royalty or privilege. There doesn't seem to be a firm consensus on whether it had "many colors" or was just ornate or fancy, but it indicates a special position either way.

The incident where he tattled on his wicked brothers certainly didn't help, but it was about to get orders of magnitude worse. As Constable points out, God's revelations have transitioned from physical appearances, to dreams and visions, and finally to what is called "providence" or divine activity hidden from our view. In this context the second method is predominant, since God gives visuals but does not speak.

In verse 5 Joseph has a dream and immediately blurts it out to his brothers. Whether he did this because of knowing the dream was from God, or by arrogance or immaturity, we don't know. But he has a second dream in verse 9 which gives the same message: His brothers, and then even his parents, will bow down to him. The repetition confirms the message, which infuriates his brothers even more, and it has his father beginning to wonder what's going on with his favorite son. So he rebukes him, probably for the first time in his life, but he also seems to wonder what it might mean.

So once again we see God intervening to choose the lowliest and most despised for his purposes, based on inner qualities and not the flesh. Society picks the strong, the persuasive, the charismatic, even the arrogant and oppressive. But what people think is an "ugly duckling" often turns out to be a beautiful swan. God doesn't pick the already-formed diamond, but rather the lump of coal that needs to be put under tremendous pressure to become the diamond. Yet Christians through the centuries have not paid attention to God's ways, preferring instead to follow "pied pipers". A. W. Tozer, no

perfect theologian by any means, nonetheless had a good statement about this over 50 years ago:

Many tender-minded Christians fear to sin against love by daring to inquire into anything that comes wearing the cloak of Christianity and breathing the name of Jesus. They dare not examine the credentials of the latest prophet to hit their town lest they be guilty of rejecting something which may be of God. They timidly remember how the Pharisees refused to accept Christ when He came, and they do not want to be caught in the same snare, so they either reserve judgment or shut their eyes and accept everything without question. This is supposed to indicate a high degree of spirituality. But in sober fact it indicates no such thing. It may indeed be evidence of the absence of the Holy Spirit.

Gullibility is not synonymous with spirituality. Faith is not a mental habit leading its possessor to open his mouth and swallow everything that has about it the color of the supernatural. 'Try the spirits' is a command of the Holy Spirit to the Church. We may sin as certainly by approving the spurious as by rejecting the genuine. And the current habit of refusing to take sides is not the way to avoid the question.

One other point to make before we go on, is that the symbolism of the sun, moon, and stars in Joseph's dream is referenced in Revelation ch. 12. This passage in Genesis makes it clear that the one in Revelation is describing the nation of Israel, not necessarily a prophetic sign in the sky involving the constellation Virgo, as some believe. Revelation refers to the Old Testament hundreds of times, so if we truly want to understand Bible prophecy, we must be familiar with passages such as this one in Genesis.

Now back to the text, and in verse 13 Jacob sends Joseph to check up on his brothers— as one might send a lamb to supervise a pack of wolves. What was he thinking? Not much, because as soon Joseph gets within eyesight of his brothers, they begin to plot his death. But Reuben, surely by divine providence and not a sudden

twinge of conscience, tells them just to take him captive. He was actually deceiving them though, because in verse 22 it says he planned to release Joseph secretly to be returned to their father.

When Joseph gets there, his brothers take away his fancy tunic and throw him into a dry well. Then along comes a caravan on its way to Egypt (verse 25), and Judah sees the opportunity to sell Joseph to them so they can dispense with him without killing him themselves. But Reuben was away when this all happened, so when he returns and realizes that Joseph is missing, he knows he's doomed, since as the oldest son his father would hold him responsible for Joseph's safety.

So in keeping with family tradition, the brothers hatch a cover story (verse 29). They put the blood of a goat all over the fancy tunic, then take it to Jacob and say, "Hey, we found this, see if you think it belonged to your son." They couldn't even call him their brother, they hated him so much. And as Constable points out, the irony is that it was the skin of goats that fooled Isaac into giving his blessing to their father.

Israel sees this and presumes that Joseph had been torn apart by wild animals, so he goes into deep mourning for a long time. This is the most emotion he has ever shown, another indication to the brothers that they were still second class, even with Joseph out of the way. Constable also points out that Jacob should have remembered the dreams at this point.

The chapter ends by reporting that Joseph was eventually sold to an Egyptian official named Potiphar, who according to Constable was likely the captain of Pharaoh's bodyguards and executioners.

## **Gen. 38**

Now the text turns away for the time being to focus on Judah and his children. He picks a woman named Tamar (verse 6) to marry his

oldest son Er, but God kills Er because he's so wicked. Per the tradition of carrying on the bloodline of the childless heir, Judah gives Tamar to Er's brother Onan. But as verse 9 tells us, Onan doesn't want his estate to go to his brother, so he refuses to impregnate Tamar, and again God steps in and puts the man to death. By now we should be getting the impression that God takes his promises of physical heirs very seriously.

At this point, Judah doesn't want to see any more of his sons killed, and apparently it never crosses his mind to tell them not to be wicked. So he tells Tamar to remain in his household as a widow until his young son grows up. But he was really only stalling, and likely hoping Tamar would not want to wait that long.

Verse 12 tells us that after a long time had passed, Judah's wife dies, and then after he mourns for her, he goes off to a certain place to shear sheep. Tamar, who sees that the young son had grown up but was not being married to her, decides to carry on the family tradition and use deception to get what was her legal right and Judah's responsibility. Constable explains that it was indeed acceptable for a father to have a child with his daughter-in-law if he had no more sons for her to marry. But Judah had no concern for her rights or his duties and promises.

So Tamar changes her clothing from widow to prostitute and sits in the square of the city where Judah is headed, keeping her face veiled so she won't be recognized. Then in verse 16 when Judah asks to sleep with her, she first demands payment. He promises her a goat, but she wants a security deposit in case the goat never arrives, so she demands his ring, his necklace, and his staff. The text doesn't explain it now, but later we'll find out that she knows exactly what she's doing.

After she realizes she's pregnant by Judah, she changes back into the widow clothes and returns home, per verse 20. Meanwhile, Judah sends the goat to where he had met what he thought was a "cult prostitute", but she is nowhere to be found, and the locals tell the

shepherd who brought the goat that there was never a prostitute there in the first place! So the shepherd returns to Judah with the goat, and Judah decides to just hush up the whole affair, likely due to the embarrassment of being swindled by a woman... not because he had been with a prostitute.

According to verse 24, three months pass before Tamar can't hide her condition any longer, and she is reported to Judah as being guilty of prostitution. Judah demands that she be burned to death— never mind that he himself had no qualms about going to prostitutes, even though he could have as many wives and concubines as he could support. How many people today would stand for their spouse having so many partners? How would we feel? This double standard has continued through history and in most cultures, even when society pretends to disapprove.

Now on the way to her execution, Tamar sends Judah a message: "Tell me if you recognize these things I got from the man who impregnated me!" As we'd say today, "Busted!" Judah knows he can't hide the truth anymore, but rather than trying to lie about it as we've come to expect, he actually admits his own guilt and Tamar's righteousness. This whole sordid mess was his own fault, and the woman he had treated like garbage turned out to have the moral high ground.

But we can't end this chapter and return to Joseph's account without one more proof of God's intervention and his choosing of the younger over the older. In verse 27 Tamar gives birth to twins, and as the first baby's arm appears the midwife quickly ties a red ribbon around it to mark him as the older child. But the baby retracts his arm and out comes his brother! The actual firstborn of God's choosing was named Perez, who would go on to become the ancestor of David.

One thing we can say about this whole family line is that there are many repeating patterns and ironies, and that God clearly has his hand in all this. Above all, it emphasizes God's seriousness in keeping his promises to Abraham, and the purity of the line through



Isaac and Jacob, along with his valuing of women—which, again, is not the sort of fiction any Jew would have invented.

This needs to be kept in mind when we read about the laws of Israel that forbid them to mix with other nations. We, and they, dare not presume that their being the Chosen People has had anything to do with their moral superiority. So they should not look down on Gentiles, and Gentiles should not look down on Jews, or on the other extreme, turn a blind eye to their sins. Chosen they are, and God is not finished with them as a people, but it's for his glory and not theirs. One thing we can say so far and in the chapters to come, is that this plot has more twists than a bag of pretzels.

## **Gen. 39**

The first 6 verses here describe Joseph's having been sold to Potiphar, the captain of Pharaoh's guard, and that since Joseph's arrival his household had prospered. So Potiphar appoints him as manager over his whole estate and the future was looking bright for Joseph, even as a slave. But soon we'll see that no good deed goes unpunished. Joseph had grown up to be a handsome and well-built man, and Potiphar's wife wants him. But unlike his brothers, Joseph has high moral standards and refuses her many attempts to seduce him. So she decides to give him a choice between giving in to her or giving up his life. She makes everyone else leave the house before Joseph arrives to work one morning, then seizes him by his outer garment and tries one last time. But he leaves the garment in her hands and runs away. So the next thing she seizes is the opportunity to tell everyone that he had tried to rape her, and that he only ran because she screamed for help, which no one could confirm or deny since she had told them all to leave the house. Nobody would think of considering the testimony of a slave, so when Potiphar hears his wife's story, he is enraged and throws Joseph into prison.

As Constable's notes point out for verse 19, this event prefigures the eventual betrayal and enslavement of the nation of Israel in Egypt. But though it looks like the end of the story for Joseph, God has other plans. Just as Potiphar had prospered with Joseph around, now the prison also prospers, and the warden puts him in charge of the whole prison!

## **Gen. 40**

Meanwhile, Pharaoh had thrown two members of his court into that prison: his cupbearer and his baker. After they'd been there a while, they each have a dream that leaves them bewildered. So Joseph asks them what's bothering them and to tell him about the strange dreams, because somehow he knows that God will give him the interpretations.

We see in verse 9 that the cupbearer's dream turns out to mean he will be restored to his job, so the baker thinks that he too will be released and restored. But instead, as we see in verse 16, the dream turns out to mean he will be executed. Joseph is nothing if not brutally honest, and everything he had said came true. But though he asks the cupbearer to put in a good word for him to Pharaoh, he is forgotten and abandoned. Not only do good deeds not go unpunished, they can also be ignored and forgotten.

## **Gen. 41**

Two years pass and then Pharaoh himself has a bewildering dream, one that his soothsayers can't interpret. Only then (verse 8) does the cupbearer remember what Joseph had asked him to do, but this delay is undoubtedly God's doing.

So Pharaoh summons Joseph from prison and tells him he heard he can interpret dreams. But Joseph, ever mindful of the fact that he

does so only by the gift of God, boldly gives God all the credit. After telling him the dream, God gives Joseph the interpretation: Egypt is about to experience seven years of abundance, followed by seven years of extreme famine. In fact, the famine will consume that whole part of the world. So he advises Pharaoh to choose someone to oversee the collection and storage of grain during the abundant years, so they won't starve during the famine years.

To Joseph's likely surprise, Pharaoh chooses him to be the "savior" of Egypt, to be second only to Pharaoh himself. He has gone from favorite son, to hated brother, to slave, to business manager, to prisoner, and now to what is essentially vice president of the Egyptian empire—and all by the age of 30. Remember some mention of a roller-coaster ride? We should stop to realize that not only is Joseph's life to this point a prophetic picture of the Messiah to come, including even his approximate age at his being "lifted up", it also prefigures the life of the prophet Daniel. He too would be a captive who rises to power in a foreign land, due to interpreting the king's dream when no one else could, and would demonstrate his character at every turn.

So Joseph gets busy immediately seeing to the storage of grain, and in the meantime he starts a family of his own. He has two sons, Manasseh ("God made me move beyond my former life") and Ephraim ("God blessed me in the land of my persecution"). Their mother was the daughter of the priest of On, whom the Greeks called Heliopolis. These two sons would be the heads of the last 2 tribes of Israel. As with the dreams of Pharaoh's prisoners, Joseph's own dream also comes true as he had said: People from Egypt and also the surrounding nations start coming to him to buy food.

## **Gen. 42**

We haven't had enough plot twists yet, so now the text picks up again with Jacob and the rest of the family. The famine has reached

them too, and one day Jacob says to his sons, “You gonna sit around and stare at each other till we all die, or go down to Egypt and buy some food?” So he sends off all his sons except the youngest, Benjamin, because he remembers what happened the last time he sent a youngster to be with the rest of his sons.

Remember those dreams that had gotten Joseph in so much trouble back home? Here he sees the beginning of their fulfillment, at least 20 years later: His older brothers are bowing down to him. But they don’t realize who he is., so he decides to test them by playing the role of harsh Egyptian tyrant. The memory of how they treated him must have made that fairly easy to do. But fear of the death penalty, as pointed out by Constable, would make them honest. Joseph accuses them of being spies, then detains them until they agree to fetch their youngest brother, whose safe passage would stand in stark contrast to his own experiences.

The one they had sold into slavery was now throwing them into prison. But after three days, possibly to represent the three years of his own imprisonment in Egypt, Joseph cuts them a little slack: They can all go except one, so they can bring grain to their starving people. It’s at this point that the brothers finally see what’s happening to them as revenge from God over how they had treated Joseph, who they still didn’t recognize. And Joseph knows this because he has been pretending not to know their language by using an interpreter.

Upon hearing that his brothers have a smidgen of conscience after all, he leaves the room to cry, proof that he never hated them, or anyone else who had mistreated him. Then he composes himself and goes back to the room to select Simeon as the one to be handcuffed and thrown into prison while the rest return home. This choice may have been, per Constable’s notes, due to his overhearing Reuben say that he had prevented his brothers from killing him. But he isn’t done dealing with them just yet: He frames them by having the money they paid for the grain put into each sack.

On their way home, they stop to feed their donkeys and are horrified to see their money in the sack they open. So they begin to wonder what God is up to— as if God had ever mattered to them before. But at least they know why it's happening, unlike many today who think that they can ignore God as long as things are going well, then hate God for not rushing to help them when bad things happen.

Now when they get home and tell their father Jacob all this, they open the rest of their sacks of grain only to see that all their money is there! Now Jacob is also afraid of what this all means, since at this point he has essentially lost yet another son, Simeon. When the food runs out, the brothers will have to go back to Egypt and bring the money in the sacks plus more to buy more grain. They also intend to take their youngest brother Benjamin with them per the Egyptian official's orders, but Jacob refuses to release him to them.

## **Gen. 43**

Now the brothers cannot return without Benjamin, so they wait until the food is gone and their father tries again to send them to Egypt without him. Jacob demands to know why they even told the official they had another brother, but they reply that they were asked a lot of questions about their family and had no way of knowing Benjamin would be at risk.

This time it's Judah who guarantees Benjamin's safety, and he adds that they could have gone to Egypt and back twice by now, had Jacob not dragged his feet. This is the point at which scripture considers Judah the head of the clan, rather than his older brothers, per Constable's notes on this passage. Finally Jacob relents, apparently forgetting all the promises and miracles of the past, resigning himself to die in grief from the loss of his sons. But he sweetens the deal by sending along lavish gifts to the Egyptian official, as he had done to appease his own brother Esau many years before.

When they arrive in Egypt and stand before Joseph, he sees that Benjamin is there too, so he tells his steward to invite them to his house for lunch. They are naturally afraid and expect to be accused again and kept as slaves permanently. So they plead with the steward for mercy and explain all that had happened. But the steward does something completely inexplicable: He assures the brothers that all is well, and adds that their God must have put the silver in their sacks of grain. He then gets Simeon out of prison to join them and makes sure they're comfortable.

Taking this as a positive sign, they prepare all the gifts they brought, and again they bow low before Joseph when he arrives. Now at the sight of Benjamin he hurries out to cry again, then composes himself and returns. But what happens next is truly bizarre to the brothers: They're seated at the dinner table in order by age. And the fact that they were eating with the Egyptian official meant, in that culture, that they were being assured of safety in spite of everything. Also, Benjamin is given 5 times as much food as the rest, which as Constable explains, is a very high compliment. It was likely a test of the older brothers' jealousy, since again the youngest was being given the most honor.

## **Gen. 44**

Joseph's final test of his brothers' sincerity of repentance for what they did to him would center on Benjamin, who was just greatly honored in front of them all by being given five times as much food as his brothers at the luncheon Joseph had invited them to. Joseph tells his steward to load up the brothers with food and provisions, and to also add the silver to the sacks as before. But this time he also has his own special silver cup put into Benjamin's sack of food, then sends the brothers on their way home.

Shortly after they leave, he tells the steward to run after them and accuse Benjamin of stealing the silver cup. He is to say that the cup

was used for divination, but that doesn't mean Joseph actually did so, and why would Joseph need it anyway since he already had God's gift of interpreting dreams? Rather, it seems that Joseph is still playing his role as a worshiper of heathen gods, who could find out their plot by divination, but he's framing it to look like they stole the divination cup so he couldn't do that.

The steward catches up to them and does as he was ordered, and while he searches their food sacks, the brothers offer themselves as slaves and the one found with the silver cup to be executed. But the steward says he will only take the thief as a slave and let the rest go. Now when the "thief" turns out to be Benjamin, the brothers tear their clothes in despair and return to the city. Unbeknownst to them, Joseph had set up a test to see if they'd still abandon their little brother to save their own skin, but they have passed this test. Even so, they are now experiencing the depth of grief they had caused their father so long ago, and both instances had come through false pretenses.

In verse 14 they all arrive at Joseph's house and once again bow to the ground before him. They don't even try to plead their case anymore but have resigned themselves to what they expect will be their fate, deserved not from the current false accusations of theft but from their past sins.

Joseph repeats what the steward had said about letting them go but keeping Benjamin as a slave, but Judah pleads with him to listen to their whole story. Now keep in mind that Joseph never knew what they had said to Jacob until the famine, and only now does he learn that they had told him Joseph had been killed by wild animals. Judah adds that his father will literally die of grief if they return without Benjamin.

Notice also that in contrast to his having left his brother Joseph to die, Judah offers to die for his brother Benjamin. It is this willingness to sacrifice himself for his brother that would be ultimately fulfilled in the Messiah. All the trials and strife have refined the entire clan into a

people who, at least for the time being, exemplify the kingdom of God. If only modern Christian leaders would also choose to be brought to the point of refinement, so they too could model the King whose name they bear.

## **Gen. 45**

At this point Joseph can stand it no longer, so he orders his staff to leave him alone with his brothers. But he breaks down and begins to sob so loudly that all of Pharaoh's household can hear him anyway. Finally he tells them who he is and he asks if his father is still alive, but the brothers are too dumbfounded to speak, probably also because he's speaking their language.

Then Joseph displays his exemplary character again by showing great forgiveness, since it was all God's plan to save his people from the famine, which would last another five years. The lesson we should learn from this is that God often allows great hardship and tragedy, not to break us but to discipline us and to achieve a greater goal. As the apostle Paul would put it much later, the sufferings of this life are not worthy to be compared to the honor to be revealed in us in eternity. We should strive to be like Joseph also in the way he recognized God's hand in the events of his life, ordinary though our own lives might seem.

One might wonder why God would have had to take such measures at all, but we could have asked that question back in chapter 3 when Adam and Eve first sinned. God could have snapped his fingers and simply created us all in our eternal state, but surely such a thing would be unworthy of the God who created us in his image. Only a love freely given from a life genuinely lived would be worthy of God.

Constable's notes include a short list of the many parallels between the life of Joseph and that of the Messiah, and I will add some of the other points to his list here:



- both were the favored son
- both made claims to a special position
- both were hated by their brothers
- both were betrayed and deemed worthy of death
- while away from their brothers, both secured the means by which they would be saved, and both received a bride
- both returned from the dead, one figuratively and one literally
- both became a blessing to Jews and Gentiles alike

Once again we are reminded that God can be trusted to have good reasons for the pain, tragedy, grief, hardship, and bewilderment of life.

Finally, Joseph's brothers— who couldn't say a kind word to him before— are able to talk, and we can only imagine what they said. Meanwhile, the word spread throughout Pharaoh's household that Joseph's brothers had come, so Pharaoh tells Joseph to spare no expense in seeing to it that all of his brothers, their families and possessions, and their father, all move to Egypt and settle in the best land.

Joseph sends them off with a gentle warning not to fight among themselves along the way. It takes a bit of convincing for Jacob to believe that Joseph is alive and well, but finally he agrees to move to Egypt.

## **Gen. 46**

Along the way, Jacob gets a visit from God at the place where he had that vision of stairs to the sky so many years before. God tells him that this move to Egypt is his doing, and that his people will become a great nation as promised. But though he himself will die there, his descendants will eventually return to Canaan. Constable points out that the text calls him Israel again here, after he finally believes his son is alive after all. Also, his joy at the realization could be compared

to the future joy of the women when they would realize that Jesus had risen from the dead.

Most of the rest of this chapter is a list of all the families, which the Greek text totals as 75 people rather than the Hebrew text's 70. The difference is possibly due to the Greek text including Joseph's family, and this is the number also given by the first Christian martyr Stephen in Acts 7:14. Then Joseph meets them in Goshen and they all have a good cry. He also tells them that Egyptians find shepherds repulsive, which would turn out to aid in the people of Israel remaining separate from the surrounding culture, as opposed to their mingling with other people in Canaan.

## **Gen. 47**

Joseph then takes five of his brothers to see Pharaoh, where they repeat what Joseph advised them about their being shepherds. Not only does Pharaoh grant the best land to them, he also puts them in charge of his own flocks and herds, especially since his own people considered that kind of work beneath them. Finally Joseph presents his father to Pharaoh, and Jacob gives him a blessing. Pharaoh sees to it that he and all his people have whatever they need.

Meanwhile, the famine is reaching the point where Egypt and Canaan have run out of money to buy food, so Joseph tells them to start selling their animals, and when the famine still continues, they have nothing left to offer but themselves and their land. The result was that everyone had to move to the cities where the food was stored, and Pharaoh owned everything and everyone. Only the priests and the Israelites were left untouched. Clearly, God's promise to Abraham that he would father a great nation and also bless Gentiles is at least partially fulfilled in all this. And Jacob, who had taken his father's blessing by deceit, would not live as long as his father or grandfather, and would not die in the Promised Land. As for Pharaoh calling the

land Rameses, see Constable's notes on various theories dealing with the fact that the Pharaoh by that name had not yet been born.

This chapter ends with the account of how the group of 75 souls grows exponentially in Egypt, and Jacob's eventual demand that Joseph must swear to take his bones back to the Promised Land when he dies. This is indisputable proof that Jacob believes God's promises at the end of his life.

## **Gen. 48**

Now Joseph presents his sons to Jacob, who formally adopts them as his own, making them equal heirs with his other 11 sons. In this way, Joseph actually receives the double portion of birthright normally given to the oldest son. As Constable points out, this also symbolically makes Joseph on an equal level with his father, and he was actually the oldest son of Jacob's intended first wife Rachael. This is probably why the text has Jacob mention Rachel in verse 7, which otherwise seems to break the flow of Jacob's train of thought.

After this, Jacob pronounces his blessing on Joseph's two sons, but he blesses the younger more than the older, which at this point should come as no surprise to anyone familiar with how God has a habit of going against social norms. Joseph sees this and presumes that his nearly-blind father has put his right hand on the younger son, so he tries to move Jacob's hands, but Jacob refuses and proceeds with the blessings. This habit of "laying on hands" was the ancient method of indicating spiritual blessing or power, and especially in this situation, a formal legal act.

## **Gen. 49**

Now Jacob is ready to pronounce prophetic blessings (and sometimes shame) on all of his own 12 sons, in order by age.

Reuben had been the strong firstborn son, but his immorality and wildness mean that he will no longer be prominent— a process we've already seen in motion. Constable notes also that the tribe of Reuben would turn out to never figure prominently in the future of Israel.

Next he addresses Simeon and Levi together, the two who had plotted and executed the slaughter of the men of Shechem. Not only are they rebuked for their quickness to shed blood, but also for having a habit of maiming oxen for fun. Their tribes would turn out to be without their own land, reduced to being scattered among the other tribes. But we will see eventually that the tribe of Levi redeems itself in the time of Moses.

In contrast to the others so far, Jacob blesses Judah as the “lion” who rules over both his brothers and his enemies. His descendants would always include rulers and leaders until the very day the Messiah comes, as indicated in verse 10. However, this does not mean there will be no interruptions. After all, not even Judah was such a great person all his life, but he was the one to repent and unify his brothers. Verse 11 continues the blessing of Judah, but in terms that undeniably point to the Messiah exclusively, pointing back as they do to the end of verse 10. This is where predictions are made about him tying a donkey's colt to a “choice vine” and “washing his robes in wine”. We may be thinking this refers to his crucifixion and death, but Constable points out that these terms refer instead to the eventual Millennial Kingdom, being symbols of prosperity, blessing, and security. This is further supported by the descriptions of his eyes and teeth. However, we can probably take it as symbolic of Jesus' death as well, or even the “winepress of the wrath of God” during the future Tribulation.

Now Jacob moves on to the other sons, each of whose blessing is a kind of play on words with their name. Zebulun is promised seafront property, Issachar will excel at farming, and Dan will be a judge in Israel. But he adds that Dan will also be like a snake along the road who lies in ambush. It seems from verse 17-18 that the victims will be

his own brothers, who cry out to God to be delivered from him. This is the reason many believe the future Antichrist will come from the tribe of Dan. William Dankenbring, who in my opinion has done some good research on the integrity of the Greek text over the Hebrew, nonetheless argues primarily from extra-Biblical sources. But they carry no weight in my estimation, since they're claiming to be prophetic rather than simply historical.

The few Biblical citations besides this passage include Rev. 7:5-8 which omits Dan from the list of the tribes of Israel, and Jeremiah 8:16-17 which speaks of Dan, the tribe farthest north in Israel. But that passage also says Dan would be the first to sight the enemy approaching, and it's the city of Dan rather than the whole tribe. Yet it also speaks of God sending serpents to bite the people of Israel, matching Jacob's words here. So while it's remotely possible to make a connection to the Antichrist with the tribe of Dan, there is certainly no firm or clear scriptural basis.

Now Jacob moves on to Gad, but in spite of the reference there to attacking the heels of raiders, nobody tries to say that the Antichrist must come from the tribe of Gad. This inconsistency helps us to not be careless in listening to such claims. Asher is simply promised riches, and Naphtali is promised what seems to mean some kind of admiration or attraction.

Then it's Joseph's turn, and he is described as the victim of oppression who was ultimately vindicated and avenged by God, who is referred to as "the mighty one of Jacob". The final blessing on Benjamin is of a successful warrior. Then Jacob gives instructions about where he wants his final burial place, near the graves of Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, and Leah. And no sooner than Jacob finishes these instructions and blessings, he breathes his last.

## **Gen. 50**

Joseph then orders the Egyptian undertakers to prepare his father's body for burial, which undoubtedly involved mummification, since the process took forty days. Then after the additional seventy-day period of mourning, Joseph was granted permission to go to Canaan to bury his father. So off he went, along with a large entourage including his Egyptian household and all his own brothers. The locals, thinking they were all Egyptians, named the place after that event. Note in the Hebrew text that their word for Egypt is Mizraim, which refers to Egypt being divided into two parts, upper and lower.

Now that their father is gone, Joseph's brothers are afraid that he'll avenge himself anyway. So they make up a story about Jacob telling them to tell Joseph to forgive them, and Joseph cries as he hears this. He explains again that he can't be angry with them since it was all in God's plan to save the entire nation.

In spite of being the second youngest, Joseph realizes in time that he will be next to die. So he makes his brothers swear to take his bones with them in the distant future, after God comes to rescue them—a statement which must have sounded very strange at the time, since they were well-protected and, as far as we know, not aware of the prophecy of their eventual enslavement. So though Joseph's body is embalmed per Egyptian custom, he is not buried but placed in a coffin to await his eventual departure to the Promised Land when his people will return there.

This concludes our study of the book of Genesis. We have learned that God chooses to work both through and around his people for their ultimate good—or ultimate downfall—depending on their choices. We've also learned that in this process God habitually chooses the least likely vessels to carry out his plans. His focus is always on character, though never at the expense of his promises of physical blessings. He looks past a person's present condition to their future potential, a theme that will be reinforced again in the life of David the despised son of Jesse, and then the lowly town of Bethlehem.

# Genesis Resources

- [the NET Translation](#)
- [the NETS Translation](#)
- [Constable's Notes](#)
- [Did Moses really write Genesis?](#)
- [Did Moses write the book of Genesis?](#)
- [Hebrew was the world's oldest alphabet](#)
- [Hebrew is Greek](#)
- [Greek and Hebrew text](#)
- [compare Greek and Hebrew text of Old Testament](#)
- [differences between Masoretic and Paleo-Hebrew texts](#)
- [Greek \(LXX\) controversies](#)

# Exodus

## Introduction

The book of Exodus covers the time from the death of Joseph to the just after Moses need a second set of stone tablets. It picks up where Genesis left off, with Israel safely settled in Egypt. Though from the beginning to the end the narrative covers about 430 years of history, everything past chapter two only covers two years, from just before to just after Israel leaves Egypt. No other Old Testament book is quoted more by the New Testament writers.

As with Genesis, and in keeping with ancient near east tradition, this historical account is not the dry list of facts and timestamps western history tends to use, but a colorful narrative that puts the reader into the story. One of the key points we learned in the Genesis studies will continue in Exodus: that God has purposes and plans for things that from our perspective make no sense at all. Faith is easy when things go well and seem rational to us, but faith is proved genuine when it endures through trying circumstances.

## Exo. 1

The text really begins with verse 8, where time has passed and a new Pharaoh arises who has no regard for Joseph. He sees the rapidly-growing nation of foreigners as a possible fifth column should Egypt be attacked, so he enslaves them and treats them harshly. This seems like a poor strategy, since it's such treatment that is much more likely to motivate treason against the host country. And so it turned out to be; not due to attack from other countries, but to the fact that the more Pharaoh oppressed Israel, the more it prospered.



In verse 15 Pharaoh decides to ignore that pesky bit of cause-and-effect and try another method of oppression: He orders the Hebrew midwives to kill all the male babies, apparently before the mothers see them alive, based on what the midwives say when confronted by Pharaoh for not obeying him.

But notice that the midwives use at least a partial cover story: that since Hebrew women are strong and vigorous (likely another unintended consequence of the work they were forced to do), they went from labor to delivery much faster than the Egyptian women, so the boys were already born by the time they'd arrive. The fact that Pharaoh buys this excuse is what seems to indicate that it was too late to kill the boys once the mothers saw that they weren't stillborn. As Constable's notes point out, this plan is the only thing that "miscarried".

For their bravery, God blesses the midwives with children of their own. Many Christians today believe that a woman disobeying a man is a terrible sin, but God is in the habit of treating women of valor like the adult human beings they are. Meanwhile, Pharaoh decides to dispense with the inconvenience of midwives and just orders his people to take any Hebrew male infant they find and throw it into the river, likely the Nile. But there is no mention of the people of Egypt actually carrying out this command, and this is further supported in the next chapter.

## **Exo. 2**

In the Genesis study we learned that Levi was a wicked and violent man who was passed over as an elder son of Jacob. But we also learned that God can and will restore and reinstate people if they genuinely repent, or if they don't follow in their wicked father's footsteps. So now we see an example of God's mercy in the birth of Moses, whose parents were of the tribe of Levi. God's sense of irony

is shown here, in that he turns the very method Pharaoh used to eradicate the Hebrews into the method of their eventual escape.

Moses' mother hides him as long as she can, and then she makes a wicker basket of papyrus coated with tar to make it watertight. It's interesting that the Hebrew word here is the same as that used for Noah's Ark, and those are the only two instances of the word in the Hebrew scriptures. So she puts the baby into the basket and sets it down in the river, which technically meets Pharaoh's requirement! Then Moses' older sister Miriam watches to see what happens to him.

We should know by verse 5 that this is all God's doing, because just then Pharaoh's daughter comes to bathe in the river. She sees the basket and hears the baby crying, but though she knows it's supposed to be killed, she rescues it anyway. Then Miriam wisely offers to find a Hebrew woman to nurse the baby for her, which unbeknownst to Pharaoh's daughter, will be the baby's natural mother — and she'll be paid for her services! Well played, Miriam.

Of course, the time eventually comes when the child must be handed over to Pharaoh's daughter, who adopts him as her own son. And it is she who names him Moses, meaning "I drew him out of the water." This again shows how God uses foreshadowing, since later Moses will lead Israel across the Red Sea on dry ground.

Constable points out another foreshadowing as well: it's always women who save Moses, who in turn will save Israel from extinction, which parallels the women who stayed with the condemned and crucified Christ after all but one of the men had run away. God is no respecter of persons.

As we see starting in verse 11, Moses grows up in the privileged life of Egyptian royalty, well-educated and respected. But for reasons explained in Heb. 11:24-25, one day he goes out to see how his people are being treated, and he comes upon an Egyptian beating a Hebrew. So he looks around to see if anyone else is watching, then

kills the Egyptian, though perhaps not intentionally. If he had any inkling of his eventual role as Israel's savior, he went about it in the worst way.

Of course, this would end his career as a royal, because people always find out. The next day when he tries to break up a fight between two Hebrews, they resent his interference and ask if he's going to kill them just as he killed the Egyptian. He knows he's dead meat, so he runs away to the land of Midian.

In verse 15 we see that by God's unseen guidance once again, Moses "just happens" to rest at a well where the daughters of a local priest come to draw water for their father's sheep. But they don't see Moses there at first. Then other shepherds come and tries to push away the women, but Moses rescues them and helps them get the water they need. So they go to their father Reuel (elsewhere called Jethro) and tell him that they were rescued by an Egyptian, and he can't believe they just left him there alone. So Moses takes shelter in the home of Reuel, who later gives his daughter Zipporah to him as his wife.

As we come to verse 23 we see that a long time has passed (40 years according to Acts 7:30), and finally the Pharaoh who wanted to kill Moses is dead. But the people of Israel continue to suffer as slaves, and their crying out to God has reached the point where he will have Moses fulfil his true calling. Later we'll see how this calling happens, including a refutation of some needlessly divisive theories about the true name of God. But we need to clear up a few miscellaneous points for now:

1. There is no evidence that the Hebrews helped build any pyramids.
2. The use of "Hebrew" to describe the Israelites, first seen in Genesis, is likely derived from a descendant of Shem named Eber.
3. Methods of calculating the number of years Israel was in Egypt can be studied at the resources below. The fact that it's been

disputed for a long time shows that it isn't as clear as we'd prefer, but at least we can say that the integrity and inspiration of scripture is not threatened by any of this.

## The Genealogical Timeline

Take a look at these resources on the matter of the number of years in the genealogical timeline up to Moses:

- [chart: Adam to Abraham](#)
- [chart: Abraham to Moses](#)
- [years in foreign lands](#)
- [calculations](#)
- [date of the exodus](#)
- [more date charts](#)

## Exo. 3

As we continue our study of Exodus we encounter the famous incident of the burning bush. According to Constable's notes, it was not unusual for thorn bushes to spontaneously burst into flame in the Sinai desert. What got Moses' attention was that the flames didn't consume the bush. So when he went to investigate, "the angel of the Lord" appeared and spoke directly to him—which hadn't happened to anyone in hundreds of years. And as clearly stated in verse 6, this "angel" is God Himself, and he identifies himself by whose God he is: the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This is the first and most important "name" of God, not a simple label but a relationship. We'll delve more into the labels later on.

Starting in verse 7, God explains that he has had enough of the suffering of his people; we must never forget that they are his chosen ones, according to what he promised Abraham unconditionally. He also promises to bring them to that Promised Land, which is always

portrayed as literal and physical, rather than a description of heaven as some teach. So now he calls Moses to be the one to confront Pharaoh to release the Israelites. Moses wonders why he is being chosen for this task, but God only replies that once the job is done, Moses will return to worship God on the very mountain he was standing on.

In verse 13 Moses wants to know what name to use when the Israelites ask him who sent him. This is where we find scriptural rebuttals to arguments that this was the demiurge of Gnosticism, or a borrowed name from a heathen culture. The Greek text (LXX) is fairly straightforward, using “theos” throughout, but here we find the phrase “I am the one who is”. So we have the Greek telling us what the Hebrew seems to obscure or complicate. That text renders *God* as *Elohim*, and *I Am* as *YHWH*. People take those names and invent connections to other religions, but they simply mean what the LXX says they mean. YHWH is actually an acronym, the initial letters of the words in the phrase. Tradition has turned it into Yaweh or some variant, such as Jehovah in English. If it had been a literal “sacred name”, the LXX would have simply transliterated it instead of translating it.

This was important to Moses because, for at least several generations, the people of Israel had seemingly been abandoned by the God of their ancestors. They as a group had not done anything to deserve their slavery, but we must keep in mind that neither had any of them deserved God’s prior blessings. As we can read in Job 2:10, “Should we accept good from God, and not hardship?” We also remember God’s pattern of refining people so they can reach their full potential, especially in the case of Joseph, who in spite of everything never gave up on God. Or again, as we read in Job 13:15, “Though he [God] slays me, yet I will hope in him”.

We could boil all this down into modern terms as a very short exchange. Moses says, “Who are you?” and God replies, “Hey, it’s me! Don’t worry about it.” But most people seem to prefer making

mountains out of mole hills and complexity out of simplicity. More than that, they love to fight and divide and condemn over syllables. Jesus faulted the Pharisees, not for lacking respect for the tiniest details of the Law, but for “majoring on the minors”, tithing on the tiniest garden herbs but living as evil tyrants. In the same way, among today’s most zealous guardians of what they deem the sacred name of God, we find the most rabid judgmentalism, beating their fellow servants, shunning and mocking precious souls who have confessed and lived out the gospel of our salvation.

Before leaving this topic, we should note that in the Hebrew text the name Elohim is used as a generic term, the English equivalent of which is God, and the Greek equivalent of which is Theos. Those who try to make it the name of some heathen deity are simply ignorant of the use of Elohim in that time and culture, especially since Moses literally says, “Elohim, what is your name?” Likewise, those who try to connect Jehovah with Jove or Jupiter also demonstrate profound ignorance of language.

Moving on to verse 16, God finishes answering Moses and then adds that he should tell them God has not abandoned them at all and will bring them to the Promised Land. Then their elders will go with Moses to demand that Pharaoh release the Israelites to sacrifice outside of Egypt. He warns Moses that Pharaoh will not give them up without a fight, but in the end the people of Israel will plunder the Egyptians— just as Pharaoh had feared but was powerless to prevent. In this way, Israel would be compensated for their years of servitude, not only from Egypt but also from God.

Some take the request for worshiping outside of Egypt as a cover story, but since the distance would be beyond the farthest military posts of Egypt, Pharaoh would take it as an intent to leave permanently. So this was a polite, indirect statement, giving Pharaoh no reason to be offended beyond the fact that such a request is made at all. We must not let our unfamiliarity with life in that area and time cause us to think poorly of Moses or God.

## Exo. 4

Though Moses was assured of God's identity, Israel would not be so willing to accept him as having been sent from God, so they would need some kind of proof or sign. God then gives Moses three miracles to perform: the staff becoming a snake and then back to a staff, the hand becoming white with a skin disease and then restored, and water from the Nile becoming blood when poured out on the ground. In this way God establishes "the testimony of two or three witnesses".

Yet even after all that, we see in verse 10 that Moses begs off his mission, complaining that he's a poor speaker. So God indignantly demands to know who it is that gives people their abilities or can allow their infirmities. Even so, Moses still resists and gets God really irate, but he won't let Moses off the hook, though he does make a concession: Moses' brother Aaron will be his mouthpiece.

Let this be a lesson to all of us, that we don't anger God by failing to trust him once we know he has a task for us. When we say, "God can't use me," aren't we insulting him and showing no faith? Even worse, do we presume God can't use another person, just because of their perceived faults or the flesh they were born with? God would certainly make fleshly requirements under the Law, just as he made fleshly promises to Abraham. But we in the Body of Christ are not to judge on the basis of worldly standards, per such passages as 2 Cor. 5:16, James 2:1, Acts 10:34-35, and 1 Sam. 16:7.

We can't be sure why Moses only told Jethro that he wanted to see if his people still survived instead of revealing God's mission for him, but what God tells Moses along the way indicates that Moses thought he might be arrested when he got to Egypt, for what amounts to be manslaughter.

At another point in the journey (verse 21), God appears again and tells Moses to expect Pharaoh to resist strongly, but to be just as

strong in defying him. But then in verse 24 a very strange thing happens: An “angel of the Lord” comes to kill Moses! The “solution” is even stranger: Moses’ wife Zipporah circumcizes her son.

The Greek (LXX) and Hebrew (MT) read very differently here. For the MT, which Constable is using in his notes, Zipporah either touches Moses’ feet with the foreskin or throws it at him, and she uses a phrase thought to be from the Midianite practice of only circumcizing a male just before his wedding. But since this action makes the angel refrain from killing Moses, one might conclude that the “death angel” came because Moses had ignored God’s command to circumcize his son, per the covenant with Abraham. If so, Zipporah was the likely reason the rite had not been performed at the proper time.

But the LXX paints a much different picture. Zipporah falls at the feet of the angel and reports that the circumcision has been done and the bleeding has stopped, so the angel departs. If this is accurate, then Zipporah was saving Moses from his own disobedience. The MT paints her as the villain, but the LXX paints her as the hero. Constable speculates that this is when Moses sends his family back to Midian without him, with the expectation that they will rejoin him later, as we will see in chapter 18. But this passage doesn’t say anything about it.

Either way, Moses meets up with Aaron and tells him all that God had said, and then they both meet up with the elders of Israel in Egypt. For the time being, the people happily accept the news of their soon emancipation. But that acceptance won’t have much time to go to Moses’ head.

## **Exo. 5**

As mentioned earlier, the 3-day journey Moses tells Pharaoh to grant Israel to worship God is a diplomatic expression meaning “we intend



to leave and never come back”. Verse 8 is where Pharaoh decides that the only reason this request has been made is because the slaves have too much free time and spend it listening to troublemakers like Moses. So in his infinite wisdom, he turns the screws tighter by making them go out and scavenge for the straw they need to make bricks.

By verse 10 we see that quotas are not being met, so the Hebrew foremen are being beaten. As the saying goes, “The beatings will continue until morale improves!” So the foremen go to Pharaoh to ask why they’re being beaten for this unreasonable demand, and as they leave the court without relief, they meet Moses and Aaron. The foremen vent their anger on them, blaming them for their suffering. In turn, Moses whines to God that not only has Pharaoh not let the people go, he has made them shoot the messenger, who didn’t want to do this in the first place.

## **Exo. 6**

So God repeats his assurance and the promise he made to Abraham and Isaac, then commands Moses to pass this on to the people of Israel. But of course, the Israelites aren’t in any mood to listen. Even so, God tells Moses to try a second time with Pharaoh, and Moses repeats his claim of being a poor speaker in spite of such a statement making God angry at him the first time he said it.

At verse 14 the text stops to do a genealogy of the sons of Levi, and we might wonder why here and now. But Constable’s notes argues that it’s to establish the pedigree of Moses and Aaron, since Israel isn’t listening to them anymore. There’s also a handy genealogical chart in those notes.

## **Exo. 7**

This chapter begins with a curious statement from God: that he has made Moses like God to Pharaoh, and Aaron like Moses' prophet. But the Pharaohs by this time had come to be regarded as literal gods, who would simply pass from one mortal body to the next as each one wore out and died. So God is both putting Pharaoh in his place and giving confidence to Moses. But he adds that he will be the reason Pharaoh's heart becomes hard, so Moses should expect more resistance rather than any progress at this time. Then we're told that Moses is now 80 years old and Aaron is 83.

Now what does it mean that God hardens Pharaoh's heart? Does God override a person's free will? We have already seen the freely-chosen condition of this Pharaoh's heart, being arrogant and disrespectful of any other claims to divine authority over him. He has shown his character in no uncertain terms. There are several ways to look at this:

1. God created Pharaoh to be evil; Pharaoh had no free will to be anything else.
2. God does the hardening, but it's only a change of degree rather than kind.
3. Pharaoh will choose to resist God, so God is the excuse; God doesn't literally harden his heart for him. This is the same principle as when we say another person made us angry; the anger is our chosen response, not that the person literally forced anger upon us.

The third option seems the most likely in light of the grammar and the reluctance of God to destroy the wicked (Ezk. 18:23, 33:11, 2 Peter 3:9).

Now when Moses and Aaron appear before Pharaoh as before, this time he demands a miraculous sign just as God said he would. So Aaron throws down his staff and it turns into a snake, though the LXX text in this chapter uses the word for *dragon*, whereas it used *serpent* in chapter 4. But the Egyptian sorcerers are able to turn their staffs into these creatures as well. Even so, Aaron's staff then

swallows all the sorcerer's staffs, but Pharaoh is not impressed. Symbolically, the consuming of Egyptian staffs meant that God had sovereignty over Pharaoh, but he rejected the claim.

Verse 14 is where the actual plagues begin. Since Pharaoh basically yawned at the miraculous sign of the staff becoming a living creature, God is upping the ante: Moses will intercept Pharaoh at the Nile and turn it to blood, including water that was already taken from there and stored in containers. This would kill all the fish and make a stench, and no one would be able to use Nile water, which of course was central to their lives.

Constable notes that various natural plagues such as of frogs, bugs, hail, and even darkness were common seasonal problems, but here God is going to directly control their timing, their intensity, and in some cases, their selectiveness in afflicting only the Egyptians. The notes also state that these plagues all take place in northern Egypt near Zoan, per Psalm 78:43, which is either the same as or near Goshen. God has prepared Moses, and now he is preparing Pharaoh.

So Moses and Aaron do as God commands, and the result is as God had told them. But again, the Egyptian soothsayers do the same, so again Pharaoh yawns and goes home. It would have been much more impressive if the soothsayers could undo what Moses did, instead of only copying and making things worse for their people. This condition lasts for seven days, which if it were merely the seasonal redness from flooding, would have lasted about 3 months, and the water would still have been drinkable and not deadly to the fish.

## **Exo. 8**

The second plague is that the Nile will swarm with frogs, which will come out onto the land and enter all the houses. As one of many

sacred animals, a person could be put to death even for killing one accidentally, so having them underfoot would be a huge problem for the Egyptians. Only after this happens does Pharaoh ask Moses and Aaron to end the plague, and again we note that he doesn't ask his sorcerers to do so, obviously because they're unable. But God, through Moses, lets Pharaoh decide the moment the plague is to end. When it does, the land reeks with piles of dead frogs, which might have put a dent in the people's reverence for them as sacred animals. But like many of us, as soon as God answers the prayer, Pharaoh retracts his promise to let Israel go.

The third plague is of gnats, though it could also mean lice or fleas or even mosquitoes. But this time the soothsayers can't duplicate the plague, and they recognize a divine power their dark arts can't match. Pharaoh just shrugs it off, even though his own magicians were outmatched and have just admitted to using tricks instead of actually having power.

The fourth plague is of something called dogflies, but just to make sure the Egyptians don't think Moses is working for any run-of-the-mill deity, God only sends it only on them and not the land where the Israelites live. And this time God does it without requiring any action on the part of Moses or Aaron. Constable notes that these flies preferred to latch onto people's eyelids and could actually cause disfigurement through swelling caused by stings. Not even Pharaoh's house was spared, but though he finally agrees to let Israel worship God, he wants them to do so in Egypt. Yet since such worship would involve animal sacrifice the Egyptians would kill them, so they have to leave Egypt entirely. God will not compromise or strike a deal, and Moses warns Pharaoh not to lie again. Pharaoh relents, but once again, as soon as Moses prays for God to end the plague, Pharaoh breaks his word.

## **Exo. 9**

The fifth plague is of a terrible disease on cattle, horses, oxen, and sheep—in other words, their work and farm animals—and again the land of Goshen is spared. This time Pharaoh makes no offers or promises, but digs in his heels and refuses to let Israel go.

The sixth plague is of terrible boils that break out on the skin of all the Egyptians and their animals, after Moses throws handfuls of soot into the air as Pharaoh watches. He still couldn't care less.

If all of that wasn't enough, the seventh plague will prove once and for all that Egypt has no god like the God of Israel. God explains to Pharaoh, through Moses and Aaron, that the only reason Egypt hasn't been totally and instantly wiped out is because God is using all this to prove his point. But this time he gives a warning to whoever among the Egyptians chooses to listen: Put your people and animals under strong shelter, because a hail storm is coming, the likes of which will never have been seen in Egypt before. Some of Pharaoh's attendants listen, but others don't. So even in this, God is showing mercy to the Egyptians on an individual basis.

The plague turned out to be not only the hail itself, but also loud thunder and fire that, as the LXX puts it, "ran about on the land". Lightning is referred to as fire in verse 24, so we could speculate that this might have been something like ball lightning, though some commentators think it means that lightning strikes caused fires which spread on the land. Regardless, none of this affected the land of Goshen.

Now God has Pharaoh's attention and he confesses the sins of himself and his people. But Moses knows better than to think he's being honest this time, even though all their crops were ruined except the later harvests, and many people and animals had died. And as expected, when the plague stops, so does Pharaoh's shallow guilt trip and even shallower promise.

## **Exo. 10**

God is about to unleash the eighth plague, and he tells Moses that this will make fools of Pharaoh and his court. This time it's locusts, who will cover the land and strip it of whatever the hail plague hadn't pulverized. As soon as Moses leaves Pharaoh's court, his advisors ask him if he's even aware that Egypt is already in ruins. But Pharaoh's retort is that Israel will indeed need their God's help if he lets more than just the Hebrew men leave the country— meaning he'd rather they all died than to let the Israelites go.

God sends the plague, and again Pharaoh pretends to “really mean it this time”. Moses prays for relief anyway, though to no avail, and the stalemate continues even if it means the ruin of Egypt.

The ninth plague— palpable, gloomy darkness— again comes on only the Egyptians, even without Moses saying anything to Pharaoh. It lasts for three full days, which some say also foreshadows a future prophetic event. But no such thing is prophesied except over the kingdom of the Beast during the Tribulation, and it doesn't say the number of days. Now when Pharaoh summons Moses and tells him everyone can go but they have to leave the livestock, Moses refuses to compromise, and Pharaoh ejects him from his court permanently. To this Moses agrees; he will never speak to Pharaoh again.

## **Exo. 11**

Now we come to the final plague: death of all the firstborn in Egypt, from the animals to Pharaoh's son, as payback for the order to murder all male babies born to the Hebrews. God reserves the right to avenge.

However, individual Israelites will only be spared if they put the blood of a lamb on the doorposts of their houses so the death angel passes them by. We could argue over whether this death angel is an angel or

God Himself, but does it really matter? Either way, this is the origin of Passover, rich with symbolic reference to the eventual Passover Lamb, Jesus. Speaking of rich, before God begins this plague, the people of Israel are to ask the Egyptian people for silver and gold jewelery and whatever clothing they can spare, and the Egyptians give generously. At this point, Moses finally has the respect not only the Egyptian people but also Pharaoh's court.

The section starting in verse 4 seems to backtrack a bit to add the last thing Moses says to Pharaoh, telling him of this final plague and that Pharaoh's own servants will bow down to Moses. Yet not even the loss of his firstborn son will persuade Pharaoh to concede to the God of Israel for very long.

## **Exo. 12**

Before the death angel arrives, God tells Moses and Aaron to mark this month as the first month of the year for Israel, roughly equivalent to late March and early April. On the tenth day of the month each household must select a flawless one-year-old male sheep and observe it till the 14th, and on that afternoon they are to slaughter all the lambs. Then they are to smear some of its blood on the top and sides of the doorframe of their house.

They must eat the meat that night after roasting it over a fire, along with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. And the people have to dress as if prepared to leave in a hurry, though the blood on the doorposts would keep them safe from the death angel. This all foreshadowed what Jesus would eventually fulfill (see [this outline](#), especially point 5-C).

The immediate context is God's vengeance against Egypt and Pharaoh, but since this is to be a perpetual memorial, it means much more. Then God adds another requirement: For seven days the people must not eat anything with yeast in it, and they cannot even

have any yeast in their houses. Later in the scriptures we'll see that yeast is symbolic of sin that infects the whole group. The first and last days of that week will be holy days when no work except food preparation can be done. This week, to be known as the Feast of Unleavened Bread, begins on the evening of the 14th and ends on the evening of the 21st, with the 15th beginning the actual Passover, since days began after sunset. The 14th would become known as Preparation Day, which is an important detail when studying Jesus' final week in the Gospel accounts.

When passing all of this to the elders of Israel (verse 21), Moses adds that no one is allowed to leave their house until morning. Then he repeats that this will be a reminder for all their generations, of the night when God overpowered and humiliated all other claims of godhood. This establishment of a national calendar, whose first month was called Abib (and then Nisan after the later return from Babylonian captivity), is the first step toward making the people of Israel into the nation of Israel, but this will require a formal covenant to be given after they reach the mountain God told Moses he'd return to.

We see in verse 29 that the death angel arrives in the middle of that night, and by the time it's over not a single house in Egypt has been spared. Finally Pharaoh lets Israel go, but he still has the gall to ask Moses and Aaron to bless him first! The rest of the Egyptian people couldn't be more motivated to expel the Hebrews at this point, giving them anything they wanted, and in this way Egypt was plundered.

So off they went, first from the city of Rameses to Sukkoth, and this is where we're told about the 600,000 men of fighting age. Verse 40 is another place where scripture cites 430 years as how long the Israelites lived in Egypt, but remember to balance this with all the other references as is shown in the timeline chart from Abraham to Moses. That timespan goes all the way back to when Abraham was given the Promise.



Then God adds another stipulation for the passover observance: no foreigner is allowed to participate unless the males are circumcised. The meal can't be shared outside of the house, and none of the sheep's bones are to be broken. These will have their final fulfillment at Jesus' crucifixion, which had to happen in Israel (the house).

## **Exo. 13**

Now God declares that all the firstborn males, human or animal, are to be consecrated to God. The stipulations for the festival are stated again as well, along with clarification that this all begins when they reach Canaan (the Promised Land). The reason the firstborn males belong to God is because of Pharaoh's attempt to kill them all.

In verse 17 God decides that Israel should not go through the land of the Phillistines even though it was a shorter route, or they might turn back to Egypt if war breaks out. As Constable notes, that route was heavily fortified by the Egyptians. So he leads them instead toward the wilderness by the Red Sea. This happens in what the text calls the fifth generation, and this is where it says that Moses remembered to bring the bones of Joseph. By day God used a pillar of cloud, and by night a pillar of fire. They were likely the same object, whose fire would be less helpful during the daytime, and of course whose cloud would be useless at night.

## **Exo. 14**

Now God sets up his final nail in Egypt's coffin. He has Israel camp such that they are strategically trapped between the wilderness and the sea, to lure Pharaoh into seizing the opportunity to enslave them again. In spite of everything, Pharaoh and his officials can't imagine why they let all those slaves go, but later we'll see that it isn't just the Egyptians who have the memory and sense of a goldfish. So off the Egyptians go with their entire army, catching up to them at the camp.

Speaking of short memory, in verse 10 we see that Israelites quickly forget all they've just seen God do. They whine to Moses, "Is this why you took us out here to die, because there wasn't room for our graves in Egypt? We were better off as slaves than to die out here!" Of course, Moses has to remind them not to be such sniveling cowards, but to sit back and watch the show as God takes care of business for them.

Then (verse 15) God has Moses hold the staff over the sea so the people can cross on dry ground. According to Constable's notes, the phrase "yam sup" is not Egyptian for "sea of reeds" meaning a shallow marsh, but Hebrew for "the sea at the end". Besides, the entire large and sophisticated army of Egypt would not drown in a marsh! God also tells Moses that once Israel begins to cross over, the Egyptians will chase after them, but it will be their undoing. Now the pillar of cloud and fire moves between the Israelites and the Egyptian army, causing darkness and gloom to keep the two groups apart during the night.

Meanwhile, Moses does as instructed, and God brings a strong wind to make a dry path through the sea, with the water forming walls on either side. So the people of Israel go across, and by morning the Egyptians see them and commence their pursuit. But God slows them down by putting them into a panic and jamming their chariot wheels. Only when they finally realize that God Himself is fighting for Israel do they try to retreat.

But since Israel had crossed the sea by this time, God has Moses hold out the staff again to cause the waters to return. The next morning, the Israelites could see all the drowned Egyptians on the far shore, and there were no survivors, though it's doubtful that Pharaoh himself had gone with them instead of staying on high ground to direct the assault. Either way, he had no army at all anymore, and no son to succeed him to the throne of Egypt— which for a self-proclaimed god had to be quite embarrassing.

So finally, at least for the time being, all the people of Israel honor and trust God and his servant Moses. We should all know by now that such a condition is always short-lived.

## **Exo. 15**

The bulk of this chapter is the celebration song the people of Israel sing in praise of the mighty God who delivered them. Hebrew poetry tends to be in the form of couplets, where a statement is made and then repeated in different words, rather than the vowel rhyming we're accustomed to in English. At least for the time being, Israel is truly worshiping God from the heart.

This is one, but not the only, way to worship God. In both Testaments, it's clear that God wants to be in a parent-child relationship with us, and that true worship is when our daily lives reflect that relationship. As it says in Isaiah 29:13, "These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me." And as Jesus put it in Mat. 15:11, "It's not what goes into us that defiles us, it's what comes out." In the same way, it's not what we do outwardly that is true worship, but where that worship is coming from. If our hearts are not in it, and we don't live like God matters, it's just empty words and hollow tunes.

This brings up a growing problem in Christian worship: The "worship team" or church leadership imposes its will and taste in music on the congregation. But how can we join our hearts in worship if the music is grating, or the lyrics are shallow, or the tune is nearly impossible for the average non-musician to sing? When I was much younger, I thought that only luddites would forbid the use of instruments in worship, but maybe they were on to something. How many of our worship songs would be singable without instruments? Don't get me wrong though; even Miriam and all the women had tamborines in this passage, and they all not only sang but also danced. But I think the modern church has made participation in worship nearly impossible.

Somewhere between “Bringing In The Sheaves” and “Draw Me Close” is worship singing that truly honors God and what God has done and will do, rather than what we say we will do or how God makes us feel.

Now back to the text, where Moses’ sister Miriam, who is called a prophet, leads the women in worship. She is no less a prophet than any man would be, and she isn’t the only such woman in scripture. We need to remember why it is that God has put emphasis on first-born males and not females: It’s a reminder that Pharaoh tried to murder them (and later that Herod would murder them). Still, through most of history, it’s been mostly baby girls who were killed. Even today in some eastern cultures, girls are aborted at a much higher rate than boys. This is what societies do, not what God does or approves.

After the celebrations, Moses leads the people into the wilderness, but after three days of walking they find no water. So the fickle and faithless Israelites do what they do best: whine and grumble against Moses. Even so, they get what they demand: a miracle from God through Moses, which God uses to remind them who he is. They seem to need a lot of reminders. This illustrates God’s patience and reluctance to punish.

## **Exo. 16**

Shockingly, they get to the next area of wilderness and start complaining again, saying they’d have been better off to die in Egypt, where at least they had pots of meat and all the bread they wanted.

So God says, “Fine, I’ll rain down bread from the sky, but I’m going to test their sincerity in following my rules!” So he tells them to gather the bread for six days but not the seventh, which means that on the sixth they must gather twice as much. Moses points out to the people that it isn’t him and Aaron they’re complaining against, it’s God.

Then God has Moses tell Aaron to assemble the people and tell them that God will give them meat in the evening and bread in the morning, to show them once again that he's God and they're not. As promised, he sends a flock of quail for meat, and the next morning the ground is covered in something they decide to call "what's this?", which is where the word *manna* comes from. They collect just what they need for the number of people in their home, which is a good reminder that what God does with one person is not always what he does with another. Moses also tells them not to try and save any for the next day, but of course many of them don't listen, and the next day the manna has become worm-ridden and smelly.

The next test comes on the sixth day, when they're told to gather twice as much and it would not go bad the next day. But some people go out the seventh day to gather more anyway, and of course none is found. This is the first use of the word *sabbath* meaning *rest*. Like circumcision, it predates the actual Levitical law, so some take this to mean it is a rule for Gentiles as well. But again, this is for the nation of Israel; it is not given as a command to all nations. There is no evidence that the whole world ever knew to make every seventh day holy to God.

As a reminder for coming generations, God tells Moses to have Aaron collect a jar full of manna to be preserved. This manna would be the "bread" of Israel throughout the full forty years of their wandering. Constable states that since caravans passed through the areas of wandering, the people of Israel certainly traded with them and so had other food during that time, but manna was their staple nonetheless.

## **Exo. 17**

God has Israel move on, and again they come to a place where there is no potable water, so again they take it out on Moses. So God has Moses take the elders to a certain rock, and Moses is told to strike

the rock with his staff, which causes water to flow out. It's as much a miracle that this stopped the grumbling again for the time being, as that water came from a rock.

As if they needed another reason to whine, in verse 8 we see that Israel is attacked by the army of Amalek. But God has another lesson to teach them. They muster an army, and during the battle Moses is going to stand on a hilltop with his staff in his hand. This is where we first meet Joshua, and notice that the Greek name for Joshua is Iesous— exactly the same as the name of Jesus in the New Testament.

Moses is accompanied on the hilltop by Aaron and someone named Hur, while Joshua leads the army. As long as Moses holds up his hands, presumably to hold up the staff, Israel prevails in the battle, but the tide turns every time he lowers them. So to deal with fatigue, they have Moses sit on a rock while the other two hold up his hands. Clearly it is God winning the battle, even though people are actually fighting it.

So God tells Moses to write this down as another memorial, and have Joshua memorize it, because God would remain the enemy of the Amalekites and eventually wipe out the memory of them from the earth. It will also remind them that the battles they win as a nation are not won by them, and that God will only enable them to win as long as they walk in his ways. We should note also that Moses wrote words, since liberal critics claim writing hadn't been invented yet.

## **Exo. 18**

After this, Moses' father-in-law Jethro hears about all this, so he comes to see him and brings along Moses' wife and sons, and Moses gets them up to date on all that has happened. Then Jethro praises God and accepts that this God is the one above all others.

The next day, Moses sits down to judge the disputes that had arisen among the Israelites, as was his habit. But Jethro sees how inefficient and exhausting this is, so he advises Moses to only deal directly with issues concerning direct commands from God and the toughest legal cases, but appoint people of high character and wisdom to handle the day-to-day disputes among them. Moses takes his advice and delegates judging authority to them by tens, fifties, hundreds, and thousands. A rough equivalent would be how the US deals with legal issues on city, county, state, and federal levels. Though Israel as yet had not been given a detailed law code, they certainly were familiar with such things.

Next we'll move on to the beginnings of that law, but first take a look at Constable's notes on this chapter for some uncanny details comparing Jethro and Melchizedek (p. 165-66).

### **Melchizedek (Gen. 14:17-24)**

1. He was a Gentile priest of Salem (Gen. 14:18).
2. He met Abraham as Abraham returned from defeating the Mesopotamians (Gen. 14:18).
3. He brought gifts to Abraham (Gen. 14:18).
4. He was king of peace (Heb. *salem*, Gen. 14:18).
5. Abraham's heir was Eliezer ("God is my help," Gen. 15:2).
6. Melchizedek praised God for rescuing Abraham from the Amalekites (Gen. 14:19-20).
7. He offered bread and wine (Gen. 14:18).

### **Jethro (Exod. 18:1-27)**

1. He was a Gentile priest of Midian (Exod. 18:1).
2. He met Moses as Moses returned from defeating the Amalekites (Exod. 18:5).
3. He brought Moses' wife and sons to Moses (Exod. 18:2-6).
4. He offered Moses peace (Exod. 18:7).
5. Moses' heir was Eliezer (Exod. 18:4).

6. Jethro praised God for rescuing Moses from the Egyptians (Exod. 18:10-11).
7. He offered sacrifices and ate bread with Moses (Exod. 18:12).

## Exo. 19

Three months after leaving Egypt, Israel reaches the wilderness of Sinai and camps at the foot of Mt. Horeb (aka Mt. Sinai in scripture), the mountain where Moses was first called by God at the burning bush. They would stay for a total of eleven months, according to most commentators who piece together events through the book of Numbers. And according to research at [this source](#), Israel only actually traveled for about two years, and camped for 38 at Kadesh. There are some good maps there as well, along with the statement that Kadesh was near Petra, which may be the place of safety for the Judeans to run to halfway through the Tribulation. Both are near the south end of the Dead Sea.

This is where we first see the phrase in the Greek, “royal priesthood and holy nation”. We know this phrase from 1 Peter 2:9, and we remember that the New Testament quotes the Greek rather than the Hebrew, which here in Exodus is translated “kingdom of priests and holy nation”. Take a moment to review the [covenants chart](#) to remember where we are at this point.

Now back to Exodus, and we see that this is a conditional promise of God to “the house of Jacob and the people of Israel”— conditional because of the “if” in verse five. Heb. 8:6-13 cites the Old Testament as saying that the new covenant would be “with the people of Israel and Judah”. The whole purpose of the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15 was to answer the question of whether all Christians had to also be Jews, and the answer was “no”. But whether the church is the ultimate “royal priesthood and holy nation” is examined in Constable’s notes on 1 Peter 2:9.



In this context, long before the church, the nation and people of Israel are the original recipients of this conditional promise. And as would eventually be explained in Gal. 3:12-25, its function was temporary and instructional, and of works rather than faith— a contrast between the unconditional covenant of Abraham and the conditional one of Moses. The blessings can extend to the world, but the covenant is with this nation.

After the people verbally agree to this covenant, Moses goes up to take their answer to God, who then tells him to go back down to the people and tell them to prepare themselves for a solemn, legally-binding ceremony to enact the covenant in writing. They are to purify themselves and wash their clothes. They must also keep away from the mountain on pain of instant death, and only approach it after they hear a trumpet blast from God and the pillar of cloud leaves.

They have 2 days to prepare, which Moses adds must include couples abstaining from intimacy. Most commentators take this as a matter of subduing the body's cravings, and in the later laws we'll see that most uncleanness has to do with body secretions of various kinds. What we can not conclude, as so many have done over the centuries, is that this command is saying women are inherently unclean and unworthy to be in God's presence.

When the time comes for this to take place, the people are terrified by a loud trumpet and other loud sounds, along with lightning and darkness. It could be taken as something like a volcanic eruption by the description in verse 18, but the cause is again the miraculous presence and power of God. This is the first instance where God's loud voice is equated with a trumpet, and the last will be in Rev. 1:10. Neither of these trumpets are of mere angels or have to do with judgment, but with the presence of God.

There is a conversation at this time between God and Moses, and God tells Moses and Aaron to come up but have everyone else stay at the bottom. This includes priests as well, though no priesthood has as yet been established. Ancient near east practice was that heads

of families were *de facto* priests, and we've already met Melchizedek and Jethro as some examples. So the likely reason priests are singled out is because they may have thought themselves exempt from the command to keep their distance from the holy mountain.

Now we're about to read the details of the covenant law, but before we do we should understand some points as brought out in Constable's notes. There were two common types of covenants: parity (between equals) and suzerainty (between a sovereign and his subjects). Both took the form of a preamble, history, statement of principles, and consequences of obedience and disobedience. This covenant is of course the suzerainty type, and it contained three basic categories:

1. Moral life
2. Religious life
3. Civil life

This hardly means that Christians can pick and choose to follow one category or another, or even dissect the Ten Commandments and discard the one that isn't in any way repeated in the New Testament, so they can say they keep the law. Rather, it simply classifies the applications of the laws, but all were binding on Israel.

## **Exo. 20**

Verses 1-2 comprise the preamble, identifying the "sovereign" and his proven power, and how the "subjects" owe him their allegiance. The first four commandments will deal with how the people must relate to God, and the last six with how the people must relate to each other. Though various groups through history have divided the Ten Commandments differently, the numbering used unanimously by the early church was that with which most are familiar: that the first is "no other gods", the second is "no idols", and the commandment about coveting is one commandment rather than two.

Verses 3-6 are the first two commandments; the first means not that God is to be the chief one among many, but the only one. The second refers to no idols or likenesses of physical or angelic beings of any kind, for the purpose of being venerated as having divine power or ability. We see here that God says he is “a jealous God”, so we need to know the difference between *jealousy* and *envy*. *Jealousy* is protecting what is rightfully ours, but *envy* is desiring what is not rightfully ours. So God being jealous is not a bad or immoral quality at all.

But what about verse five, which speaks of God avenging sins for up to four generations of those who hate him, and mercy to thousands of generations of those who love him and keep his ordinances? And how would we reconcile this with Ezekiel 18, where especially verses 4 and 20 say that the one who sins is the only one who will die? Remember that God says this as part of the formal drawing up of the covenant, not mere poetry or hyperbole.

The answer is the difference between guilt and consequences. Here, God is referring to how those who hate God will invite very long-lasting consequences on their descendants, whereas in Ezekiel the topic is on being held guilty for what someone else has done. We all can relate to how one simple mistake or sin can affect us and our family and friends, and we have seen this for the whole nation of Israel, which of course will reach its extremes when they're exiled as a nation in the future.

The third commandment (not taking the Lord's name in vain) means to not use it as a casual or vulgar expression. The added warning seems to make this an unforgiveable sin, at least under the law, likely because it meant a person is treating God as worthless or shameful.

The fourth commandment is about keeping the Sabbath, which was the seventh day of the week from one sundown to the next. The reason in the immediate context is to remind them of creation week, which makes no sense if creation took many eons, and nothing in either the Greek or Hebrew indicates any such thing as “a day per an

epoch". And this rest meant that no one— slave or free, male or female, foreigners, or even animals— was to do any labor. The Bible also speaks of a future spiritual rest in both Testaments, in Psalm 95 and Heb. 3 and 4, and we've already seen God allude to this when he made the rule about not collecting manna on the seventh day. It's interesting also that the Greek text says "remember the day of sabbaths" (plural). The context makes it clear that there is only one sabbath per week, so the meaning of the plural here is simply that this is a repeating cycle.

The fifth commandment is about children respecting their parents, because just as the whole nation owed its life to God, so also children owe their lives to their parents— both of them. As the New Testament points out in Eph. 6:2, this is the first commandment with a promise. This is not to say that parents are always sinless or perfect, but that children under their care should show them more honor than other adults, and especially more than themselves or their siblings. It is unwise to disrespect anyone we're dependent on.

The sixth and seventh commandments really stem from the same principle: Don't take what doesn't belong to you. The main distinction between adultery and fornication is that in the latter there is no one from whom the other person is being taken, except perhaps in a society where the daughter is considered the property of the father.

One point to make about stealing is that it requires such a thing as private property. The society God is structuring here is not a commune but an association of families owning their own properties, livestock, crops, equipment, and employees. Land ownership within tribes was especially important to God regarding the nation of Israel.

We could actually add the eighth commandment in the same category, since murder is the taking of a life that doesn't belong to you. Critics like to point at this one and say that God violates it since he takes life, but life is his to give or take. Would the critics put themselves under the same rules as they put their own children? Rather, this commandment is to keep people from treating life as

cheap or theirs to take without divine permission. Such permission was granted to society when Noah got off the Ark, but only if a person took another person's life; it was never granted as a matter of personal vengeance or a way to solve differences.

Some even try to make the killing of animals murder, but the context here and throughout the scriptures never supports such a meaning. Neither does it grant us the right to maim or torture people or animals, unless a person has maimed another person, and even then there is no permission to make the "eye for an eye" torturous. God has already delegated the authority to wage battle, but again, it is delegated, not to be taken upon ourselves.

The question often arises as well about suicide. But if we belong to God, then not even we can take our lives because they don't belong to us. However, we also must show compassion since many suicides are the result of immaturity, severe suffering, or mental illness. Let God be the judge, but at the same time, let us be more intent upon showing concern such that others won't even consider it. Prevention is far better than grief.

Now to the ninth commandment, bearing false witness. This is specifically about false accusations, not all statements of untruth. After all, God himself used cover stories in various times in Israel's history, and he will send a "strong delusion" during the future Tribulation. But this is hardly a blanket endorsement of lying. Politeness and diplomacy are often borderline or outright lies, but they can prevent hostility or needless tension. Intent is everything; are we trying to harm or help? Slander is always harmful of course; its purpose is to ruin someone's life or reputation for something they never did. Simply being offended or not liking a person is hardly justification for this.

The tenth and final commandment is against envy: not simply wanting something but having the desire to take it though the owner is not offering it for sale. In fact, all the commandments prohibit

taking what is rightfully another's, whether the other is people or God, objects or honor.

After all this, the terrified Israelites ask Moses to speak to God for them in the future, but Moses explains that this fear of God is part of the instruction. They have thus asked for intermediaries between themselves and God. Critics take this as an indictment against God, who in their judgment is immoral for wanting to be feared. But again we appeal to them as parents; do they not expect their children to fear punishment should they defy them? Parents give rules to protect and guide (ideally at least), so defiance can be dangerous or deadly. And if the children don't learn by words, then they will have to learn by actions. When done with compassion and love, children raised in this way rarely fault their parents but respect them instead. And this is what God has repeatedly demonstrated, being reluctant to punish, but always having reconciliation and maturity as the goal.

Then in verse 24 God instructs them to make altars out of dirt or uncut stones, because the tools would defile them. They are also not to build the altars so high that anyone could look up the robes of the priests and shame them. These requirements were likely in response to the worship practices of other religions.

## **Exo. 21**

The first six verses are about Hebrew servants. The Greek word there is *paida* (from which we get pediatric), meaning child or youth, not *doulos* meaning slave. Though the context doesn't make a clear distinction between the two meanings, the main point is that these were fellow Hebrews and must not be enslaved for life, unless by the servant's consent and with the legal sanction of judges. Compared to slavery in the surrounding nations, this was very humane and protected the rights of servants or slaves as human beings. Hebrews were thus treated as indentured servants, more commonly for the purpose of paying a debt. And in this we see that the laws of Moses

did not simply mimic existing laws from other cultures but improve them. Remember that Israel did not form in a social vacuum.

However, we see immediately the inferior status of female servants, in line with the fact that all females were considered inferior in being or essence in ancient near east culture. A woman was always the property of some male relative or spouse. She could be bought and sold even if not a slave, and she had no choice in the matter if her father decided to sell her as a concubine. Even so, she had to be treated kindly and given adequate provisions for living; this was an improvement compared to other cultures.

Remember this when people today whine about backlash against patriarchy. Two wrongs don't make a right, but all human beings should treat each other as equal in rights, opportunities, and respect. Not equality of outcome or disregard of ability or character, but equality of humanity. There's a huge gap between God's natural order, and people's natural order.

The next topic is homicide, and if accidental, the offending party could run to one of what were called Cities of Refuge for a certain time, so the deceased person's family couldn't avenge themselves. If intentional, there was to be no refuge anywhere, not even at God's altar. In contrast, the Code of Hammurabi allowed capital punishment even if the death was purely an accident.

We see also that if a child deliberately killed or even insulted their parents, that child was to be put to death, though there doesn't seem to be any evidence that this was actually carried out, as it was left to the discretion of the parents. The point seems to be that this was a last resort for a habit of assault against parents, not a flippant attitude against children over everyday arguments.

The next brief topic is kidnapping, which is considered a capital offense and executed without mercy.

After this the text turns to two men fighting and one being injured. It's basically an early form of worker's compensation, because the injured party must be compensated for loss of employment and medical expenses. But if the injured party is their own servant, they're only punished if the servant dies. The reason is that the servant is the owner's property, so the owner is already punished by loss of services, and no further legal penalty is imposed. The reason death is worthy of punishment is again because life belongs to God and can never be owned by us, but only leased.

Of course, to our modern western ears, this all seems barbaric. But remember that God is only setting minimal standards in light of human frailty; it was a step, not the whole staircase. Jesus is the top of that staircase, but even in the New Testament we see the teaching of a gradual change so as not to cause chaos in society. However, too many have dragged their feet and clung to what God intended to be superceded, such as flesh-based entitlement.

Next we move on to cases where a pregnant woman is injured and the baby miscarries, and this is where we first see the principle of "an eye for an eye". Since there was no premeditated intent to harm the unborn child, the punishment is to fit the degree of injury. It seems to indicate that if the child appears fully formed and would have otherwise been born alive, the one causing the baby's death must pay with their own life. Constable's notes include an argument against the claim of abortion advocates that this passage treats the baby as not a person, so check that out if you'd like to see the scriptural support for babies as vaunted human beings. Regarding permanent damage to various body parts of an owner's servant, the servant is to be set free as compensation.

Next the topic is harm against humans by animals. Whereas Hammurabi demanded the death of a man's son if his ox killed another man's son, these laws of Moses demand the death of the man, but only if he was habitually allowing his ox to run free and cause damage. If not, then only the animal must die, and it cannot be



eaten. Even so, if the man is to die, he can offer to pay a ransom for his life. But if the person killed by the animal was a child, no ransom can be substituted. If the victim was a servant, even a female one, the animal's owner has to pay the full price of a servant, that being 30 pieces of silver— the amount we all know that Judas was offered to betray Jesus, so they only valued him on the level of a common servant.

Next is the case of someone failing to take reasonable safety precautions for a pit they dug, and an animal falls in and dies. Basically the pit owner has to abide by the modern saying, "If you break it, you buy it". In the case of one animal killing another animal, the killer animal must be sold and the money divided, and the meat of the dead animal divided. But if the killer animal was known to be dangerous, the owner would have to pay the full price rather than half.

In all of this so far, we see that these laws show compassion for victims beyond other societal norms, including the vaunted Code of Hammurabi. In some cases the Biblical laws are harsher, because the value God places on human life is higher. But all of this is to teach people to respect other people and their property.

## **Exo. 22**

The first section of this chapter is about theft. The penalty involved compensation beyond the value of the stolen goods, as a punishment and deterrent. If the thief is caught in the act and dies at the owner's hands, the owner is not held guilty unless it was daytime. And if the thief can't pay the penalty, he has to be sold as a slave. One of my ancestors suffered the deaths of her husband and baby on the way to the United States, and she was sold as a slave to compensate the ship's captain for the trip.

The next section concerns a careless animal owner whose livestock is grazing on someone else's land, and the demand of suitable compensation for arson or careless burning that spreads to destroy someone else's crops or stacked grain. It also deals with a person who is negligent in safeguarding what someone else entrusted to them, and cases where the person was actually robbed rather than negligent. More mundane issues are covered up to verse 15.

Now the text turns to issues of morality carrying property compensation penalties. If a man seduces an unbetrothed virgin, he has to pay the bride price and marry her, or whatever payment the father demands.

Three other issues are then briefly mentioned: the no-questions-asked execution of sorcerers, those committing bestiality, and those sacrificing to any god but the real God. The Greek word for *sorcerer* is *pharmakous* meaning someone who administers potions to induce visions or hallucinations, and the Bible doesn't care if the intent is "black" or "white" magic. The modern word *pharmacy* is derived from this but has changed to mean *dispensing medications for healing*, and the Bible clearly allows the use of medicinal compounds. Too many would-be theologians jump to the wild conclusion that all modern medicine is forbidden by God, because they don't consider how the Bible uses words, and that these words change meaning over time and between languages and cultures.

In verse 21 the text turns to the issue of hospitality, with the reminder that the people of Israel were once foreigners in Egypt. God makes it clear that he himself will administer severe penalties to those who oppress foreigners, as he did to the Egyptians on behalf of Israel.

Then in verse 25 it deals with the issue of what is commonly called *usury*, which some mistakenly apply to all forms of charging interest on a loan. However, this text is talking about money borrowed by the poor. The poor are borrowing out of necessity and for that reason must not be charged interest. Money borrowed by the better-off as a business investment is not in view here at all, though in other

scriptures interest was not to be charged to fellow Hebrews in any case, but could be charged to foreigners. Extortion and “loan sharking” are clearly forbidden in all scripture, without regard to whether or not the borrowers are Hebrews. Yet even the permission to charge loan interest to foreigners is held in contempt by modern western critics, as an excuse to hate all Jews without distinction or exception. May such people be held to the same standards of guilt without a trial.

The final section we’ll cover in this section is about “first fruits”. We’ve already learned why God reserves the firstborn sons for himself, and now it includes also the first and best of herds and crops, to remind them that everything belongs to God and we’re just leasing it.

Tacked on to the end of this chapter is the command for people not to eat the meat of an animal that they themselves didn’t kill, but to leave it for the dogs. The rationale presumed by most commentators is that since the time and cause of death is unknown, it poses a risk of disease, and the blood had not been properly drained.

## **Exo. 23**

Ch. 23 opens with a warning against even listening to gossip, much less spreading it. Slander can’t do much damage without people willing to hear it and repeat it. The command is to demand evidence, and the accomplice shares the guilt of the slanderer. From this comes the next warning against following the crowd in making baseless accusations. And while most would agree that justice should not be perverted to favor the rich, scripture also forbids perverting it for the poor.

The point seems to be interrupted by verses 4-5 to address a sin of omission: seeing another person’s work animal wandering off but not bothering to return it to its owner, just because the owner is someone you don’t like. The same applies if the animal is injured or

overburdened and you leave it to suffer instead of helping your enemy relieve their animal.

Now back to partiality in a court of law, but the flip side: Just as it's wrong to defend the poor in a trial when the poor person is guilty, so also is it wrong to falsely condemn the poor when they're innocent. In other words, justice must not be perverted just because you can get away with it. No one should be wrongly acquitted or condemned because of their social standing, and more than that, the common practice of accepting bribes is forbidden. This applies even to foreigners.

The next section is usually thought of as a religious law, but it has very practical societal benefit: Not only is every seventh day a sabbath rest for people and animals, so also is every seventh year a sabbath rest for the land itself. The land has a chance to rebuild its nutrients, and the wild animals and poor people can glean whatever grows on its own. Failure to observe this command would eventually lead to Israel being deported to Babylon for the number of sabbath years the land had been robbed of. That turned out to be a total of 70 years, which is how the prophet Daniel knew the time had come for Israel to return to the Promised Land.

Now the text abruptly turns to remind the people to not speak the names of other gods, and then it begins a section on annual religious feasts. [This source](#) gives details and dates on all the eventual feasts, but the three described here are:

1. Passover
2. Unleavened Bread, beginning the next day and lasting for seven
3. Tabernacles or Booths, said here to be at the end of the year, though Lev. 23:34 says the seventh month; "year" in this passage refers to the harvest season.

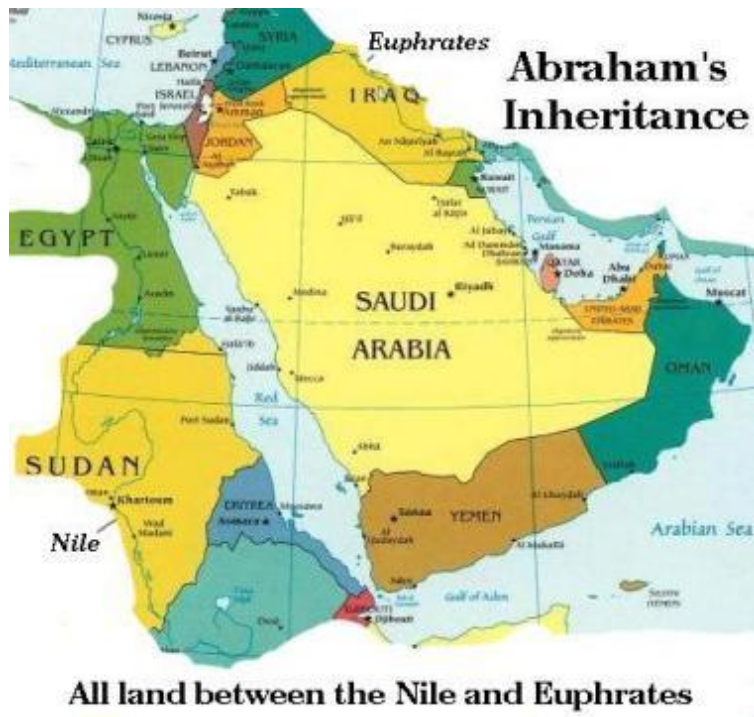
Again we see the reference to "every male among you", a reminder of Pharaoh's attempt to kill them all, and a reminder about the other "first fruits". To this is the added stipulation that a lamb must not be

boiled in its mother's milk, the reason for which we can only speculate about.

There is a clear break at this point to look to the future. The angel is presumed to mean the Angel of the Lord, which most take to mean Jesus, the Person of the Trinity to eventually incarnate as the ultimate Passover Lamb. This is the one who will guide them into the land he is preparing for them. But there are conditions; the people have to listen to him, and the consequences depend on whether or not they do so.

The people are warned that when they come to the Promised Land currently occupied by the ethnic groups listed, they must not worship their gods or behave as they do. God goes on in that section to point out that he cannot drive them out all at once or the land would become desolate and wild animals would become a problem.

Now God defines the boundaries of the land, as shown in this map. The actual occupied area will turn out to be smaller than this due to disobedience. But again the people are warned not to worship the heathen gods or make alliances with the people there, and none of them are to be left in the land.



## Exo. 24

All of this has only been the writing out of the covenant, but now it needs to be signed by both parties. Moses, Aaron, and two others are to bring 70 elders with them to worship God from a distance, but only Moses can come near to God. Before they go, the people again affirm their acceptance of the terms, and Moses builds an altar at the foot of the mountain, along with setting up twelve stones to represent the twelve tribes of Israel.

Next Moses has sacrifices made, and he takes the blood and puts half in bowls and half on the altar. Then he reads the whole covenant aloud and the people affirm their acceptance again, so he sprinkles some of the blood on them too, which signs and seals the legal agreement. This symbolized the willingness to give one's own life should they break the agreement.

Now Moses and the others can go up to the mountain. That's where they see an appearance of God standing on something they can't

really describe, and they eat the sacrificial meal in his presence. This meal sharing, like the blood sprinkling, was typical of solemn legal agreements, especially involving deities.

Now Moses goes on farther, bringing only Joshua, to receive the stone tablets of the law. They leave the elders in the care of Aaron and Hur, and all of them are to watch over the people. So the glory of God covers the mountain like a cloud for six days, and on the seventh God calls to Moses, at which time the glory of God becomes like an intense fire. Moses goes into that and stays there for 40 days.

## **Exo. 25**

God begins to give instructions on furnishing the Sanctuary or Tabernacle, a portable temple to be set up according to precise specifications and made with the finest materials. This was to impress upon the people that God was among them per the covenant both parties have just agreed to, as a kind of throne room for official meetings. The people had asked for a mediator, and this would be the point at which mediation would take place. Here is a depiction of how the Tabernacle probably looked:



The centerpiece of the Tabernacle would be the famous Ark of the Covenant, whose description you can read up to verse 24. The Ark as depicted in *Raiders of the Lost Ark* really wasn't all that bad. The passage goes on to describe all the various utensils and equipment needed for various ceremonies and sacrifices as well.

## **Exo. 26-27**

The specifications continue into ch. 26, while the altar itself is described in ch. 27. Then God adds a courtyard area around the temple with the same quality of materials and attention to detail.

## **Exo. 28**

Now God turns to the matter of a priesthood, comprised of Aaron and his sons. Aaron was likely chosen because he had already been



functioning as a mediator for Moses. The priests are assigned special garments of high quality and precise detail, equal to everything else associated with the Tabernacle, and the description goes on for quite a while. Constable has a lot of material on all this, and you can see [here](#) and [here](#) for artists' conceptions of how this all was laid out. There are [depictions of priestly garments](#) as well.

## Exo. 29-31

Ch. 29 is where the ceremonies for consecrating the priests are described, but they will be examined in more detail in Leviticus 8. Ch. 30 continues with additional articles for the Tabernacle and rules for financing its upkeep, while ch. 31 is where God selects skilled workers for its construction. Verse 12 is where God turns back from the priesthood to the people, who are reminded to honor the sabbaths, and that the penalty for failure is death! This is God, and he is to be taken seriously and honored as the one to whom all owe their lives.

To further impress the permanence and seriousness of this covenant, God Himself writes on the two stone tablets. These are called The Tablets of Testimony, meaning a legal witness. It really doesn't say what exactly was written on them until 34:28, and both the Greek and Hebrew texts say "the ten words" rather than "the ten commandments". However, the Greek word *logos* can mean statements or phrases as well as individual words.

As for their sizes, we do know that they would be placed inside the Ark of the Covenant, whose dimensions we're given, and that Moses was able to carry them in his arms. Some say that they each had half the Ten Commandments, but others that each stone had the same writing so that each of the two parties to the covenant had a copy.

In the next section we will undoubtedly hear the sound of God face-palming over these people, with whom he just went to a lot of trouble

to make a covenant. But why did he go to all that trouble, especially knowing how these people are?

As we're told in Heb. 8:5 and 9:23, the earthly temple and everything about it had to be made precisely as God instructed because they represented what is in heaven. God always has good reasons for everything. We just have to trust him.

## **Exo. 32**

The previous section went over the solemn, careful procedure to ratify the conditional covenant between God and Israel, and Moses' 40-day meeting alone with God. Now we see that the people have quickly become impatient, and the guardians Moses appointed were nothing of the sort. Israel, including Aaron and the elders, seem to have an "out of sight, out of mind" attitude in spite of all the signs, miracles, plagues, fires, noises, and their own repeated words of allegiance to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They were afraid of God's presence and asked for an intermediary, but this put just enough distance between themselves and God to erase their memory.

As the saying goes, "When the cat's away, the mice will play", and that's exactly what Israel does. Aaron volunteers to make a calf-shaped idol for them out of their gold jewelry and says, "These are (plural) your gods who brought you out of Egypt!" So they make sacrifices to the idol, then have a feast and a wild party. The first three commandments were already broken, and now they pretty much break the rest. They have made a god in their image, with their own hands, a cheap substitute that could make no demands— and no promises.

At this point, God tells Moses what's happening, and he refers to the Israelites as your people. Then he basically tells Moses to stand back while he wipes them all out and starts over with him. But Moses, the

intercessor, pleads for their lives, and he reminds God that if he destroys Israel, the Egyptians will scoff at him and say he only led them out of Egypt to kill them— which is exactly what the Israelites kept saying to Moses as they traveled. So God backs off, and this brings up an interesting observation: that our prayers can indeed move the hands of God, who in his sovereignty allows us a significant amount of free will, of choices within boundaries. It may well be that God allows certain things to happen just to see whether we'll try to intercede or offer points for him to consider. And it could also be that God was testing Moses as a mediator.

So Moses goes back down the mountain accompanied by Joshua, who hears the roar of the crowd and says "They're at war!" But Moses says, "No, they're singing and partying!" And when they get close enough to see as well as hear, Moses does what a lot of us do when we're outraged: throw something— in this case the stone tablets written by God Himself— and they shatter. Why not, since Israel had already shattered the covenant in every other way?

Next Moses takes the idol, melts it in the fire, grinds it to a powder, scatters it on the water, and makes all the people drink it. (Do you think maybe he's a little upset?) As the ultimate insult to them and their idol, by drinking the gold it was made from, they would literally defecate this false god.

As an interesting side note, Constable makes a connection between this drinking of the gold dust with the later test of adultery in Numbers 5:24. Here, Israel has committed adultery against God and is made to drink dust. In Numbers, if a husband suspected his wife of adultery, he would take her to the temple, and the priest would make her drink water with dust in it from the temple floor. If she survived she was innocent.

This seems barbaric to us, but not only does it stand as a testimony to the unfaithfulness of the whole nation, it also formally acquits an innocent woman who has been falsely accused in a public place, and it publicly shames the husband who tried to ruin her life. Because of

this risk, husbands would have to think twice before making rash accusations against their wives, who would be destitute if divorced. Again, God is protecting the most vulnerable members of society from those with power.

Now as angry as Moses obviously is, he still saves them from complete extinction, but there's a price to pay. He confronts his brother Aaron, who makes up the lamest excuse since Adam: He shifts blame to the people, then claims that the calf formed itself out of the fire!

Of course Moses isn't buying it at all. And as he sees that Israel's enemies are gloating over the people running wild since Aaron utterly failed to control them, he shouts out to the people: "Whoever is still loyal to God, come stand with me!", and only the tribe of Levi comes. So he tells the men of Levi to get their swords and go kill all the others. Verse 28 totals the dead at 3,000 men, so clearly not every single person was killed. But because of their loyalty and devotion to God even if it meant punishing their own people, the Levites are designated the priestly tribe. In the Genesis study we made note of the fact that Levi himself was a scoundrel, but that his tribe would later redeem themselves, and this is when that happens.

At this point, Moses returns to the presence of God to make atonement for their sin, even to the point of offering to trade his own life for theirs. God replies that he will only take out those who remain rebellious, and he sends a plague on them for now, but complete punishment will be delayed.

## **Exo. 33**

Here we see that they will break camp and move toward the Promised Land, but they will go without God's immediate presence. Almost sarcastically, God gives the reason: If he goes with them, he just might kill them after all! Though God has not completely

abandoned Israel, there is now great strain between them because of their shallow character. Constable's chart for this passage shows point-by-point how the restored covenant is much more restrictive than the original.

Of particular importance is that the Tent of Meeting would no longer be at the Tabernacle in the center of the camp but at Moses' tent, which he moves to the outside of the camp to show that Israel had effectively thrown God out of their house. Also, only Moses would see the glory of God from this point on, and the stone tablets were to be replaced.

Now Moses is concerned about the absence of God's presence as he leads the people out, so God tells him that he'll at least be with him. But Moses needs assurance in a more concrete way after all that has happened, so God arranges a certain place where Moses can only see a glimpse of his back rather than his face, since to see his face would mean instant death. This reminds me of a story I heard long ago, about a little boy who was afraid of a storm and wanted his parents to stay in his room with him so he could go back to sleep. They assured him that God would protect him, but he replied, "Yes, but I need God with skin on!"

## **Exo. 34**

This is the point where God tells Moses to make new stone tablets. Though verse one says God would write on them, verse 28 says Moses does the writing. The clearest reconciliation of these two verses would be that the words are God's, but the actual writing is to be done by human hands. The whole procedure is repeated, of Moses going alone up the mountain and spending 40 days with God, who again dictates all those ordinances.

During this time, God seems to add another festival called the Feast of Weeks, which is described in more detail in other passages. But

commentators argue that this is actually part of the Feast of Firstfruits; that is, Firstfruits is the first day of the week after the Passover, but it begins the counting off of seven weeks to what this verse calls “a harvest in the middle of the year”, meaning the middle of the harvest season, known to us as Pentecost.

All the feasts from Passover to Pentecost constitute the spring feasts, and you might want to check [this source](#) for more detail. As that article points out, Jesus was crucified on Passover, buried on Unleavened Bread, raised on First Fruits, and sent the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. God always has reasons for his rules.

As Moses returns to the camp, he doesn't realize that his face is glowing from being with God. Since it disturbs people, he says he'll cover his face in the future until the glow wears off after each time he meets with God. At least they'd still have some proof that God is with them and Moses is still God's chosen leader for them.

## **Exo. 35-40**

From this point in the text is a repetition of instructions for Tabernacle materials, which they finally begin to build. Constable puts the timing at about a year after Israel left Egypt, which is 9 months after they arrived at Mt. Sinai/Horeb. When it's finally finished (ch. 40), God tells Moses exactly what must be done to initiate the use of all this.

When everything is ready, God's cloud covers the Tent of Meeting and his glory fills it, and whenever the cloud would lift and move, that would be the signal for Israel to break camp and move out. As for the routine from that point on, you might want to see Constable's notes on Exodus for a handy chart of the ancient Hebrew calendar.

## **Conclusion**

If this study of Exodus has taught us anything, it's that God allows his people enough freedom to delay or alter his plans, but not enough to ruin his plans. His people are chosen not because of their perfection but in spite of their imperfection. He does everything possible to shower us with blessings and reluctantly uses discipline to keep us from going too far astray.

His laws for Israel were exclusively for them, as his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was for them, mediated and enacted formally through Moses. If Israel obeys, then their blessings can extend to the world. There would be many more speed-bumps to come for the nation of Israel, and a final one remains even in our day. But through the Messiah, the Passover Lamb, blessings to the world have already begun for those who, like Moses and the tribe of Levi, have accepted God's terms.

# Leviticus

## Introduction

Leviticus is named for its focus on the activities of the priestly tribe of Levi, though it's only mentioned by name in two verses. As the third book of the Pentateuch or Torah, it continues from Exodus with detailed instructions from God to Moses, not just for the priesthood but also for the people.

The book of Leviticus needs a lot of context. Constable's introductory notes include a very good quote: Leviticus has been called the Bermuda Triangle of the Bible, because many Christians get lost in here. Yet the New Testament book of Hebrews draws heavily from it, so there is something to gain from basic familiarity with it.

If Exodus was the preamble of the law, Leviticus is the formal legislation, and nobody likes to trudge through a long legal document. Every detail of worship is spelled out in fine detail, so there could be no need to guess how or whether anyone was pleasing this holy God who keeps them alive in spite of themselves. Unlike other religions, where the adepts and priests hold secret knowledge the unwashed masses are deemed unworthy to receive, the Levitical system is written out for all the people to see.

But keep in mind that what we as Christians can take from this study is the emphasis on holiness and respect for God, not that we must know and practice this law for ourselves. Hebrews 7 explains that with a change of priesthood comes a change of law, and as Jesus taught in parables, you can't mix the old and the new. Above all, the sheer volume of details makes Jesus' fulfillment of it that much more impressive.



Constable also points out that to us today, Leviticus reads in a haphazard and repetitive way, but in fact the various chapters and sections each have their own literary structure, just as any legal document would have different styles of presentation for different aspects of the contract. Constable's notes include a handy outline of the entire book, but we won't be going verse-by-verse through this one; we will only pick out particular areas of controversy or difficulty.

## **The Big Picture**

Probably the most important point to grasp is that these rituals and requirements only cover sin rather than cure it, or they wouldn't need to be repeated as the book of Hebrews points out. We could think of this as renting or leasing legal pardon until actual payment in full could be made at the right time through Jesus, who shouted that legal term on the cross at the very moment it was being shouted by the priests sacrificing the Passover lambs.

The sacrifice of animals, which actually began when God covered Adam and Eve with animal skins, illustrates the substitutionary atonement of the innocent for the guilty. Our society bristles at such an idea on the surface, yet we practice it on some level ourselves. For example, if a child breaks a neighbor's window, it is the parents who make restitution, since the child is not a responsible party under the law.

This is a matter of inability to pay, not a method of teaching children to be reckless and irresponsible, provided of course that the parents make sure the children learn to be more careful. It is an act of mercy, both to the child and to the neighbor as the injured party. In the same way, God provided a way for Israel to compensate him for their offenses on credit so to speak, rather than striking them dead at the first offense. And as with the child needing to see how much it cost the parents to replace the window, so also the Israelites needed to see the terrible price of rebelling against their Creator.

But like anything else put on credit, payment eventually comes due, and the Israelites would be forever unable to make it, so they would need to be redeemed. And of course it isn't just Israel who would need help, so God also would pay the ransom for the whole world held under the power of the evil one, leading to reconciliation between God and all mankind. These three Rs sum up not only the laws of Moses but also the reasons Jesus had to sacrifice himself.

This may be a good point at which to define some terms. Pardon or forgiveness takes away the penalty of a crime but not the guilt, whereas justification takes away the guilt as well, so justification means dropping the charges. But to drop charges when there is still an injured party to compensate would be unjust, unless the injured party accepts the pardon out of mercy. What this means spiritually is that the laws of Moses could bring pardon or forgiveness, but God as the injured party is still owed something— something only the perfect, sinless God-Man could provide. And that is reconciliation with the souls he created.

But what does it mean to be sanctified? Its literal meaning is to be set apart or aside, and it includes the idea of being separated or distinguished for a spiritual purpose, good or bad. But it can also be applied to objects and animals and days, so it isn't necessarily a term of morality or restraint from sin, but more of an identification. At the very least, it signifies the intent or beginning of a spiritual task or state. Ideally, it also includes the completion of that task, or maturity in that state.

1 Cor. 6:11 puts it all together: "You were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God." This accomplishment of Jesus is the final goal that the laws of Moses could never reach but only rent. So the laws of Moses served to sanctify and at least temporarily pardon the people of Israel, but they couldn't justify them so they could live forever in God's direct presence.

Now we need to address the current resurgence of the so-called Hebrew Roots movement, which teaches that Christians must obey at least some of the laws of Moses in order to please God. Yet passages such as Rom. 7:1 and Gal. 2:11-21 make it very clear that such a teaching belittles Jesus' sacrifice, since in Christ we died to the law. How can we please God by taking to ourselves a law that was not only specified for the nation of Israel alone, but was superceded by Jesus' sacrifice? When Paul confronted Peter, it wasn't because Peter was trying to save or justify himself, but because he had lapsed back to practicing the laws of Moses. We cannot please God by doing something that got Peter a rebuke.

Context is everything, and the context of the laws of Moses and the whole Levitical system is the nation and people of Israel. They had physical rites for a physical temple in a physical place on earth, the practice of which would bring physical blessings to the people and land, and the neglect of which would bring physical curses. Some quote Habakkuk 2:4 to claim that salvation was by faith even before Christ, but it doesn't say that; it says that righteous people live by faith, not "go to heaven" by faith.

In hindsight we can all agree that spending eternity in God's presence is granted to "saints" in any era, but they were designated such on account of their good deeds if done in faith. Even so, their souls could not enter heaven until Jesus made his sacrifice and "took captivity captive" per Eph. 4:8. But you will find nothing about eternal salvation of the spirit in this law. You will only find the detailed laws of an earthly theocracy.

Yet again, such a system was designed to keep the relationship between God and Israel as close as possible in this life, so that when people died they could rest in peace knowing God would judge them by how they lived and why. For Israel it meant living according to the whole law; for everyone else, it meant living with a clean conscience, per Rom. 2:14. But for us in the age of grace, it means resting in the finished work of Christ, a gift to be received with

gratitude, rather than a wage to be earned by performing good deeds. And the way we please God is not with rituals or by pretending to be Jews, but by being God's hands in this world.

As pointed out in earlier lessons, the purpose of some of these laws is to regulate rather than establish socio-economic norms such as slavery and the status of women as property. Jesus himself said in Mat. 19:8 that Moses allowed divorce only due to men's hard hearts (ref. Deut. 24), and God's habit is to always choose the lowly and despised to humble the proud and esteemed, per 1 Cor. 1:27-29. 1 Peter 5:5 states that God opposes the proud but defends the humble. If anyone thinks they're granted entitlement because of their flesh, they've missed the point of not only these laws, but ultimately also the Gospel of Grace. We need to keep all this in mind as we study Leviticus, which at least will turn out to be the settled practice of Jewish life for many generations to come.

Now we'll cover three topics: defilement laws, sabbatical and jubilee years, and tithes.

## **Defilement laws**

Generally speaking, any body secretion that could be considered "life liquid" caused defilement. On the positive side, such laws gave people time to rest and heal since they couldn't do their normal religious and civic duties. So we shouldn't think of this as shaming people; instead, it not only gives them rest but also honors God as absolutely holy and perfect.

Regarding uncleanness after childbirth, there is no dancing around the fact that the time of being unclean was twice as long for giving birth to a girl as it was for a boy. Not surprisingly, many take this as a statement of inferiority of being or essence on the part of females, because another lowest-of-sinners has been brought into the world.

But our study of Genesis 3 put any such notion to rest; besides, the baby itself is not called unclean.

A less misogynistic view holds that the mother would want more bonding time with a baby girl, yet this makes little sense unless she expects the baby to be quickly sold as a slave, since women were segregated in society and spent their lives mainly with other women. Any mother can tell you that bonding time doesn't care whether the baby wears pink or blue.

Can we really think that the God who promised Eve that her seed would defeat the serpent's seed would turn around and demean all her seed forever? And did women in ancient near east culture even need God to make sure they knew their place? The simple fact is that God hasn't told us why he's done a lot of the things he's done, and we have to trust him to have valid reasons— not to make up our own, or to use his silence to excuse putting one half the human race over the other.

But what about the vow price of a female being significantly less than that for a male? This was essentially putting a value on a person's life, so is God saying that men outvalue women? Not at all; God is saying that society valued men's lives more because of their earning potential and the monetary value lost if the person died.

1 Tim. 1:9 states that the law is not for the righteous but for the sinful. So in these laws of Moses, the purpose is to deal with sinners, to keep them from going too far astray. What we should conclude from this is not that God made women as inferiors to men, but that sin needs to be kept on a leash. As has been said before, it's a step, not the whole staircase.

Now by this time, those who are convinced that God is indeed a respecter of persons will have concluded that anyone who argues for equality of the sexes is something we might call the Christian F-word: a feminist. They seem to fear that equality of being is a

slippery slope to all kinds of heathen beliefs and practices. But the fact is that this is a study of the Bible, not of people, and it isn't God who ever intended to put one person over another.

As further evidence of this, take note of the fact that Biblical equality does not advocate the murder of babies (abortion), nor the practice of sexual deviancy in any way. In these passages we clearly see what God thinks of homosexuality and bestiality; they are detestable, perverted, and disgusting, so the penalty under the laws of Moses was death. Unlike the blending of fabrics or eating certain animals, this type of sin, like murder or theft, is clearly a line that not even Gentiles are to cross.

Before we move on to the next topic, we might be wondering why secreted blood is unclean, but sacrificed blood is cleansing. As Constable's notes point out, the difference is that the sacrificed blood represents the giving of one healthy life for another, instead of being due to some disease or temporary physical condition.

## **Sabbatical and jubilee years**

There were two kinds of sabbath rest years for the land itself: one every seventh year, and a special one every 7x7 or 49th year, also called the Jubilee year. In both cases they could harvest whatever grew, but they could not plow or prune. For the Jubilee, there were to be trumpet blasts on the tenth day of the seventh month (roughly our October).

Now on the Jubilee year all land reverted to its original tribe. Because of that, the sale price of any land between Jubilees was to be pro-rated to the number of years remaining— which, again, shows that land was leased rather than truly bought and sold, on the basis of how many harvests a person would get.

Land could also be sold to what is called a “kinsman-redeemer” if a poor person really needed the cash, so the land would stay in the family. That is, a clan must not turn a blind eye to the poor among their own, but were obligated to help them as much as they could.

The same principle applied to Hebrews, who were sold as slaves because of poverty, and these were to be released on the Jubilee just as the land was. Neither was interest to be charged to fellow Hebrews; no profit was to be made on the backs of any of them who were in poverty.

At this point I can hear the critics muttering about Jews and money, but do we not give things to our relatives that we would otherwise sell to outsiders? Do we give the same rights and privileges to foreigners that we give to citizens? And to be fair, per [this source](#) about Jews and money, it was the early state-church that pushed the Jews into banking and finance. Since the state-church took such a strong stance against charging interest but needed it to finance their business, they thought God wouldn't mind if they used the Jews to do their banking for them—the same mentality that justified their use of state military power to enforce religious compliance. In both cases, they thought they'd be off the hook because they delegated their dirty work.

This is not unlike the Pharisees who legalistically wouldn't take back Judas' betrayal fee because it was blood money; it was all about legal loopholes rather than principles of ethics or morality. This “solution” of the state-church led eventually to the invention of international banking, first with the Medici family. They predated the Rothschilds by a couple hundred years, but likely served as a prototype for what has become a monstrous oppressing entity over the whole world. So before we break out the pitchforks and torches, we should ask who really created this monster.

## **Tithes**

Finally, let's look at the issue of tithing. We can see that an annual harvest tithe was done on increase or profit from crops and herds—not any and all income or wages, and not from anyone who wasn't a land owner gaining the profit. And it was paid to the temple so the landless Levites would have food, per Num. 18 and Chron. 31.

There was also an annual tithe for all of the people, who would give a tenth of that tithe to the Levites and poor, then take the rest and consume it themselves at the Temple. From the description in Deut. 12:4-19, 14:22-27, and 26:10-11, it was essentially a huge national holiday. Notice especially in Deut. 14:25-26 that the celebration included alcoholic beverages.

On top of that, there was a tithe every third year especially for the poor, which was collected in local towns to keep food banks stocked. This too is not described here but in Deut. 14 and 26. There are some nice infographics about all this [here](#).

You will never hear a church sermon on tithing from the New Testament, because it simply isn't there and cannot be there. Nothing ever connects a local church to the Temple of Israel, or pastors to the priesthood, or the wholesale replacement of food with money, much less putting a guilt trip on all working-class people to tithe their paychecks. Tithing as we know it wasn't officially demanded until about the mid-500s a.d., and it flies in the face of the explicit teaching for Christians in 2 Cor. 8:8-15 and 9:6-7. It is impossible to give (not tithe) without compulsion when it's demanded as a requirement to support an organization's staff and property, or when people are threatened with God's curses. Christians are to be generous, and this cannot and must not be enforced by others.

So Leviticus is not a bucket of proof-texts for control freaks to use against Christians, nor is it a weapon of oppression and cold-bloodedness as the critics allege. It simply governed the civic and religious life of the agrarian nation of Israel, so they could enjoy



God's blessings in the land and be reminded of the hard lessons of the past.

Above all, the laws reminded Israel of what it takes to be in good standing with a holy God, to be considerate of others including animals and property, and even to be considerate of the land itself. All of it, even their own lives, were the property of God, who was graciously allowing them to lease it. This was the relationship, the proper connection between God and people, which underlaid every aspect of Hebrew life. If they understood and accepted this relationship, they would behave accordingly, which would serve as a shadow of the coming age of grace.

# Numbers

## Introduction

Numbers is named for the years Israel spent in the wilderness, and for taking a census for the rebellious generation and then their children who enter the Promised Land. It covers the first census, Miriam's death, the 'jealousy test' a case of temporary mutiny, the plague of serpents, the death of Aaron, the account of Balaam, and the sin with Moab. As with Leviticus, we will focus on overarching principles rather than minute details, which again can be found in Constable's notes. The overarching point is that Israel's wandering was the direct result of their unfaithfulness to God.

## The Big Picture

The first 25 chapters center on the older generation and its eventual disqualification for entering the Promised Land, while chapters 26-36 turn to the next generation. Notice how the Bible is defining *generation* here, which should not be confused with *lifespan*. A generation is defined by parents and children. The wandering was 40 years because that's how long it took all the rebellious parents to die off, not because a generation must be 40 years.

This is why, in the study of Bible prophecy, many err in taking Jesus' statement "this generation shall not pass away" as meaning "40 years after Israel is reestablished in the land" (or after Jerusalem is retaken). At best, Jesus meant that the generation of adults at that time would see the completion of the prophecies. If this is the case, the outside limit would be about 60 years after 1967, if people who were 20 yrs. old live to be 80, which brings us to 2027.

But whether we're studying the past or the future, we see that God will never break his promises, and that includes the perpetuation of Israel as a nation per Jeremiah 31:35-37. That nation will endure as long as the earth and sky, no matter how far the people stray. Replacement- and Fulfillment-Theologians need to read that passage several times.

The first census was to determine the amount of land needed for each of the twelve tribes, as well as the size of the army to clean out the Promised Land. In those early chapters we also see that the tribes camped around the Tabernacle evenly, three on a side, though the Levites camped on all four sides closest to it. Notice that Joseph's two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, make the Levites a 13th tribe in a sense, though one without land.

Of particular interest here is also the animals representing four of the tribes. Rev. 4:7 lists four creatures described as resembling a lion, a calf or ox, a human, and an eagle, which also match the four angelic beings of Ezekiel 1:10. The future city of the Lord in Ezk. 45-48 and the New Jerusalem in Rev. 21 have gates named after the twelve tribes as well, though the order is different. Such facts mitigate against the teaching that since Jesus came, God has dispensed with any physical nation of chosen people.

Now let's look at the 'jealousy test' of chapter 5, which was referenced in the study of Exodus when Moses threw soot into the air and it caused boils to break out on the Egyptians' skin. This test, where a woman suspected of adultery was forced to drink water with dust from the Temple courtyard mixed in, would actually discourage false accusations of adultery by husbands against wives, since her proof of innocence would shame the man. And if the men of Israel wanted to use this one-sided test to show a husband's authority, it also represented God's authority— reminding them of their own unfaithfulness as his spiritual wife.

In any case, society considered women property, and God is simply regulating this practice. The explanation of the actual physical curse seems plausible: that the guilty woman's body would be affected in such a way that she could bear no more children. Constable also contrasts this situation with one where they know the identity of the man who committed adultery with her, in which case both were to be executed according to Lev. 20:10.

Constable notes as well that there was in fact no corresponding right of the wife to test an adulterous husband. Again, though God makes concessions and puts limits on human choices, he never intended the practice or attitude of humans ruling over other humans. But we must always remember that the injustices of this life will be compensated for in the next. People with any kind of entitlement mentality would do well to remember Jesus' warning in Mat. 7:2: We will be judged the way we have judged others.

In chapter 9 God makes provisions for those who couldn't celebrate the Passover due to defilement; they could celebrate it one month later. So again we see that God is not a hard legalist when there are good reasons for inability to follow his decrees. But we should be careful not to use such auxiliary feasts to confuse and obfuscate prophetic symbols.

Now when it comes to prophetic symbols, we cannot gloss over the two silver trumpets to signal Israel to break camp and then move out, and to do so in a controlled and orderly manner. These, not the as-yet unrevealed judgment trumpets of Revelation, were undoubtedly what was referred to in 1 Cor. 15:52 regarding the "last trump".

In Constable's notes you will find a nice little chart showing where and when the nation of Israel moved from one place to another, along with a simple map. But just when the people of Israel seem to be getting their act together, they find an excuse to whine again and earn God's punishment, as you can read starting in ch. 11. Some

take those people as the non-Hebrews who left Egypt with them, which at least would explain where the whining started, though certainly it was picked up and amplified by the Hebrews. This is a lesson for us in not seeking the exciting, flashy, ever-changing trinkets the world offers— as well as when the churches offer the same things in the form of spiritual experiences.

After some more housekeeping for governing the day-to-day whining, the discontent reaches the point where even Aaron and Miriam became a problem. They had an issue with Moses marrying a non-Hebrew, though there is some disagreement over whether she was from Cush or Ethiopia, and they assume he married her after his first wife Zipporah died. At this time, God had only forbidden the Israelites to marry Canaanites, so there was no ethical reason for the complaint.

But what the text seems to emphasize is not the excuse for the complaint but the attitude: They wanted to have equal standing with Moses. Miriam, apparently as the main antagonist, is stricken with the same instant skin disease as Moses had been when he himself doubted God's sanctioning of his leadership. But then Aaron pleads to Moses for her healing. He in turn prays to God, though she would have to stay alone outside of the camp for a week. And lest we point fingers at Miriam, how many of us would tolerate one of our siblings being chosen by God as our leader?

Now we come to the point where the people are to move north and begin battling against the people of Canaan. This is where we first read about the men sent to spy out the land so they could decide how best to attack. One was chosen from each tribe, but the two key names here are Caleb and Joshua, whose original name was changed by Moses from Hoshea.

When the report came back, the spies all agreed that it was a good land. But everyone except Caleb and Joshua was afraid of the people there, not only for the fortified cities but also for the Anakites,

who are equated with the Nephilim. We remember from our study of Genesis that these were the hybrid offspring of fallen angels and humans who had super-human strength, and some of them were giants. Ten of the twelve spies had forgotten that it is always God, not themselves, who wins their battles.

Again the people whine to go back to Egypt, and they add to their sin by threatening to murder Joshua and Caleb for telling them to trust God to give them victory. On top of that, they decide to look for a new leader to take them back to Egypt! So again they bring God to the brink of wiping them out and starting over with Moses, who again intercedes for them and reminds God what the Egyptians would say if he did. For this wholesale rejection of God and complete lack of faith, the adults would never enter the Promised Land. God turns them away until they all die and are replaced by their children.

Meanwhile, and nobody's sure exactly when, some of the sub-Levitical clan of Korah decide to do more than whine: They actually muster a small force to rebel against Moses. They blame him for failure to enter the Promised Land, in spite of the overwhelming evidence of their own guilt. Because of this, God needs to make it clear enough even for the Israelites to see that Moses is his chosen leader. He tells the people to separate themselves from the tents of the leaders of the rebellion, and then the rebels and everything and everyone belonging to them are swallowed up by the earth. As Constable points out, let this be a lesson to anyone claiming authority that doesn't belong to them—which is to say, anyone claiming that the authority of God or the Bible rests with them instead of the Holy Spirit.

After this, God also reconfirms Aaron as high priest by causing buds and even almonds to form on his staff, per ch. 17. So not only has God once-and-for-all put an end to questions over his choice of leaders, he also has them put Aaron's staff into the Ark as a reminder, along with the jar of manna and stone tablets.

After details about priestly service in ch. 18-19, Miriam dies and is buried in the wilderness of Zin. But right away the people begin to whine about having no water, I guess because people with the memory of a goldfish need lots of water. So God tells Moses to assemble them in front of a rock that he is to speak to and make water come out. But instead of speaking, Moses strikes it twice with his staff. It works anyway, but because he struck it instead of only speaking, he and Aaron would be denied entry to the Promised Land. The ones who had been vindicated over and over were not above accountability, which is another lesson for us all.

## **The death of Aaron**

As Israel travels, Moses sends messengers ahead to the king of Edom to request passage through his land, but he refuses to allow it. While nothing more is said about it here, later on this refusal will be a factor in God's judgments against Israel's enemies. After going around them, God tells Moses that Aaron is about to die, so he needs to pass on his priestly office to his son. He does so up on a nearby mountain for everyone to see, and immediately Aaron dies and is buried there.

## **The bronze serpent**

After a victory over the Canaanite city of Hormah, Israel gets impatient having to go around Edom. So they decide this is a good time to whine about free food from heaven, because it's boring. So God wastes no time in punishing them, in this case with poisonous serpents that kill many of them. The solution after they repent is for Moses to make a bronze likeness of one of the snakes and put it up on a pole, such that whoever looked in faith to it would be healed if they were bitten.

This is precisely what Jesus referred to in John 3:14. He too would be “lifted up”, and whoever looks to him in faith is saved. As always, God has reasons for what he does and commands, and he’s not obligated to explain every one of them to us as we often demand. Are any of us really better than Israel, when we keep forgetting what God has done for us, and how many times he’s forgiven us?

## **King Og**

Israel keeps going after this, and you can see in Constable’s notes a map of the various people groups in Canaan, with the strongest being the Amorites. Ch. 21 is where we meet Og, king of Bashan, and they defeat him after the Amorites. There will be more detail about Og in Deut. 3, who is described there as a Rephaite— a giant.

## **Balaam**

Now in ch. 22 we come to the account of Balaam. As Constable notes, commentators are divided over whether or not Balaam was a prophet of God. There is a good case made for ‘not’, but Balaam still appeared to know about the God of Israel and had a respectful fear of him. He was at the very least an influential and sought-after soothsayer, and what he was about to experience would certainly have made him reconsider his views of the supernatural.

As you can read in the passage, at first Balaam simply accepts God’s command not to go with the officials from Moab and curse Israel. But king Balak sweetens the deal, so Balaam waits again for God’s answer— not as though he really considered God as his own God, but that this was the entity who was communicating with him. This time God lets him go with the officials, but he still has to refrain from cursing Israel.



But then God is upset that he goes with them, apparently because God meant for him to choose wisely rather than actually carry it out. So this is where we see the well-known incident of the talking donkey. The donkey sees the Angel of the Lord blocking the path and holding a drawn sword, so it goes off to the side to go around. But Balaam sees nothing and beats the donkey for straying. Then it happens again, this time with the donkey going to the other side and pressing Balaam's foot into a wall, so he beats the donkey again. It happens a third time, and since there's no place left or right to go, the donkey crouches down and gets another beating.

Though it isn't clear in translation, the donkey was not actually enabled to talk on its own, but instead was operated by God like a puppet. The likely reason Balaam carried on the conversation as if talking to a person is because of his deep familiarity with the supernatural. The conversation is actually kind of funny:

- "Why are you beating me?"
- "Because you're making a fool out of me! I'd kill you if I had a sword!"
- "Have I ever acted like this before?"
- "Um, no."

Then God lets him see the angel, who says something just as comical: "If the donkey hadn't tried to avoid me, I'd have killed you but let the donkey go!" Balaam is terrified of course, but God just repeats the command to say what he is told to say.

So in ch. 23 he finally meets up with King Balak, but though they arrange for the curse to be pronounced, it comes out a blessing instead. The king is pretty exasperated, especially since he already paid him, but he decides that the gods just need a little more appeasement. So they try it again in a different place, though to no avail.

In vs. 19 we see a very key statement: that God is not a man, as if he could lie or change his mind. This is a good statement to remember when people claim God is just an exalted man or is like the pagan gods. But the second blessing infuriates Balak so they try a third time. And again, another key statement in vs. 9: blessings on those who bless Israel, and curses on those who curse Israel. Can today's anti-Israel Christians take such a risk, if they are convinced modern Israel is not part of God's plans? Can they guarantee that the nation is completely fake and fulfills no prophecy?

Though Balaam tried 4 times to curse Israel, he not only kept blessing them but also prophesied details about their conquests and their enemies' defeat. God has shown in this incident that he will dispense true messages even through the ungodly, even an animal. God is all about the message, not the messenger. If he decides to use someone who doesn't meet our approval, who are we to get in the way?

## **Moab**

Ch. 25 highlights another lesson for us today: Great achievements are often followed by great failures. After all that has happened, Israel's close proximity to Moab leads the men to chase after the heathen women who invited them to their sacrifices. The order of the text is not chronological, so we have to look ahead to ch. 31 to see that this came at the instigation of Balaam, who had given up directly cursing them and turned instead to enticing them to curse themselves.

God tells Moses to arrest every leader in Israel who sinned with the Moabites, and publicly execute them. But while he's still speaking, one of them brazenly brings a Moabite woman to his tent. So one of the priests grabs a javelin, runs into the tent, and impales both of them at once. God had brought a terrible plague on Israel, but this stops it— after 24,000 had already died.

## **Land disputes**

Ch. 26 begins the final phase of Israel's wandering, with the second census of men of fighting age, to also calculate the amount of land for each tribe. But just when many readers are chalking up another male-centric win, ch. 27 tells of five women who realize that their clan is about to be robbed of land just because their father left no male heirs. God tells Moses that the claim is valid and the women must be granted land. To this we could add the fact that Job also granted inheritance to his daughters. God will only go so far in accomodating social norms.

## **Preparing for the death of Moses**

The text turns to the impending death of Moses, and God has him go up on Mt. Nebo to see the Promised Land that he himself would not be allowed to enter. Moses takes the news well, which might be at least partly due to all the grief he had endured in his life, especially as the deliverer of ungrateful and fickle Israel. Joshua is chosen to succeed him, but at this point the text turns back to the requirements of the feasts.

Along with the feasts we see more about vows, and again we see the lesser social (not spiritual!) value of women. Even so, a woman not viewed as the possession or "honor" of a man was responsible for her own vows. Of course, I strongly dispute Constable's quoted statement that Adam was held responsible for Eve's actions because of his silence. We have already seen in our study of Genesis that no such responsibility or authority existed before they left Eden. It is especially inappropriate to compare a parent-child responsibility with husband-wife. Possession of some humans by others was never God's natural order.

Ch. 31 tells us that Moses has one final task to perform: He must see to it that Israel wipes out Midian. Among the slain is Balaam,

whose clever plan finally caught up with him. And though most people balk at the taking of women and children as plunder, it would be more humane than either killing them or leaving them to fend for themselves.

But there's a further complication here: Moses is angry that they failed to kill all the women. He reminds them that these women were the ones who had enticed them to sin, and that the boys would grow up and try avenge their fathers. So the decision was that only virgin women would be spared. Even so, we might accept God wiping out women and children if they had Nephilim blood in them, but there's nothing in this passage to indicate that this was the reason. Rather, the whole justification is that the people as a whole had earned God's wrath, and their lives belonged to him anyway.

When critics allege that God is a bloodthirsty, cold, vicious tyrant, they ignore the fact that as God all life is his, and if we use our lives in ways that defy him, he has the right of vengeance. Wouldn't innocent children go to heaven anyway? When God took the firstborn of Egypt as vengeance for taking the baby boys of Israel, was that less objectionable?

The question for the critics, though, is whether or not they have the right to point fingers at God. If they had the power, many of them would gladly destroy God and all his followers, out of sheer hatred. We know from Bible prophecy that the world will gladly put all followers of Jesus to death by beheading, starvation, and all other forms of atrocity. Even now they condone violence against others just for ideological differences, and turn a blind eye to the suffering and death of millions that they simply don't like. This very Israel about whom we've been reading is a nation many have desired to wipe off the map. Who are all these critics to judge God?

Moses takes care of a lot of last-minute business after ch. 31, but one point worth mentioning for our instruction is in ch. 35: that God required at least two witnesses to convict anyone of a crime worthy

of death. How often do we as Christians quickly condemn someone on the basis of nothing but one person's claims, or worse, by nothing but suspicion or personal dislike? Remember what Jesus said about being judged by the standards we use to judge others.

Finally, the repetition of land grants reminds us that God's dealings with Israel were— and will be as long as this earth remains— about a people, a land, and a covenant. Yes, the ultimate fulfillment was in Christ; yes, eternity future is spiritual and immortal, though also physical. But at least a thousand years remain for this earth, and we in the body of Christ cannot rush God's plans or tell him they're already completed.

# Deuteronomy

## Introduction

Deuteronomy means that the law was given again, to the generation that would actually enter the Promised Land. It is quoted often in the New Testament, and it's written as a formal suzerainty-vassal treaty between God and the nation of Israel. But rather than just repeating the law, it teaches as well and includes some changes to reflect the consequences of Israel's past failures. The book ends with the death of Moses and his replacement by Joshua.

## Deu. 1

We see in verse 3 that this is the 40th year since leaving Egypt, so it's Moses' last act of guidance for Israel. Constable argues that the name Yahweh appears first in this book and signifies that it is "the name most expressive of God's covenant role with Israel". But the Greek text simply renders it *kurios ho theos* (the Lord God, the existing one), and it seems reasonable to assume that if Yahweh were a formal name, they would have transliterated it as such.

As you continue reading through this chapter, you'll recognize a summary of past events. But notice in verse 39 that it mentions children who were not old enough to know good from bad. This is commonly referred to as *the age of accountability*, though many deny that the Bible teaches it, usually out of a misuse of Psalm 51:5 where David laments that he was "sinful at birth". But that Psalm is clearly using hyperbole to express deep repentance over sin, such as in Job 3:1 where Job curses the day he was born. In this chapter, Moses is reminding the people of the time when their parents failed

to trust God and thought they and their children would die in the wilderness, so the children are being declared innocent.

## **Deu. 2**

We see in verse 11 another mention of the Raphaim, from which the Emmites were descended. So while we can't dismiss all the commands of God to wipe out even women and children as because they weren't fully human, there certainly were quite a few who fit the description. Verse 14 tells us that the 40 years' delay was for the military-age men to die off, so the reason for keeping them out is because they, as the army of Israel, were relying on their own strength instead of God's demonstrated power.

Then in verse 20 we see mention of the Raphaim again, who were displaced by the Ammonites. We need to remember that history is filled with 'indigenous populations' being displaced, so using that as an excuse to punish the current citizens of a land is not only ignorant but also proves we are no better.

## **Deu. 3**

Here we're given a little more detail about King Og of Bashan. There is disagreement over whether verse 11 is talking about his bed or his sarcophagus, but it was over 13 feet long and 6 feet wide. Notice verse 26 where Moses has asked God one too many times if he could please enter the Promised Land, and God retorts, "Enough of that!" The phrase is sometimes rendered as something like "Let it be sufficient for you"— which should sound familiar to us, since God told Paul the same thing about the thorn in his flesh in 2 Cor. 12:9. It's possible that God was not being as gentle with Paul as we've always assumed. The point is that even God's patience is limited.

## Deu. 4

Now in ch. 4 we again see the conditional nature of this covenant ("so that"). So Moses has to remind them of their history with God, the God who has no equal or rival, who proved that he doesn't play favorites when it comes to sin, since he punished Moses for striking the rock instead of speaking to it, though the people provoked him.

But starting in verse 25 is a prediction as much as a warning: Should Israel stray to other gods in the future, they will be exiled from the land, but God will hear them if they sincerely repent and seek him out. The reason for this mercy is in verse 31: God keeps his promises no matter what. This is an over-arching principle forgotten and despised by replacement theologians of all kinds. The covenant God swore to keep can never be revoked, and it concerned physical descendants living on physical land. Some of those promises still remain to be fulfilled.

Starting in verse 32 is God's own testimony of his unique relationship with this nation, proved by his actions over and over, and how this backs up his claim to be the one and only God— not one of millions as the false religions teach. According to Constable, verse 37 is the first formal declaration of Israel as God's chosen people— a choice not made due to their exemplary character, but to God's unilateral promises to Abraham.

National election does not guarantee individual salvation but physical blessings and the means by which the Saviour would come. The purpose of God's statements is to reveal the character of this perfect and holy God, who in spite of the sins and faults of his people, will keep his promises even if only a fraction of them remain in the end. Israel is under contract as a nation or one entity, though it is made up of individuals. We cannot and must not confuse the two; what God says to a group is not necessarily said to the people as individuals. We see this also in the letters to the seven churches



in Revelation; they had collective issues with individual exceptions. Otherwise, Jesus would only have addressed individuals.

## **Deu. 5**

After verse 40, Moses gives the law to the people for the last time—the final form of the legal contract. Note especially verses 2-3, where Moses states point blank that this covenant is not the one with their ancestors, but with the nation as composed of the twelve tribes who were standing there at this time. This hardly means that we can ignore the character of God and his revelation of what he wants from us, namely our willing return of his love. But it does mean that we are not under this covenant. Certainly we all know that taking what does not belong to us is against the character of God, but we are not the nation of Israel with a conditional, two-party contract.

So the over-arching lesson for everyone is to teach us what God wants from us: gratitude, humility, compassion, holiness, and consistency. This what Jesus taught as well; love God and people, treat others as you wish they'd treat you. And Paul, writing to the Romans, said that love fulfills the law, because love does no harm to a neighbor. Those are the universal laws, outside of any covenant. They are the underlying moral base for the national laws of Israel, but in no way does that make us Israel in any sense at all. They were charged with modeling God's character to the other nations, to the smallest detail of their lives.

Now for some brief observations on the Ten Commandments in verse 15, since these have already been covered in the study of Exodus. Constable points out a difference between the fourth Commandment here and the one in Exodus 20:11. Before, the reason for observing the Sabbath was that God made the world in six days; here in verse 15 it's to remind them of their trek out of Egypt as another act of creation: the nation of Israel.

## Deu. 6

This is where we find what Jesus called the greatest commandment: to love God with more than mere outward conformity. The heart was believed to be where our thoughts originated, the soul was the invisible source of the will and personality, and of course strength was the physical, outwardly-visible person. So this means to love God with every part of our being, to act from relationship rather than legalistic obligation.

Again, this doesn't mean either that outward performance was optional for Israel on the one hand, or that outward performance is mandatory for the church on the other. Rather, both have one thing in common: a relationship between Creator and creature, not some cold stimulus-response mechanism. Actions can be done without the heart, but they will always follow the heart. Or as Jesus put it, your heart will be where your treasure is. The difference between forced and voluntary compliance is like the difference between a teacher who is only there for a paycheck, and a teacher who genuinely cares about the students and wants to see them excel. God wants our hearts, not our completed checklists.

There are some good points in Constable's notes about practicing what we preach, and living like we have this relationship in mind. But it raises the question of passing down more than rules and traditions to the next generation; how do we pass down our convictions? It isn't just a simple matter of making rules and following them slavishly, but of explaining why we do what we do. "Because I say so" or "It's our tradition" are not valid explanations. There are certainly times or situations where explanations will have to wait, but we should make the best of every opportunity to give good reasons for our beliefs and actions. If what we believe and do is right, our children will pick up on that—just as they will also pick up our faults.

## **Deu. 7**

Chapters 7-11 give practical examples of how Israel was to carry out the covenant. Sometimes this would include some pretty harsh actions, which is part of their being “chosen”. Being chosen doesn’t mean people can do whatever they want or that they won’t have to do any unpleasant tasks— which brings us to verse 7, where God explicitly states what it means: “I didn’t choose you because of your superiority, but in spite of it.” God has shown time and again that it’s only due to his patience and mercy that they exist at all. In the same way, we as Christians should not think that we enjoy God’s blessings because we deserve them, any more than we should point fingers at the suffering of others and say they deserve it.

## **Deu. 8**

Chapter 8 verse 3 is where we see one of the scriptures Jesus used to resist the devil during his temptation in the wilderness: “Man does not live by bread alone but by every word from the mouth of God”. Here again we see the “spirit of the law”, and the physical blessings to Israel for willing obedience— or punishment for rebellion, as good parents discipline their wayward children. Blessings are not to be taken for granted, nor lessons of discipline forgotten.

## **Deu. 9**

Here God gives the justification for Israel’s impending elimination of the nations in Canaan. Verses 4-6 state that it is only because those nations are so evil that God is having Israel wipe them out, not because Israel is so good. In fact, God calls them “a stubborn people”, hardly the kind of thing a Jewish writer would invent. This brutal honesty is one of the many pieces of evidence against the

claim that the Bible is fiction. This point is driven home through the end of the chapter.

## **Deu. 10-11**

These two chapters are a reminder that Israel had broken the original covenant, but that God graciously allowed it to be repaired, albeit with some “glue” this time. He could have legally “divorced” Israel but instead chose to give them another chance, mostly due to Moses’ intercession. All he ever wanted from them is to be kind and faithful, and they had no excuse for failing to meet that demand, especially since they had seen God’s great deeds with their own eyes.

## **Deu. 12-14**

There’s a nice chart in Constable’s notes showing how each of the Ten Commandments is fleshed out in chapters 12 through 25, which is what we’d expect of a formal suzerain treaty of the time.

Near the end of ch. 12 is another lesson for us: The Israelites were never to study the religious practices of other nations, because of the danger of adopting their practices. Many Christians have been ensnared by a morbid curiosity of other religions under the pretense of “knowing our enemy”. Entire “ministries” are devoted to the detailed study of the occult, only to subconsciously weave it into their own interpretation of scripture. Others study religions claiming to be restorations of— or improvements on— the New Testament, but they aren’t anchored strongly enough on the truth, so they compromise because they want to accept everyone.

On an individual level, we also tend to do this with relationships; we think we can change someone or overlook serious issues, and as a result we tolerate or adopt many sins. Instead of putting on the full

armor of God, we wear the skin of the chameleon, and we become like the bland salt Jesus warned about. Then, when the fake prophets come along as tests from God, we fall like the house built on sand in one of Jesus' parables. Plants that spread quickly in shallow ground are easy to pull up, and so are Christians who spend their time running from one intriguing spiritual teaching to the next.

## **Deu. 15-18**

Another lesson can be found in verse 11, where God says that there will always be poor people in the land. Critics jump to the conclusion that God is cold-hearted or powerless or imaginary, since otherwise there would never be poor, sick, or injured people. But as with false prophets, these were permitted in Israel to test the faithfulness of the better-off. Can we be like forgetful Israel and presume that God is not performing his duties properly, or that he won't give fair compensation in the eternity?

But someone will object that verse 4 says there won't be any poor in Israel. Yet there are always conditions, per the "if" in verse 5, in this case that all Israel is living in obedience to the laws. So verse 11 simply assumes that they will fail to some degree through the generations to come.

There is another gem in 17:3, where the Bible expressly forbids the worship of the sun, moon, or anything else in the sky. Critics claim that the Bible is all about sun worship since Jesus is the "Son" of God, which even on its face is an absurd and ignorant linguistic fallacy. They ignore explicit teachings like this in favor of their cherry-picked "connect the dots" game. But it's even more tragic that so many Christians cannot point this out, because they don't know the scriptures any better than the critics— and sometimes, less so.

## **A word about prejudice**

I will follow the example of scripture by not overlooking the sins of Constable on the topic of women. I've sung his praises for the most part so far, but the time has come to get in his face about a terrible sin. In his notes he makes a statement about the need for credible witnesses so justice would be served at all times, then adds, without comment, a quote from Josephus that claims Moses said women and servants were never to be considered credible witnesses.

I would have expected Constable to at least cite Judge Deborah, who was the top official in Israel and a prophet who spoke for God as any male prophet did. We could also cite Esther, whose testimony and wisdom were proven very credible and accepted as such by a society that had even less regard for women. Or what of the ideal woman of Proverbs 31, who is known for her wisdom? Or Abigail, wife of a man whose name meant "fool", whose wisdom and bravery saved her clan and eventually got her married to King David?

Both Josephus and Constable should be ashamed of themselves for their prejudice and sin of omission. Sadly, this sort of treachery against half the human race is promoted and enshrined to this day, by most of the Christian world. If you search on articles about women in the Bible, or the judges and prophets of Israel, you will be hard-pressed to find any honest and complete studies. The seminaries churn out Christian leaders with this doctrine of devils, and the bookstores are filled with their ungodly elevation of the flesh.

Especially egregious is the common claim that women like Deborah or Huldah were only chosen because no suitable men were available, so God was either scraping the bottom of the barrel or shaming the men. But scripture never even hints at such a thing; it is pure speculation, putting words in God's mouth that he never uttered. All who do this will be put to shame at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Since God promised curses to Israel if they became like the nations around them, what will he do to Christians who bow to the cultural prejudices of the world?

Even so, there's a nice chart in his notes about the functions of priests as compared to prophets, but it should serve as another indictment for the omission of Huldah as a teacher of scripture since she fits the Priest category. Even if *merely* a prophet, she delivered authoritative messages from God, which has been almost completely forbidden for Christian women.

## **Deu. 19-20**

Verse 19 states that a false accuser was to be punished with the verdict they had hoped to bring against the accused. This would be an excellent deterrent to a common problem today. Then in 20:18 God gives the clear reason why not one living thing was to remain in the Canaanite cities: that Israel would learn the detestable worship practices of the survivors. But notice also in these war passages that not every enemy outside of Canaan was to be wiped out completely, because they were more distant and less of a threat of corruption.

## **Deu. 21**

Verse 10 begins a section on wives, and again God shows that he is not "bowing to culture" by treating female captives of war as garbage. A captured woman is to be granted a month to mourn the family she left behind, either by death or separation, and the man who captured her is not to touch her until that time is completed. Even if the man chooses not to keep her, he can't sell her. Both of these things kept society's granting of male privilege from going too far. At least Constable's comments on this passage are tolerable.

Since it's quite unlikely that Israel would have learned any lessons from the "favored wife" problems of the patriarchs, God has to regulate polygamy, another cultural norm he never sanctioned. Then the topic is a rebellious son, but Constable has to "presume" that it

would also apply to a rebellious daughter. And again, this is talking about a habitual problem, not an occasional lapse by the son, or a moment of rage on the part of the parents.

In the final section of ch. 21, it says that the body of a person who has been executed for a crime is to be hung on a tree but buried before sundown. This is where we read about a curse on anyone hung on a tree, and Constable points out that this hanging was the result— not the cause— of that curse. This is something to keep in mind when reading the Gospel accounts of Jesus' execution.

## **Deu. 22**

In ch. 22 we see a very brief but overly emphasized prohibition against men and women wearing each other's clothes. At the time, such a practice was mostly for occult or magical reasons, not the modern concept of cross-dressing. Of course, the blurring of sexes is condemned in both Testaments, but it should also be known that both men and women wore long robes in those days and in that culture, such that "dresses" as we know them aren't what Moses had in mind.

This seems to be part of the overarching theme of separation, which is the meaning of holiness. Critics love to pick out verses like this and wave them in the faces of Christians who wear cotton-polyester blends, or plant a garden with more than one type of seed. They don't seem to understand context or covenants, much less the principle behind the separation, which is ultimately that Israel was to be distinct from all other nations.

Now back to women issues, and again the slanted playing field as defined by culture. At least God looks out for the woman falsely accused of being promiscuous. But in spite of the general law of making false accusers suffer the fate of the accused, in the case of a husband who has falsely accused his wife he is not to be put to



death as she would have been if guilty. Instead, he has to pay a heavy fine to her father, and he can never divorce her. But remember that in that society it would have been a favorable outcome for her, since had the man been put to death, she would likely be impoverished.

The remainder of ch. 22 deals with various circumstances of rape, and verse 30 is the likely reference for the scathing rebuke in 1 Cor. 5 about a man sleeping with his stepmother. Though not identical situations, the principle seems the same, and in the case of the Corinthians, even the Gentiles were shocked that anyone would do this.

Before we go on, there's an interesting statement in Constable's notes, that passages concerning women and marriage require discernment as to whether the rules are cultural, temporary, bendable, or the opposite of all that. Only now, after having earlier disparaged all women of all cultures for all time as being unfit to serve as witnesses, does he consider the importance of context. The driving force of such an inconsistent approach to scripture is fear, since women as equals would mean men are not automatically entitled to privileges and power.

This is part of the larger issue of the "plain reading" method, where words are lifted off the page without regard to context, common sense, or consideration of the scriptures as a whole. Some live in the fear that if we need to "rightly divide the Word of Truth" instead of skimming it off the surface, then we're opening the door to disrespect of scripture and all kinds of heresies. But in fact it's the "plain reading" method (I call it the "lazy reading" method) that disrespects scripture, treating it as if it had been written in a cultural and linguistic vacuum. To wrongly divide the scripture is to divide the Body of Christ.

We should also mention the issue of polygamy, since many point to these ancient laws of Israel and note that God regulated it instead of

forbidding it. But that would be severely regressive, since God via Israel was trying to lift up the human race, not keep it in bondage. Many, but not all, have come to realize the inherent injustice and inhumanity of slavery, yet refuse to let go of patriarchy, which is only different in degree rather than kind. There is simply no excuse anymore, especially among professing Christians, to claim entitlement on the basis of the flesh.

## **Deu. 23**

Moving on to rules about personal hygiene, especially regarding when the army is camped somewhere, we see again that substances leaving the body are seen as unclean because they signify some kind of abnormality. But Constable decided to throw in a little Calvinism here and claim that it signifies “total depravity”. Who can say, as he does, that “there is nothing good in man”, when scripture speaks of “righteous” people like Abraham or Mary? Never let an aberrant ideology drive interpretation of scripture.

Verse 18 is the rule against giving money to the temple that would be considered “ill-gotten gains”, which was the likely command the Pharisees had in mind when they hypocritically wouldn’t put Judas’ betrayal fee into the treasury. Many try to rationalize vices such as gambling or profits from shady business deals by giving “generously” to charity. Some of the worst criminals in history were philanthropists, because public charity tends to get people to overlook hidden crimes. The end does not justify the means.

## **Deu. 24**

On that happy note, we’re back to women’s issues again. Few teachings have ruined as many lives as that Jesus forbade any and all divorce except for unfaithfulness, as skimmed from the surface of Mat. 5:32 and 19:9. To his credit, Constable brings up the context of

those passages, which was that two rabbis were at odds over the precise meaning of the law here. One claimed that Moses permitted “no-fault divorce”, which would allow a man to dump his wife for no reason, likely because he wanted someone younger and prettier. The other claimed that Moses’ intent was that some kind of sexual sin would be required to justify divorce.

Many still miss the big picture here about compassion. A couple already divorced in relationship should not be forced to stay together. But on the other extreme, women are not to be treated as dispensable toys. The Pharisees wanted Jesus to take sides in their legalistic debate, and Jesus simply stated the law as written, meaning he took the conservative, compassionate side. He was rebuking their heartlessness, not enforcing it.

Wolves in sheep’s clothing have been teaching that God demands women stay with even the most abusive husbands, even to the point of death, because this is somehow “suffering for Jesus”. Such twisted, cold-blooded misogyny! Jesus never taught that believers should expect persecution from other believers. The blood of murdered, maimed, or verbally abused wives is on the hands of those who have twisted Jesus’ words. God is no respecter of persons. At least Constable brings up Paul’s teachings on the matter for Christians, and that what God permits is not necessarily what God intended. If only he would apply that truth across the board.

Verse 16 says that children and parents are not to be executed for each other’s crimes. What does that do to the Calvinistic teaching that God holds us all guilty for the sins of Adam and Eve? How could God’s law be more compassionate and just than God? Guilt cannot be inherited, though consequences can spread to the innocent. We’ll see this principle again in Ezekiel 18.

## **Deu. 25-29**

In this section we see the teaching about keeping inheritances intact by making sure there are male heirs. This is the law the Sadducees used to try and trap Jesus, by the hypothetical case of a woman who eventually went through seven brothers, so whose wife would she be in heaven? They didn't believe in life after death, so they tried to use this law to prove their belief. But what the modern western mind objects to is the idea that anyone would be forced by law to marry someone they don't love. Here again, culture differences need to be understood, or we misapply them as moral lessons.

From this point, the text goes into various civil remedies and the tithing system, and the repeated agreement of the people of Israel with the law. By ch. 28 we see the lists of blessings and curses, and we would remind "Hebrew Roots" believers that you can't have one without the other. Who would want to trade salvation by faith under the light burden of the priesthood of Jesus, for the 613 laws of Moses with its curses for breaking them? History has shown that these curses were very literal and physical. Is this trading of the easy for the impossible not the same as Esau despising his birthright?

## **Deu. 30-34**

Now in ch. 30 God expresses the final end to which even the most defeated and scattered Israelites could look in hope. The day has not yet been reached when all of these promises have been fulfilled, but we can rest assured they will be, literally and physically on this earth. Verse 19 is a final appeal to choose wisely, an impossible task for the Calvinist interpretation.

In 31:14 it's time for Moses to hand over his job and authority to Joshua, and God tells them that Israel will quickly sink back into idolatry, in spite of everything. Then in verse 24 he has Moses write down the law on a scroll and put it beside the Ark of the Covenant

as a written witness against the people when they rebel. On top of that, Moses calls heaven and earth as witnesses.

In 34:4 God has Moses ascend to the top of Mt. Nebo so he can see the Promised Land, and then he dies. He is buried in the land of Moab but no one knows precisely where, which implies that God buried him himself. But if we consider the laws of Moses his “last will and testament”, his death made it active and the people were legally bound at that point.

## **Conclusion**

This brings us to the end of Deuteronomy, and the end of the Pentateuch or Torah. The Torah explains the origin of the world, the weakness of humans regarding sin and separation from our Creator, and the Creator’s merciful plan to restore it all without violating his character, which is not mere raw sovereignty but also compassion and patience regarding our free will to do stupid things. To only know the end of the story is to be ignorant of the story, so this beginning of the Bible should be familiar to Christians at least on the basic level.

From this point on, the scriptures describe the steps between the foundation and the pinnacle, and the journey is as important as the destination. So we can’t leave the theater at the end of the overture, nor enter the theater at the final act. The Bible is a unit, and a book many have died to preserve. Let’s at least treat those devout martyrs with some respect by holding the Bible in high esteem, not merely with words but with actions.

# Joshua

## Introduction

The book of Joshua continues the account of Israel as it begins to enter the Promised Land, up to the time of Joshua's death. You can see the book outline and other introductory details in Constable's notes, so we'll be focusing on key points in the text.

## Joshua 1-2

Joshua is now the new leader of Israel, by the direct command of God and with a reaffirmation of the physical, literal boundaries of the Promised Land. This land will not simply be handed to them though; they will have to conquer it, of course with God's help, if they remain obedient.

As mentioned in the study on Deuteronomy, there are some topics where the otherwise astute Dr. Constable makes statements in his notes that contradict scripture, which is why we need to pay attention to the account of Rahab. It is reasonable to deduce, as he does here, that Rahab knew about the God of Israel, since some of the patriarchs had been in the area before, and news of their exploits had spread throughout the region.

There is some question about whether she simply ran an inn or was also a prostitute. But her mention in scripture is noteworthy, not only because she is never described in derogatory terms, but also because she will turn out to be an ancestor of King David and ultimately the Messiah. This should be a cautionary lesson for modern Christians who look down on those they deem worse sinners than themselves. On the other hand, it's almost comical that

Constable is less concerned with her occupation than the fact that she lied to protect the Israelites who came to secretly scope out the land before their attack. As you read this section of scripture, you'll see that all the people were terrified of Israel because they knew they served the most powerful God. So Rahab pleads with the spies to swear they will spare her and her family, and the deal is made in verse 20.

But what of this issue of lying? We recall the account of the two Hebrew midwives in Egypt, who at the very least didn't give all the facts to Pharaoh, and a technical half-truth still violates "the spirit of the law" when it comes to intent to deceive. The full truth was that they had no intention of obeying Pharaoh's orders, so this was a legal loophole and cover story. And what about 1 Sam. 16, where Samuel is told to go to the house of Jesse to anoint the replacement for King Saul, who would kill him if he found out about it? God himself tells Samuel to use a cover story. Is this not deception? Constable doesn't comment on this question in his notes on 1 Samuel.

To argue, as Constable does, that "the evil that was mixed with the good was not imputed to her", is to say that the end justifies the means. There is no escaping the fact that scripture is condoning this, if indeed Rahab sinned by lying. To say that God did not sanction her lie, and that he probably intended for the spies to die, is putting words in God's mouth and playing the judge against Rahab.

There is much debate about this issue, but my personal opinion is that the key to sinful lying is intent to harm, or the attempt to cover one's own sin. The midwives were not trying to subvert the government of Egypt; Samuel was not trying to start an insurrection; Rahab was not trying to betray her people. All of them were trying to serve God and his chosen people.

I find Constable's notes very puzzling at times. After cautioning the reader not to "overestimate Rahab's confession of faith", he states

that God spared her because of her faith, and that her actions proved her sincerity and confidence of rescue! I'm not quite sure what else Rahab would have had to say or do in order to merit approval for her confession of faith.

## **Joshua 3-5**

Now to ch. 3, where Israel prepares to cross the Jordan River. God tells Joshua that he will perform a miracle so the people respect him as the replacement for Moses. As soon as the feet of the priests carrying the Ark of the Covenant touch the water, it will pile up and allow them to cross on dry ground, just as the Red Sea parted for Moses. Verse 16 states that it piled up at a town far upstream, and the priests stood in the riverbed with the Ark until the whole nation had gone across.

As we near ch. 6, Israel is about to face the destruction of Jericho. But just before they get there, Joshua sees a man with a drawn sword, so he asks which side he belongs to. But the answer was that this was the commander of the Lord's army. Similar to the burning bush incident for Moses, the man tells him to remove his shoes because he's standing on holy ground. So again we see echoes of the calling of Moses.

## **Joshua 6**

6:3 says that only the warriors actually marched around Jericho, rather than the whole nation as some presume. They were to march around the city once per day for six days, along with priests carrying the Ark and blowing rams' horns. On the seventh day they would march around seven times, and then the rams' horns were to signal the army to attack. Once again we see that "the last trump" is a signal for God's people to move. The seventh trumpet of Revelation is never called the last trump.



As they were about to shout, Joshua tells them that all the plunder belongs to the temple treasury, and that Rahab and her family are to be spared. Then they shout and the walls collapse, apparently just crumbling rather than being pushed in or out as has often been claimed.

It is the two spies who were saved by Rahab who are to get her and her family safely out of the city, and according to verse 25 she was still alive at the time this account was written. Then Joshua pronounces a curse on anyone who would ever try to rebuild Jericho. This curse would come true when someone named Hiel rebuilds the fortifications as stated in 1 Kings 16:34.

## **Joshua 7**

However, not everyone obeyed the command to turn over all the loot to the temple treasury. The victory over Jericho was clearly God's doing, but this didn't mean there would be no consequences for disrespecting God afterwards. A man named Achan keeps some of the riches for himself, but God is furious with the nation as a whole, showing again that God does indeed treat a group as a single entity and not merely a collection of individuals.

Meanwhile, Joshua had sent spies ahead to a place called Ai, and they reported that it would be a pushover so the whole army wouldn't be needed. But the self-confident army was routed by Ai. So Joshua, not knowing why this happened, whines to God and asks him if he brought Israel across the Jordan just to destroy them— an echo of the faithless generation that kept wanting to return to Egypt.

Then God snaps at Joshua to get up off his face, because it was not God's but Israel's own fault that this happened. The people are to prepare themselves for God's wrath the next day, after he sets up a method by which the individual responsible would be outed.

The penalty for the perpetrator would be the burning of himself and all his property, though we'll see shortly that they would first be stoned to death. God never sanctioned the burning, hanging, impalement, or torture of any living person. Many had died because of Achan's theft of what belonged to God, so the penalty was appropriate; he and all his family were stoned to death and then burned. This would also impress upon the rest of the nation how seriously God takes his honor and their compliance.

## **Joshua 8**

Now Israel's entire army is sent to destroy Ai, but this time God would allow them to keep the spoils of war. We should learn from this that timing is much a part of God's will as action, because what is forbidden today may be allowed tomorrow— if we're patient. Failure to wait on God's timing can be deadly.

Notice the strategy of the attack: They used the earlier defeat to fool the army of Ai into thinking it was winning again because Israel was retreating. So they begin chasing Israel's army and leave no soldiers behind to protect the city. At that moment Joshua signals the soldiers hiding on the west side to attack and burn the city. When the army of Ai realizes what happened, they freeze in the realization of their tactical blunder and are then attacked from both sides.

## **Joshua 9**

If the region was terrified of Israel before, it was much more so now. So various nations form an alliance, and a clever plan is hatched by the army of Gibeon: They would send out a delegation pretending to have been on a long journey from a distant land, who had heard of Israel's exploits and wanted to make peace with them.

But though Joshua asks them many questions, he forgets the biggest one: to ask God. So they make a treaty and seal it with an oath. It took a few days to find out they'd been fooled, and it prevented them from carrying out God's command to destroy their people. So they made them slaves instead.

The lesson for us here is that we cannot keep God in a box we only open on Sundays. Major decisions should always be brought to him, especially regarding the modern habit of blindly accepting into our Christian fellowship anyone who tells us what we want to hear. In our desire to present ourselves as ultra-loving and accepting, we invite wolves through the main gate to mingle with the sheep— and the wolves don't even have to wear sheep's clothing anymore. We have neglected the command to "test the spirits", yet we act surprised when we see the Christian community rotting from within.

But Constable raises a good question: Doesn't the deception of the Gibeonites parallel that of Rahab? The enslaved Gibeonites turned out to remain faithful to Israel and God throughout Israel's history, though their people had been marked by God for total destruction, just as Jericho was. So can we say that their profession of faith was insincere? Or, I would ask Constable, should we be careful not to "overestimate" that profession of faith? I would also point out that unlike Gibeon, Rahab did not try to deceive Israel or God, but her own condemned people.

Be that as it may, we as Christians must never make alliances or partnerships with those who are openly hostile to God, the Bible, or the Christian faith; not only from this example but also from the warning about an unhealthy interest in other religions. The word "pastor" simply means "shepherd", and the job of the shepherd is to not only nurture the sheep but also guard them from spiritual damage. But instead of guardians, many of them have become "hired hands" on more than one level, leaving the bulk of the Christian community defenseless and ineffective. Christians need more than comfort and encouragement.

## Joshua 10-24

Moving on to ch. 10, we see the city of Jerusalem mentioned for the first time in scripture. Because Gibeon had made peace with Israel, the cities who expected to be conquered next formed an alliance to attack Gibeon. But because Israel owned them as slaves, they had the right to ask for help, and God tells Joshua to give it.

Verse 11 says that in addition to the army of Israel routing the enemy, God threw down large hailstones from the sky. Rather than some kind of meteor shower it seems to be hail as we know it, though larger stones than we'd ordinarily expect. Still, the true miracle is that it only killed the enemy, not Israel.

Now we come to the famous incident of God making the sun and moon stand still so Joshua and his army could have more time to finish off the enemy. Constable's notes simply present several views on this incident, without really reaching a satisfying conclusion. The Hebrew text then directs the reader to something called "the book of the upright", the accurate meaning of Jasher, for more detail.

All of the theories presented in the notes presume that modern cosmology is correct, such that the sun and moon only appear to move across the sky because the earth is a spinning ball. If instead we take Biblical cosmology as presented throughout both testaments, the need to speculate evaporates; the sun and moon move over a stationary earth, and they stopped moving for about a day's worth of time. That would be the simplest explanation.

Yet the need to find extra-Biblical reports of this long day remains. The problem in either case is that the tool we would use to calculate this long day involve the movements of heavenly luminaries—which is the problem we're trying to solve. As far as I've been able to determine, there are some possible corroborating accounts, such as the Greek myth of Apollo's son Phaethon altering the sun's course

for a day, and the myths of the Maori and Mexican people where there was an abnormally long night.

At any rate, attempts to explain how this worked under modern cosmological theory are equally mythical, such as that it was some kind of “trick of light”. Another theory, variation in earth’s wobble or rotation speed, would have been reported in the historical records of cultures across the world as a devastating and uncanny event. In the case of rotation speed, a sudden stop would send everything on the surface flying off at a tangent; if a change in wobble, the sloshing oceans would have created massive tidal waves on all the coastlands. In fact, something similar is predicted in Revelation as “the roaring and tossing of the sea” that causes people’s hearts to fail from fear, though the same effect would result if God shook a flat earth as one might shake a bowl of water.

This all impacts how we approach the Bible: Should it bow to popular cosmological theory that forbids anyone to question it, or should such theory bow to the Bible? Astrophysics, and what is called “science” in general, prides itself on always changing but has a history of self-embarrassment. Today’s indisputable scientific fact is often tomorrow’s laughable ignorance. In contrast, the Bible has a history of being proved right and accurate again and again. This is not about engineering or medicine, but about the philosophies called astrophysics and evolution that are masquerading as science. In fact, empirical science is the enemy of evolution and all that stems from it.

## **Conclusion**

What this study hasn’t covered is primarily the mopping up of Canaan during Joshua’s lifetime, though much more would remain to be done after his death. We see once again that God clearly marks out the boundaries of the Promised Land and each tribe’s territory in physical, geographical terms; this distinguishes it from claims of

spiritual allegory or that the Promised Land is actually somewhere else in the world, such as Africa or even the north pole.

Joshua echoes the life of Moses one more time by making sure the people understand, remember, and commit to the law. Then he dies at the age of 110, the same lifespan as Joseph. But as the end of the book records, Israel's respect for the elders and God only lasts as long as the elders do, and they never again return to this level of obedience and blessing. The next phase of Israel's history will be a shift from the time of the patriarchs to the time of the Judges.

# Judges

## Introduction

The book of Judges is about a series of leaders in Israel who were not chosen by parentage or prestige but by God, for specific purposes as Israel finished settling in the Promised Land. More importantly, it's the story of Israel's devolvment into anarchy.

## Judges 1

After the death of Joshua, God did not appoint a successor. Each tribe was left with the responsibility of taking control of the land allotted to it, with God only raising up a leader of the nation for certain situations. God never intended for Israel to be like other nations with their kings and dynasties, and for at least 300 years that's how it was. In this study, we will meet names familiar to us from the New Testament, especially the "faith" chapter of Hebrews.

Constable makes a good point regarding the failure to completely wipe out the Canaanites: that when people fail to deal with external enemies as God commands, they turn on each other instead. This is painfully true of the Christian world; we treat fellow believers with more disdain and revulsion than we do the forces of Satan, who just sit back and laugh because we're our own worst enemies. Does a Christian read a translation you don't like? Believe salvation has a different duration than you believe? Have an opinion about free will that you think they shouldn't have? Let people preach and teach whose flesh is not what you accept? Ask yourself if that is your worst enemy, though they profess saving faith. And ask yourself what message is being sent by your hostility against that person.

## Judges 2

Over and over we see the phrase, “they did not conquer the people”, and finally God steps in to ask them why they’re not doing what they know they should. The people quickly “repent”, but we all know how long that will last. After a brief recap in verses 6-10, the “repentant” Israelites had fallen fast and hard into the worship of the false gods of Canaan.

We can see here especially in verse 16 that God kept raising up leaders to help the whiny Israelites, who had quickly lapsed to the “lather-rinse-repeat” cycle of unfaithfulness, suffering, and only briefly returning to God. Just as Joshua had made a vow to not destroy the Gibeonites and kept it regardless of their treachery, so also God would not utterly destroy Israel because of the vows he made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Finally God says he will no longer help Israel drive out the other nations at all. But notice verse 22: Joshua had left those nations there to test Israel, and they failed miserably. Yet how often do we fail our tests? Can we say that when God answers our prayers, that he doesn’t also leave us with some challenges to overcome?

## Judges 3

Now God names the nations who were spared as a test, at least one of which every Christian should be familiar with: the Philistines, who would become their arch-enemies, and after whom the Romans would name the area after 70 a.d. (Palestine).

In Constable’s notes there’s a nice chart of all the judges, and it’s good to see that he has not ignored or trivialized Deborah, at least in the chart. Other key names include Gideon and the final judge Samson. Later he notes that the twelve judges may be an



indictment against the twelve tribes, and there's another chart showing the tedious pattern of this part of Israel's history.

## Judges 4

Now we'll skip ahead to Deborah in ch. 4, though I would encourage you to read through the account of Ehud, which is pretty straightforward and covered well by Constable. Verses 4-5 state that Deborah was leading Israel, not only giving prophetic instruction from God but also settling disputes.

Remember the earlier lesson where Constable quoted from Josephus about women being unqualified to serve as witnesses? He devolves into prejudice again, quoting an excuse to deal with this scripture where it is claimed that a woman in such a leading capacity would only come about due to a loosely-organized society and general poverty. The implication being made in that quote is that once a nation is stable and structured, then women are no longer qualified to lead. In other words, men must take charge only when the leading is easy and institutionalized. Both men and women are demeaned by such an argument.

This is not unlike the nonsensical rationale for alleged order in the church: that God would allow the most vulnerable (children) to be taught by the most deceivable (women). Though they rightly credit Deborah with strong character and leadership, and admit that this is sanctioned by God, they still seem bent on keeping her in an auxiliary box. So it surprises me that they would describe her work here as "ministry", as this seems to be a trigger word in modern Christianity.

They even admit that she gave orders to the military general Barak; she summoned him, which is an act of authority. But again Constable lapses into wounded fleshly pride when he makes excuses for Barak's pleading for Deborah to go to battle with him.

Would this have “raised questions” for Constable and the men he quotes, had Deborah been a man? They are painting the seasoned warrior Barak as a sniveling coward! But how is this situation different from when Moses wound up having to speak through Aaron? Was God also scraping the bottom of the barrel then? Was Moses’ faith weak, as Constable claims about Barak?

The battle ensues, and the enemy commander Sisera runs to the tent of his supposed ally Heber, whose wife Jael is the courageous one to carry out what had to be done. Though some commentators claim Jael was defending herself against possible rape, this is refuted by the scripture saying he asked her to guard the tent.

Constable admits that God used two women to lead Israel to victory — in spite of continually making excuses for this “anomaly” along the way. And then he quotes someone who states that a Christian leader has a “dynamic, bold faith in God”— which was much more true of Deborah and Jael than Barak.

So can Christian women be denied the same acknowledgment of leadership? If anyone wants to define a Godly women, point them to Deborah and then to Jael— who drove a tent peg through a man’s skull. Now of course this is not to advocate violence but to make a point about women as wise, brave, and forceful. If this is how God viewed women before the Cross, how can God treat women with less respect after the cross? God does not; only people do.

## **Judges 5**

By the way, as with Miriam, Deborah is also a worship leader here, no excuses needed or allowed. And in that song, it says in verse 7 that Deborah was the protector of Israel— another role or trait modern Christianity reserves for men. Scripture makes no apologies or excuses for her status or “role” as a protector.

In verse 24 it says that Jael should be “the most rewarded among women”, and it goes on to describe her act of bravery in graphic detail. At least Constable makes some effort to defend her actions, though he misses the lesson for modern Christianity; our charge to not put conditions on God includes not pushing women aside. Barak would have been dishonored whether the glory went to a woman or a man, since he begged off his responsibility in this battle. The “replacement” is not to be held in less esteem, especially when God had already chosen Deborah as Israel’s leader, and Jael as their victor over the enemy commander.

But the final paragraph of this section in the notes shows again how much such truths make many men squirm. Constable is to be commended for the list of women in “key roles”, but by claiming that 1 Tim. 2:12 prohibits women from “the authoritative leadership of churches as elders” is a contradiction of every point he just made about all the women in his previous paragraph. He at least admits that women in the church cannot be less restricted than women in the Old Testament, and that women are as much priests in Christianity as men are.

Yet I must strongly denounce his equivocation fallacy: He confuses permission with ability. Ability is not permission, and men lack the ability to give birth, not the permission to give birth. The biological ability to be mothers is not a “ministry” for which men are denied permission. Lofty praise of motherhood cannot obscure the fact that Constable has gone against scripture and God’s calling to make him a “respector of persons”.

This also highlights another divisive and nonsensical teaching of modern Christianity. If, as they claim to agree with scripture about, leadership in the church is a lowly, humble, serving position, then they cannot become incensed and fearful that a woman might join them as equals at that lowest of places. No one ever fights to be last in line, so if anyone fights to keep a place, that place is deemed first and best. Thus it follows logically that becoming angry at the thought

of Christian women as equals in the church and home is to expose what many men really think about Christian leadership: It is not humble service but prideful rule— what scripture calls “lording over”, regardless of how benevolently or gently such rule is conducted. Actions speak louder than words, so lip service to motherhood cannot hide their belief that Christian leadership is a position of power and authority. They can’t have it both ways.

Under “final chorus” in the notes, we see that in spite of everything, Deborah’s ministry “reveals Israel’s inverted life” during this era, made “obvious by a woman in leadership.” Inverted in whose eyes? Did they not just praise her for her leadership qualities and divine appointment? Only society or tradition deems this “inverted”. This is the sort of doubletalk God hates.

And if anyone has been chafing at my continued emphasis of the issue of women in the Bible, they’ve only begun to taste the chafing women have endured for thousands of years. I’ve lost count of the condescending sermons on Mothers Day and Fathers Day, the commentaries and videos, the books and seminars, where women are hammered into little pink boxes the way Jael hammered Sisera. We say with the disciples on trial before the Sanhedrin, “Judge for yourselves whether we should obey men rather than God!”

How would men feel if at every turn their flesh was held against them as an inferiority of being commanded by God Himself? Would they meekly accept statements like that of Constable, that no one of their kind of flesh can “usurp the authority” of the opposite sex over them? Is God really commanding that women not take the lowest position of servitude in the Body of Christ— where apparently the highest authority resides?

I must dispense with Constable at this point, due to his pages-long gerrymandering of what he and others decide are women’s boundaries simply because of the flesh. How can we learn from one

so prejudiced, so quick to bow to culture, when time after time we have seen God go against culture?

## Judges 6

Now we come to the unlikely hero Gideon, another case of God having to “scrape the bottom of the barrel”. After forty years of rest, Israel had gone back to evil practices and were reduced to hiding in caves following seven years of oppression from the Midianites. So the angel of the Lord comes to where Gideon was secretly threshing wheat. He greets Gideon by calling him a courageous warrior, but Gideon asks where God has been the last seven years, though it should have been clear enough that they were reaping what they had sown. Now we see in verse 15 why I called Gideon an unlikely hero: He is the youngest member of the weakest clan in the half-tribe of Manasseh.

Gideon wants a sign that he will indeed defeat Midian, and he is then convinced that this was a real message from God. After testing the angel, it was God’s turn to test Gideon. He tells him to pull down his father’s altar to Baal and cut down his Asherah pole, then replace them with an altar to God and sacrifice a bull on it using the wood from the pole. That’s how you desecrate an altar!

When the men of the area see what Gideon had done, they demand that his father Joash hand him over to be executed. But Joash says something really bold and convicting: If Baal is a real God, let him execute Gideon himself! The one true God had done this many times, but of course people today hate him for it.

After passing this test, Gideon is given the Spirit of God, which points out an important difference between the age of grace and any other before or after it: Only in the current age does the Holy Spirit come upon a person and stay for life, whereas before this the Spirit

came and went on various people. This is what turned Gideon into the courageous warrior, and he began to muster an army.

Verse 37 is where we first see the literal instance of what people now call “putting out fleece” to determine the will of God, or to confirm it when we’re not sure.

## **Judges 7**

Now we come to the most interesting section of the account of Gideon. Though Midian’s army was likely around 135,000 troops according to 8:10, Gideon’s army of about 23,000 was too big for God’s purposes, since they might try to take credit. Read through the passage for the steps God takes to pare it down to a mere 300 soldiers.

Then God sent Gideon and a servant to eavesdrop on the enemy camp to hear what they were saying, and they heard one man tell of a dream he had about their army’s defeat. It’s clear that this dream was from God, just as Pharaoh, the baker, and the cup bearer in Egypt had dreams from God, though they didn’t worship him.

Then Gideon roused his 300 soldiers during the night and divided them into 3 groups of 100 each, to stand on three sides of the Midianite army. When they suddenly broke open their jars with torches inside and blew their trumpets, the Midianite army panicked and began fighting among themselves as they ran away.

The lessons here for us are first of all that God continually picks the least likely heroes in our eyes, then that he can send dreams and visions even to unbelievers to carry out his plans, and also that he can be trusted to work things out for those who trust him— which sounds suspiciously like Rom. 8:28.

## **Judges 8**

Here we see that the Israelites want to make Gideon king but he refuses. Instead, he asks for gold from which he makes an ephod, which was an article of priestly clothing, though used also in false religions. And this is exactly what Gideon's ephod became: a false god to which he, his family, and the whole nation of Israel prostituted themselves. Even so, God allowed Israel to have rest for forty years while Gideon lived, and forty years turns out to be a common time for a judge in Israel during these days.

## **Judges 9**

As the idolatry continued, Gideon's son Abimelech decided to make himself the sole ruler of Israel by murdering all his brothers. The lone survivor, Jotham, gave the people a lesson in ingratitude and a curse from God, then took off before Abimelech was able to kill him.

Skiping past the details of how God sets up to avenge Gideon's sons, we come to verse 50 where it says the people of a city being attacked by Abimelech are all taking shelter in the fortified tower. But when he comes near it, a woman drops a millstone weighing about 30 lbs. on him, shattering his skull. And so the curse came true.

But of course, we see also that being killed by a woman was humiliating, so he had his armor bearer run him through with his sword so he could get out of that shame on a technicality. Yet clearly everyone knew that a woman did indeed kill him, and all the servant did is make the death quicker. Ego is a very delicate facade.

## **Judges 10**

Now in we see that Israel quickly goes back to its wallowing in the mud, so God brings against them the dreaded Philistines. They cry

again, and this time God says, “Why don’t you go whine to those gods you love so much?” But like a good parent with a very rebellious child, God can only stand so much of Israel’s suffering even though they deserve it.

## **Judges 11-12**

Along comes Jephthah, who is one of the names mentioned in Heb. 11, yet whose mother was a prostitute. Again, God picks the unlikely hero, the despised and rejected. His own half-brothers chase him off because of his mother, and he becomes something of a gang leader. But when they need him to help defend against the Ammonites, he reminds them of how they treated him. It isn’t clear whether they deny this or ask him to forget about it in verse 8, but he agrees upon their pledge of loyalty.

In the ensuing war of words, Jephthah tells the enemy king to take whatever his god Chemosh gives him, and reminds him as well that he waited 300 years to reclaim the land he says Israel stole from him. Does that sound familiar? There’s been a lot of talk in the news over the last few decades about that sort of thing. We’ve seen in an earlier lesson that there really are no such things as indigenous peoples, and land has changed hands multiple times in history.

But Jephthah is most known for his foolish vow. In verse 31 he vows to God that he will sacrifice the first thing that comes out of his house to meet him when he returns safely from battle, and verse 34 reports that this turned out to be his only child, a daughter. He is understandably grieved, but she takes it pretty well.

Yet critics rush to presume she was burned in sacrifice, so they charge God with condoning this, just as they do with Abraham and Isaac. Yet God’s law forbade human sacrifice, per Deut. 18:10, Heb. 11 would never have included him if he had done such a thing, and God would not have granted him victory knowing this would be the



outcome. Further, we have seen that God will not hesitate to punish even someone like Moses for a less severe violation, so why is scripture silent about Jephthah if he had done such a thing as human sacrifice?

Also notice the girl's request: to mourn her virginity rather than her death, and to spend her last two months away from her family. And why would the text add verse 39 about her virginity if she had died, since many children die? Verse 40 tells of the memorial the women of Israel celebrate for four days each year; why would they not do this for all who died in childhood, or why would they want to keep a human sacrifice in public view? At the very least, we can say that there is no indisputable proof that God allowed it.

## **Judges 13**

Now we come to the account of the final judge, Samson. God tells his so-far barren mother that she will have a son, but she must not touch alcoholic beverages or ritually unclean food until he is born. And when he is, they are never to cut his hair, because he will grow up to deliver Israel from the Philistines. Why did God appear to the mother instead of the father? He appears to have been a godly man by his reaction to what his wife tells him.

Then the husband prays that God will tell them how to raise the boy, and the angel returns with instructions, this time speaking to both of them. But notice verse 18: The angel tells them not to ask his name, because they wouldn't be able to comprehend it. What impact would this have on the Sacred Name movement?

Then in verses 22-23 we see that the man is afraid that God will kill them because they saw the angel, but the woman wisely reasons that if God wanted to kill them, he wouldn't have accepted the sacrifice they just offered. So unlike the other judges before him, Samson was chosen before he was even conceived.

## Judges 14

In spite of Sampson being so chosen, his life won't turn out to be all unicorns and lollipops. He grows up and decides that his parents must get him a Philistine woman he saw, and he doesn't care that she's not an Israelite. But as we see in verse 4, this is God's way of creating a pretense upon which to dispense with the Philistines who were ruling over Israel.

Why God needs a pretense, we can only guess, but that's what scripture tells us. But if anyone wants to use this as a proof-text against free will, let them explain why the Bible is filled with commands for people to choose wisely, or why they feel compelled to debate people about free will if the people who disagree with them can't help it.

Anyway, Samson goes to see the woman but along the way he's attacked by a lion, which he tears apart with his bare hands by God's power. On his way home, he sees the lion carcass, and a swarm of honeybees had built a nest in it. So he takes some of the honey and gives it to his parents, without telling them where he got it.

Finally the day comes for the wedding, so he takes his father with him to a bachelor party in the town where the woman lived. During the party, and probably while inebriated, Samson gives the other guys a riddle to solve and offers prizes if they do, but the prizes are owed to him if they don't.

But they can't, so they decide to cheat and have his bride get the answer from him. And if she fails, they threaten to kill her. So she gets it and passes it on to the men, who come to claim their prizes, but Samson knows they cheated. So he goes out and murders thirty men so he could take their clothes and pay the cheaters their prizes. Needless to say, the woman is married off to someone else— his

best man. Who needs soap operas when we have quality drama like this? And by the way, this wasn't even the infamous Delilah.

## **Judges 15**

After some time passes, Sampson goes back there to claim his wife, not knowing until he gets there that her father gave her to his best man. Now the hostility between Samson and the Philistines escalates, with Samson tying lit torches to the tails of jackals and setting them loose in their stacks of standing grain. In retaliation, the Philistines burn his wife and her father to death.

Samson of course avenges their deaths, then hides in a cave. Meanwhile, the Philistines decide to invade Judah so they can find him. But the people of Judah go and get him themselves and tie him up to hand over to them. But when he arrives where the Philistines are, he breaks the ropes like they're nothing and then grabs the jawbone of a donkey and uses it as a weapon to kill a thousand men.

## **Judges 16**

Next he goes to Gaza to hire a prostitute, but the Philistines find out about it and wait by the city gate to capture him. But he leaves in the middle of the night and pulls the gates right out of the ground. And that is when he meets Delilah. But instead of threatening her with death unless she finds out the secret of his strength, the Philistine men offer her money. Sampson isn't dumb enough to tell her the truth so he keeps tricking her, but she keeps trying until he snaps. Somehow she knows when he has finally told her the truth, and they cut off his hair and then gouge out his eyes. God chose him knowing this would happen, but nothing says God told him to give away the secret of his strength.

Time passes, and the Philistines plan a celebration in the temple of their god Dagon, so they send for Samson to make fun of him. But his hair has had time to grow back, and they make the mistake of placing him between the two main supporting pillars of the temple, where the rulers and over 3,000 people were gathered. He prays one last time for God's strength, knowing he will die with his enemies. God grants his request.

## **Judges 17-19**

The rest of the book is not so much about judges but general events. Yet it's interesting in verse 11 that they call Jerusalem "Jebus", which is used by anti-Christians as a mocking name for Jesus. We could all educate the ignorant critics that they've been talking about Jerusalem all this time.

Then a very disturbing event takes place in Gibeah. Like Sodom and Gomorrah, the men of this city demand to rape a man, a Levite, who has taken shelter for the night in a local resident's home. So the host offers to send out his own virgin daughter to the wicked mob. To that culture, it was far better than failing to protect a guest in their home— provided the guest was a man. Women simply didn't matter to them. But it was the Levite who grabbed his own concubine and threw her out to them. They abused her all night, and she wasn't even checked on till the next morning when he found her on the doorstep, and all he could say was "get up, we're leaving". But she was dead, so he put her over a donkey and went home, where he carved up her body into twelve pieces and sent them out to the tribes of Israel, to see what they wanted to do about it.

We find it difficult to read about such cruelty as a man throwing his partner to an evil mob, let alone carving up her dead body, but too many women can testify to this and more in our time. Here we are, two thousand years since Jesus came, and many even in the western world still treat women as worse than animals. Again I ask,

can those who promote the submission of women not see their own culpability in such an attitude? There have been “right to life” organizations who teach that all women are temptresses who need to be kept under the control of a man at all times. Could the Pharisees have been as hypocritical and heartless?

Jesus said that defilement comes from within us, and it’s impossible to deny the slippery slope from the subjugation of women to the abuse of women. Treating women as equal adults cannot be blamed for abuse, but the teaching of hierarchical gender roles is often given as the excuse when a man is arrested for abusing a woman. Yes, there are women who abuse men, but that’s never been enshrined as “God’s natural order”. The Christian community should be ashamed and will be judged accordingly.

## **Judges 20**

The critics, of course, think that if the Bible simply reports something, then God must approve. But again we must understand that such reporting of the most heinous crimes proves that the Jews did not invent any of this. Even so, when the Levite tells what happened he fails to mention that he is the reason the woman died, but the result is that Israel is ready for war. Remember that this is all in a time when Israel has repeatedly chased after other gods. So they confront the whole tribe of Benjamin and demand they hand over the rapists/murderers, but they refuse, and then the whole tribe is nearly wiped out in battle.

## **Judges 21**

The final chapter tells of yet another disturbing event, a “solution” only a culture like that could think of: preserving the defeated tribe’s inheritance by helping the surviving men kidnap a bunch of virgins and take them as their wives. (Those Israelites and their legal

loopholes!) This time of the judges should be renamed the time of insane inhumanity— though in all fairness it pales in comparison to some other cultures.

# Ruth

## Introduction

This book is about a Moabite woman named Ruth who lived during the time of the Judges, who would turn out to be the great-grandmother of King David. The book was probably written around 1000 BC and is one of two Old Testament books titled after a woman. But though nobody knows who actually wrote the account, Ruth is the subject. Her life exemplifies the highest standards of character: devotion, hard work, honesty, and sacrifice. And it shows that while Israel as a whole had largely sunk into idolatry and chaos, there were always people who remembered God and Moses. Though God never speaks to her or anyone else directly in this account, God's hand is clearly evident.

## Ruth 1

Ruth's mother-in-law was Naomi, an Israelite who had to move from Bethlehem to Moab with her husband and their two sons during a famine. After her husband died there, her sons married Moabite women, one of whom was Ruth. But when both her sons also died, she was left without support or land title, so she decided to return to Israel, where at least she had some rights as a widow and the famine had ended.

But though her daughters-in-law came with her, Naomi stopped and told them to go back to their mothers, where prospects were better for them to find husbands. But Ruth refused to leave Naomi, and this is where we find Ruth's statement of loyalty and her commitment to worship the God of Israel.

So off they went to Bethlehem. Being a small village, when Naomi returned they remembered her and were happy to see her. But she told them of the tragedy that had befallen her, and she took it as punishment from God, though there is no mention of anything she had done that would make her deserve it more than other people. Nonetheless, she never blamed God for any wrongdoing.

The end of ch. 1 states that the time of year was the barley harvest, which would have been in the spring. This was an early harvest or “first fruits”, meaning the greater harvest was still to come. This has obvious significance in Bible prophecy and the foreshadowing of the festivals to the eventual coming of the Messiah.

## **Ruth 2**

This chapter opens with a note about a legal principle in Israel called the “kinsman redeemer”, who would be responsible for carrying on the line of any childless male relatives and for supporting anyone in the clan who was impoverished. In this case it was a wealthy and respected man named Boaz. Now it doesn’t appear that Naomi knew this at first, when Ruth volunteered to glean the fields so they wouldn’t starve. But God saw to it that she went to a field owned by Boaz; the phrase “just happened” is God working things out behind the scenes.

On top of that, it “just so happens” that Boaz comes to greet the harvesters when Ruth is working behind them. He is told her story, and though she’s a foreigner he treats her very kindly. When she returns home and shows Naomi the amazing haul of grain for the day, Naomi tells her that that Boaz is their legal guardian, so she should continue working there where she’ll be safe.

## **Ruth 3**



Eventually Naomi knows that Ruth needs a home and family of her own, and that Boaz would be required by law to marry her. So she tells Ruth to do something very unorthodox to say the least: Dress up, wait till dark, sneak up to him while he's asleep, lie down beside him (or at his feet), cover herself with his cloak, and then ask him to marry her! I think we're all making the same face right now.

There are some good points in [this source](#) concerning Ruth and Boaz. First of all, there are no other examples in scripture of this being a normal or customary way to propose marriage. Second, it leaves little to the imagination: Wait for a man to fall asleep after he's had plenty of food and drink, then lie down beside him in your best outfit. Though there is no expressed or implied basis for claiming anything actually happened, the intent was unmistakable.

Third, compared to Samson, Ruth's actions were exemplary. And besides, she was only carrying out Naomi's instructions, not bringing any customs from Moab. Fourth, the timing was meant to take advantage of Boaz being in a vulnerable state after celebrating the harvest, as only Naomi would know. Fifth, the reason Boaz didn't want anyone to know she'd been at the threshing floor likely had to do with the fact that people would presume immoral behavior had taken place. It may be that Naomi thought something would happen and then Boaz would have no choice but to marry Ruth, since there seems to be no other explanation for the plan.

Though that article tries to fault Naomi on the grounds that she should have let Boaz "take the leadership role", the other points seem valid. Ruth can be excused for not knowing the legal issues and social customs. But Naomi's fault, in my opinion, was not in taking initiative but in the manner of carrying it out. After all, Tamar was considered the righteous one when she took the initiative to preserve the family line— and her methods were decidedly less defensible than Naomi's!

As for the “proposal” itself in verse 9, the article makes a good case for translating it as the Greek does: “Take me under your wing as next of kin.” This idea of spreading a wing or corner of cloth over someone is common throughout scripture. She was more asking for security than expressing lust, which is proved by Boaz’s response. She came to him instead of chasing younger men, because she was honorable and devout, regardless of what Naomi may have had in mind. Ruth was selfless to a fault.

## **Ruth 4**

The next day Boaz goes to the city gate to conduct the formal business of offering both the land and Ruth to the nearest kinsman, who exercises his option to pass the rights on to Boaz. But again we see that women were considered property to be bought and sold, though also again, they fared better in Israel than in many other societies of the time.

So they get married and have a son named Obed, who would be the father of Jesse, who would be the father of David. Thus we see that the line of the future king David already includes a prostitute (Rahab) and a Moabite. God is not a respecter of persons, and as we’ll see when we study the choosing of David as king, neither does God choose servants on the basis of the flesh. But again, don’t jump to the wild conclusion that this means God is finished with the people of Israel as a nation.

## **Conclusion**

This story of Ruth is rich with symbolic meaning. The one who was in grief and poverty is redeemed and sheltered due to the mercy of the one in a position to help. This levirate law (kinsman-redeemer, not Levi) pointed to what Jesus would accomplish by stooping down and sacrificing for the world. Ruth modeled Jesus in her selflessness and

humility, while Boaz modeled Jesus in his redemption of the helpless and vulnerable.

In scripture, God is never the one condoning the mistreatment of the poor or lowly; in fact, his laws put limits on abuse by the rich and powerful. The great error of modern Christianity is failure to recognize this characteristic of God, in spite of scriptures such as James 4:6 which says that God is opposed to the proud but gracious to the humble, and 1 Cor. 1:27 which says that God chose the foolish to shame the wise, and the weak to disgrace the strong. Cold-hearted hierarchy is why the church has been far less effective than it was meant to be.

# 1 Samuel

## Introduction

1 Samuel is of course about the prophet Samuel, focusing on the first two kings of Israel, Saul and David. It covers from Samuel's birth to the death of Saul.

## 1 Sam. 1

The account of the prophet Samuel begins with Elkanah and his two wives. Not surprisingly, the two wives don't get along, especially because one is fertile and the other is barren. We can assume there was always competition among wives in polygamy, which is why it's such a bad idea for anyone to have more than one spouse. But as always, God works through and around people's poor judgment and character flaws.

Every year Elkanah would take his family to Shiloh to worship God, which is where we're introduced to the two sons of Eli the priest: Hophni and Phineas. Remember those names, because they'll come up again later. But though Elkanah tries to pacify the barren wife Hannah with double portions of food since he loves her the most (and we all know how that sort of thing has worked out in Israel's history), she's still miserable because the fertile wife keeps mocking her for being childless. The husband just doesn't get it.

But on one such trip to Shiloh, Hannah weeps bitterly to God about this, and she vows to God that if he gives her a child, she'll dedicate him to God in a similar way to Samson, who never drank wine or cut his hair. But she's praying in her heart and only moving her lips, so

Eli presumes she's drunk. After she explains that she's crying out to God in anguish, he asks that God will grant her request.

She and the rest of the family return home, after which God answers her prayer, and then in time she gives birth to Samuel. But when the time comes to return to Shiloh, Hannah remains behind to wean Samuel, after which she takes him there to stay permanently in God's service.

## **1 Sam. 2**

This begins what is pretty much a taunt against Hannah's rival wife, seeing that it's all about humiliating the proud and elevating the humiliated. This is how God works, the opposite of society's norms. In verse 12 the narrative turns briefly to Eli's two wicked sons, who had been using their positions as priests to abuse others.

Then it turns back to Samuel, whose mother would bring him new clothes each year when they all came to sacrifice. Eli pronounces a blessing on Hannah for God to give her more children because she honored her vow and gave up her firstborn, and he does. Then in verse 22 it's back to Eli's wicked sons, who not only had been robbing people's sacrifices but also (at least in the Hebrew text) sexually assaulting the women who served at the temple. Eli was old and didn't even know what his sons were doing until other people told him.

God at this point has already decided that the sons will die for their wickedness. So he sends someone to confront Eli about his failure to discipline his sons, which meant he was valuing them more than God. Eli is then cursed with premature death on all his descendants, beginning with the deaths of both his sons on the same day. Moreover, his descendants will beg for crumbs from the family of the one God raises up to replace him.

## **1 Sam. 3**

Meanwhile, Samuel grows up and has a reputation of being godly, though messages from God had become rare by then. One night Samuel hears a voice calling to him, so he goes to Eli thinking that's who it was. But Eli just tells him to go back to sleep, and then it happens again. By the third time, Eli finally realizes that Samuel is being called by God, so he tells him how to respond the next time.

When he does, God gives him a message repeating the curse on Eli and his family line. But Samuel is afraid to tell him, so he waits till morning, but Eli demands to know what he was told. And though the curse did not take place that very day, Samuel was becoming known throughout Israel as a prophet of God.

## **1 Sam. 4**

The curse is to begin with the Philistines, a familiar name from the story of Samson. They go to battle with the Israelites and begin to defeat them, so the Israelites decide to bring the Ark of the Covenant to the battlefield, which meant that Eli's sons would go with it. But it does Israel no good, as if the Ark could be used like a talisman. It's captured by the Philistines, and Eli's sons are killed in battle. Stage one of the curse is complete.

Meanwhile, Eli is sitting in a chair by the road, waiting to find out the fate of the Ark (but apparently not his sons), when a runner comes with news of the battle. After telling him about his sons and the Ark, Eli falls backward off his chair and breaks his neck, and so he dies the same day as his sons. When one of his daughters-in-law hears of all this, she goes into labor, gives birth to a son, and then dies.

## **1 Sam. 5-7**

Meanwhile, the Philistines had taken the Ark to the temple of their god Dagon. But the next morning, the idol was face down on the ground before the Ark. They stood it up again, but the day after that, not only was the idol on the ground again, but its head and hands were chopped off as well. You'd think they'd take the hint about false gods, but instead they just move the Ark to another place. Then sores break out on the people in the city where they take it, so they move it again, but the people there aren't dumb enough to accept it.

After seven months of this, they consult their soothsayers to find out how to get Israel to take it back. Their advice includes familiarity with what God had done to Egypt, along with what they considered a proper guilt offering. They send the Ark and offerings on a cart and let two cows take it away on their own. The cows pull the cart to a certain field in Israel, but some of the locals are killed because they look inside of the Ark. So they send for others to come and take the Ark away, like a high-stakes game of hot potato.

After it stays in the next place for twenty years, Samuel tells Israel that they have to get rid of all their idols and shrines so they can be delivered from the Philistines. But when the Philistines see them all gathered together, they decide to come to do battle. But God basically shouts "boo " at them and causes them to panic, which allows Israel to defeat them. From then on, while Samuel lived, Israel was not bothered again by the Philistines.

## **1 Sam. 8**

Now Samuel is old and he appoints his sons as judges over Israel. But as with Eli, Samuel's sons turn out to be wicked, and it is this which prompts Israel to demand a king, which was never God's intention. Samuel failed to learn from the poor example of his mentor, and this is the consequence.

But when Samuel tells God about this, God informs him that it isn't Samuel the people are rejecting, it's God Himself. He tells Samuel to give the people fair warning of what it means to have a human king over them: The sons will be conscripted into the army, the daughters will be pressed into service as cooks, the farmers will be ordered to grow the king's food and tend his herds, the craftsmen will be ordered to make weapons, and the land owners will be taxed for the benefit of the king's officials. Human government is inherently oppressive and parasitic.

But even with the final warning that God will turn a deaf ear to them when they whine about being oppressed by their own king, they still demand it, because they want to be like all the other nations. This is just as foolish as when Christians today demand to be under the laws of Moses.

## **1 Sam. 9-10**

So now the search is on for a king, and naturally they pick the son of a prominent man. Saul, who is described as being head-and-shoulders taller than the average man, was off chasing after some of his father's escaped donkeys when he comes to a town where Samuel is planning to make a sacrifice.

Samuel had been told by God that this guy he'd encounter the next day would be the one to anoint as king. When he meets him, Saul, like Gideon, wonders why someone from a small tribe in Benjamin is to be given a message from God. But instead of telling him outright, Samuel has dinner with him and then tells him just before he sends him back to his father.

So he anoints Saul with oil and pronounces him king of Israel, which will be proved when he conquers the Philistines. But notice that Samuel tells Saul that the Spirit of God will come upon him at a certain place, causing him to prophesy and changing him into a



different person. Here is a clear instance of the fact that the Holy Spirit came and went on individuals before the cross, in contrast to the permanent indwelling of the Spirit after the cross.

These things all come true as Samuel prophesied, and people who had known Saul begin to wonder what happened to him. (Shouldn't that be said of people who become Christians as adults?) Finally Samuel gathers everyone together to tell them that they finally had their precious king, instead of direct rule by the God who had rescued them from Egypt. It seems clear from this choice of Saul that God is going to teach them a lesson. But when it comes time to present Saul to them, he had hidden himself in fear! They had to drag him out, which should have been their first clue that this demand of theirs was a bad idea. But no, they all shout "Long live the king! ", like prisoners cheering a new cowardly warden.

## **1 Sam. 11-13**

Saul's first battle as king was to wipe out the army of the Ammonites who were threatening them, and after the battle they celebrate by formally established Saul as king.

Nearing the end of his life, Samuel recounts the pathetic history of Israel's cycle of rebellion, oppression, and restoration. So God will be with them if they follow him, in spite of demanding this king. But if not, and really when not, they will be punished once again.

It begins with this king they just coronated. Saul provokes the Philistines, as if he had a stick in his hand and couldn't resist striking a hornet's nest with it. So now he's confronted by an army much larger than his own, and he does what he's best at: Hide in a cave and call for help. He sends for Samuel but gets impatient and makes an offering without him. When Samuel sees what he did, he tells him how stupid that was, because God requires someone loyal and

faithful. So Saul will have the kingdom taken away and given to someone not of his family line.

We've seen the name of Saul's son Jonathan in this passage, and he will turn out to be best friends with Saul's replacement. What could go wrong? And because of Saul's foolishness, the Philistines had made sure Israel had no blacksmiths to make weapons, so only Saul and Jonathan had swords.

## **1 Sam. 14**

But God is still working behind the scenes. Jonathan and his armor bearer sneak out and kill a Philistine garrison of twenty men, and God puts fear into the whole Philistine army because of it. By the time Saul and the rest realize what happened, the Philistines have scattered and begun killing each other. It's only then that the army of Israel is "brave " enough to attack them.

But genuinely-brave Jonathan, who didn't know about his father's foolish curse on anyone who ate any food before evening, comes across some honey and eats it. He is revived while the rest of the army is faint with hunger, so they all follow Jonathan's lead and quickly devour the animals from the army they plundered.

When Saul finds out about this, he really doesn't punish anyone right away. But when God refuses to answer him when he asks for a sign to go into battle, he asks God to identify the "sinner " who caused the silence, and Jonathan is outed. But the army he had led to victory that day refuses to allow him to be executed, so Saul goes back home to consolidate his reign by dealing with all the other enemies, and then back to fighting the Philistines. Saul finally displays some bravery in this.

His other children are listed after this, including a daughter called Michal, another name to remember. But the Philistines, as

mentioned in an earlier lesson, would continue to vex Israel during Saul's reign, and he was in the habit of conscripting any particularly brave man he saw.

## 1 Sam. 15

God had said that the kingdom would be taken from Saul, and now we come to the events leading up to that. God tests Saul by ordering him to totally wipe out the Amalekites, but he spares the king and the best of the loot.

So God tells Samuel of his regret at choosing Saul, and Samuel confronts Saul over his failure to obey God. Saul makes excuses and denies his failure, but Samuel isn't having it, and this is where we find the familiar passage about God valuing obedience more than sacrifice. Finally Saul admits his guilt, and that his motive was fear of his own army; his bravery was short-lived. Then we see another characteristic of God: he is not a human being, which most translations render "man". This is important to remember whenever other religions try to make God in their image, or when Christians try to adopt heathen beliefs by making God gendered.

It would be Samuel, not Saul, who dispatches the Amalekite king, and Saul would never see Samuel again. But the repetition of the statement about God regretting his choice of Saul is a curious thing, since we know that God is all-knowing, and he had just said he doesn't change his mind like people do. We also recall God's regret at having made mankind at all, and the subsequent Flood. You can read a fairly exhaustive list of God's apparent regrets at [this source](#), in the final post on that page.

A possible answer from one angle is that God is saying this for our benefit and in terms we can grasp. His purpose is to emphasize that his decision is final, and also for us to learn from other people's mistakes. The lesson here is not just for Israel; how often has

Christianity chosen the most attractive, charismatic, eloquent leaders, instead of the most godly or studied in the Word? Look at the popular so-called ministries on television or the internet, and see what they're teaching.

Another angle is that the word typically rendered "regret " is better understood as "grief ". Yet why would God only be grieved after the passage of time, since it was his choice and he knew how it would turn out? Certainly the free will he granted humanity comes into play, but in these and numerous other passages, we're given the impression that God is disappointed that people miss his expectations, which shouldn't be the case since he knew what they'd do from the start.

The Greek word here in verse 35 is *metemelethe*, whereas in verse 29 it's *metanoesei*. The primary difference is that rather than merely a change of mind or direction, the one in verse 35 includes the motivation for such change. Remember as well that the semantic range of any word is taken from context, not context from semantic range. So we can at least establish that God is not repenting of a sin or mistake.

So how do we reconcile verses 29 and 35? In my opinion, the solution is that while God never changes his plans, he often changes our instructions at various points in time. This is the outworking of the paradox between his sovereignty and our free will. For example, when God came down to see what the builders of the Tower of Babel were up to, or whether Abraham would obey God without question, we must see these visitations as from our perspective and ability to understand, not God's limitations or imperfections. This is also the essence of Dispensationalism.

## **1 Sam. 16**

The prophet Samuel can't seem to accept that Saul has been rejected by God as king of Israel, but God tells him to go anoint the new king he has chosen. This is where we see one of God's cover stories. Samuel is afraid that Saul will kill him if he finds out what he's about to do, so God tells him to pretend he's just going to make a sacrifice.

Verse 7 is where we see God's opinion of how people choose leaders. We pick the most outwardly impressive, but God picks the most inwardly impressive. God picks "the runt of the litter" in front of all his more outwardly-impressive brothers. And as with Saul, David immediately receives the Holy Spirit.

Meanwhile, that same Spirit had left Saul and was replaced by a tormenting spirit from God. For whatever reason, Saul's advisors recommend a good harp player to soothe him during his episodes. David, the despised sheep herder, happened to be just such a musician, along with being a brave warrior, a good speaker, and a good-looking guy. He becomes Saul's armor-bearer and soul-soother.

## **1 Sam. 17**

Now back to the pesky Philistines, who camp out on one side of a valley while Saul's army camps out on the other. Then out from the Philistine camp comes their champion, the infamous giant Goliath. His actual height is disputed, but all seem to agree that he was at least seven feet tall, but likely taller judging by the sizes given of his weapons and armor. Every morning and evening for forty days, Goliath would dare Israel to send out their champion to fight him. Saul was the biggest man in Israel, but he was afraid to face him.

Meanwhile, David had been commuting between sheep herding and placating Saul, but in another case of "just so happened", David's father sends him to bring supplies to his older brothers in Saul's

army. He arrives just as the soldiers are marching to the battle lines for the day, and he hears Goliath's taunt.

But while the army retreats in fear, David hears them talk about the rewards promised to whoever would face him. His questions here are not to get the answers he already knows, but to declare his intention of being the one to fight Goliath. His oldest brother rebukes him for arrogance and for allegedly only coming to watch the battle. But David's retort is one many of us can totally relate to: "Can't I say anything?"

Eventually Saul gets wind of David's offer, but he tells David that he, as a mere youth, can't hope to compete with this powerful seasoned warrior. Yet David is confident, due to his experiences with wild animals, and his outrage that anyone would defy the living God who has given him his successes.

So Saul has David try on his own armor, but he rejects it— not because it's too big but because he's not used to wearing armor. He goes with his familiar and trusted weapon, a slingshot. As you can see in [this video](#) (first segment), this is not the Y-shaped version we're used to, but a long strap with a pouch that the person would swing in circles like a lasso. The stone released from this has enough force to break a skull, but it takes great skill to use with both power and accuracy.

As David approaches Goliath with only his shepherd's gear and a walking staff, Goliath despises him and is insulted by Israel apparently sending its worst instead of its best to fight him. Trash talk ensues, but David fearlessly runs toward him and then stops to sling the rock, which sinks into Goliath's forehead. Seeing Goliath drop dead on his face, David takes Goliath's own sword and beheads him. Only now, in typical Israelite fashion, the army is emboldened and chases after the terrified Philistines. David takes Goliath's weapons and puts them in his tent, but takes the head to Jerusalem.

Saul had been watching from a safe distance of course, but we're puzzled to read that he doesn't even seem to recognize him, though he had met him just a short time ago. But the end of the chapter tells us that what Saul didn't know was the name of David's father, not David himself, and this likely was at least being asked because of the promise he made about exempting the champion's family from taxes.

## **1 Sam. 18**

Remember Saul's son Jonathan? He and David become best friends at this time, and Saul employs David full-time so he no longer commutes to his shepherding job at home. David goes on to become a respected warrior, but the rainbows and lollipops are fleeting. The women sing after the defeat of Goliath, but they credit David with ten times the honor of Saul. Not surprisingly, Saul is a tad jealous, and he keeps a wary eye on David from then on.

The next time David comes to play the harp for one of Saul's episodes, he tries to impale David with a spear. After it happens again without success, Saul removes David from being his bodyguard to being a field commander. This of course only made things worse for Saul, because David would turn out to be a superb warrior.

So Saul decides to let the Philistines do his dirty work for him, by luring David into battle to win the right to marry his daughter Merab. But David feels unworthy, so Saul marries her to another man. Saul tries again with his other daughter Michal, who had a crush on David anyway. But David escapes death again and finally agrees to marry Michal. He continues to rise in rank, and in esteem in the eyes of pretty much everyone but Saul.

## **1 Sam. 19**

Saul tries to get his staff to kill David, but Jonathan gets wind of it and warns David, then gets Saul to relent— for the time being. After an unknown length of time passes, Saul goes back to his old ways of trying to impale David with a spear while he's playing the harp to soothe him. (I think the anger management classes aren't working.) Then Saul sends a squad to David's house to arrest him, but his wife Michal helps him escape during the night. She puts an idol on his bed and covers it with a quilt to make it look like he's still there, and she tells the assassins that he's sick. But when they come back to Saul without him, he sends them right back to haul him off anyway, and then they realize they've been had.

So Saul confronts Michal, who says David threatened to kill her, which of course was a lie, but again I would recommend the earlier discussions concerning what God considers sinful deception. Meanwhile, David has run to see Samuel. When Saul's police catch up to them, they see them all prophesying, and even the police start to prophesy! So finally Saul goes there himself, and even he starts to prophesy. Pretty bizarre scene to say the least, but sometimes God seems to have a twisted sense of humor.

## **1 Sam. 20-21**

While all that's going on, David takes off to find Jonathan and ask him what Saul's problem is. So the two of them devise a series of tests to see if Saul is hiding his intentions from Jonathan, and again, the plan involves lying. And to no one's surprise, Saul has every intention of killing David, and seems to also hate Jonathan for being his friend.

So per the pre-arranged signal, David runs away, and would keep running away until God himself takes Saul's life. Verse two is the incident Jesus would later refer to regarding the Pharisees' objection to his healing people on the Sabbath. David is on the run and needs some bread, but the only bread available has been offered in



sacrifice to God. He is given the bread anyway, and God doesn't express any problem with David's cover story.

From there David runs to Gath, but the people there are suspicious of his intentions, so David pretends to be insane— another deception. I keep pointing these out to impress on us how often deceit seems to further God's plans, when such deceit is only doing harm to God's enemies.

## **1 Sam. 22-23**

Off David goes again, and this time his family finds him. Then all the discontented people in the area made him their leader and form a force of about 400 men. But then we see that there has been a snitch by the name of Doeg following David around. At Saul's order, he had killed the priests who had sheltered David, but someone named Abiathar escaped and told David what happened.

After a skirmish with the Philistines, David hears that Saul and his army are coming after him again, and Saul stays in pursuit until God diverts them to deal with the Philistines.

## **1 Sam. 24**

Now we come to the familiar incident where David has a chance to kill Saul, but he only takes a corner of Saul's robe as he relieves himself in a cave where David and his men were hiding, and he doesn't even know anything happened. So David's group sneaks out of the cave and goes a safe distance, where David shouts to Saul and holds up the corner of his cloak to show that he could have killed him but didn't.

David's statement about not "touching God's anointed" is one the Christian community has grossly misapplied. They take it to mean

that preachers are not to be criticized, in spite of the New Testament's explicit teaching that leaders are to be held to the highest standards. They are not "God's anointed" above other believers. There is nothing elevated or special about one spiritual gift compared to others, as you can read in 1 Cor. 13. Any church leader or popular speaker who uses this phrase as a free pass to sin is a fake and should be disfellowshipped. Anyway, Saul admits his fault and breaks off the pursuit for the time being.

## **1 Sam. 25**

Now we read the briefest mention of the death of Samuel, before coming to the next bit of drama. There was a wealthy man in the area, who had a wife named Abigail. The scripture describes her as wise and beautiful, but her husband Nabal as a harsh and evil fool.

David finds out that Nabal is sheering sheep and sends messengers to ask for provisions, since David and his men never gave Nabal and his servants any trouble. But Nabal insults them, so David decides to attack Nabal's household. One of the servants finds out what's about to happen, so he runs to Abigail to see what she might be able to do to keep them from being wiped out due to her husband's stupidity and ego. And just to continue driving home a point, today's Christian teachers would say she should have let them all be slaughtered rather than go behind her wicked husband's back.

While David is on his way there, Abigail loads up a caravan of gifts for him and his men and rushes out to meet him. She takes full responsibility for all this, though none of it is her fault, and she tells him that her husband lives up to his name which means "fool".

She presents her plea for mercy, and David is very impressed with her good judgment. So he accepts the gifts she brought and passes by. But when she gets home, she finds her husband throwing a party and slobbering drunk, so she doesn't bother to tell him anything till

the next day. When he finally sobers up and hears her story, he has a stroke and is paralyzed, until God kills him ten days later.

When David hears the news, he asks Abigail to be another of his wives. Though by this time Saul had married off Michal to someone else, David had married another woman. This sort of uneven playing field has been the cultural norm for most of history, so any modern-day whining about the field tilting the other way just a bit will get no sympathy from me.

## **1 Sam. 26**

Now it's back to Saul chasing David, which presents David with another opportunity to kill him. He and another man actually sneak into the middle of the sleeping enemy camp where Saul was surrounded by soldiers, but again David won't strike him down. He had just seen how God took care of Nabal, so he has full confidence that God will do the same with Saul.

This time David takes a spear and a jug of water from right beside Saul, but he isn't caught because God put them into a deep sleep. After retreating a safe distance, instead of shouting to Saul he shouts to Saul's bodyguard Abner, to scold him for not protecting his king. How embarrassing!

Then David warns Saul that if he has tried to kill him without justification or permission from God, he and his men will be cursed. Again Saul confesses his sin, again they part ways, but again we all know how this will go.

## **1 Sam. 27-28**

Now David does something totally unforeseen: He takes refuge among the Philistines! His reasoning is that Saul won't pursue him

there, and the Philistines actually agree to his presence among them.

Then the time comes for the Philistines to go into battle again with Israel, so David pledges his support for the Philistines. Saul is terrified at the sight of the Philistine army, but of course God doesn't listen to his pleas for help. So he seeks out a medium in a town called Endor. Why Saul thought a disguise could be of any use when visiting someone believed to have psychic powers, we can only guess.

Of course, she thinks this is a hit squad from Saul that has come there to entrap her since he had expelled all the other mediums from his land. He assures her that isn't the case, so she asks who he wants her to conjure up, and he says Samuel. But to her great horror, Samuel actually appears! She had expected the usual trickery or even perhaps a demon, so this terrifies her, because she knows that this is Saul himself. Then Samuel actually speaks to Saul and demands to know why he disturbed him from among the dead. He also tells him that Saul and his sons will be with him in the grave the next day.

## **1 Sam. 29-31**

Meanwhile, the upper leadership of the Philistine army decides that David and his men cannot be trusted in battle, so again David is held in suspicion though nothing he ever did made him deserving of it. Many of us who defend the faith online know this feeling all too well.

So David returns to where he had been living in the land of the Philistines while the army goes off to fight Israel. But they find that their city has been raided and burned and their women kidnapped. So David inquires of God what he should do, and he's given the green light to go after the raiding party. He recovers everything and everyone that had been taken.

Now back to the battle between the Philistines and Israel, which Israel was losing. Saul's sons all die as predicted, and Saul himself is mortally wounded. He asks his servant to finish him off so he won't be captured and tortured, but the servant is afraid, so Saul falls on his own sword.

## 2 Samuel

This book continues with the aftermath of the death of King Saul, then to David's adultery with Bathsheba and murder of her husband, to his falling out with his son Absalom, and finally his ill-advised census of Israel.

### 2 Sam. 1-2

Saul and his sons have died in battle, and a runner brings the news to David. But he falsely claims to have put Saul out of his misery, which he thinks will win him favor. But David, who would not dare to kill Saul himself, is incensed that this foreigner would gladly do it, so the runner is immediately executed. This is a case when a lie was used to make someone appear more noble than they really were, so it's clearly sinful.

David, being a musician and poet, plays and sings a long lament for Saul and Jonathan, and this is where we see the familiar phrase, "How the mighty have fallen!" God would later describe David as a man after his own heart, and we see a glimpse of it here, in that David does not gloat over the death of the one who had tried to kill him on many occasions. God himself said in Ezekiel 33:11 that he takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked.

Finally David is coronated king of at least part of Israel, but the troops that had been loyal to Saul were still a problem. Saul's bodyguard Abner had made one of Saul's sons king, so the armies of Israel and Judah face off but decide to pick twelve soldiers from each army to decide the battle. This didn't help though; it was a stalemate, and all 24 of them wound up dead. Then the rest of the armies decide to go ahead and fight anyway, but David's forces overcome those led by Abner, and Abner and some others run away.

## **2 Sam. 3**

As time passes, David's forces grow stronger and Abner's weaker, and David has some sons whose names will come up later. But when Abner is falsely accused by his king of sleeping with his father's concubine, Abner decides to defect to David's side. Many today think nothing of slandering others, but there are consequences because it's as much a sin as any other. To destroy someone's honor out of spite or mere suspicion is no better than murder, yet we quickly jump to wild conclusions on the mere appearance of guilt, without even bothering to ask the accused for their testimony.

However, all this healing and unity is about to be ruptured. A soldier named Joab is sure that Abner had only come to spy out David's forces, so he secretly goes off to meet with Abner as if to bring a message, only to run him through with his sword. The text adds that Joab was also avenging the blood of his brother that Abner had killed. When David hears about what Joab had done, he pronounces a curse on Joab's descendants.

## **2 Sam. 4-5**

As the saga continues, we learn that Jonathan had a son who was crippled due to a childhood injury, but the others in the house where he lived were murdered in their sleep by some of David's men. They too thought they were bringing David good news, but they get the same "appreciation" as the one who claimed to have killed Saul. These were brutal times, yet here we are in the "age of grace", virtually murdering each other over the most trivial things.

After all that, David is finally acknowledged as king over all of Israel. But there were still cities to conquer, including Jerusalem. The Fortress of Zion was part of the city itself, and it became known as the City of David. So he is now firmly established with Jerusalem as

his capital, and the king of Tyre sends him workers and material with which to build his palace. Of course, a palace shouldn't be empty, so David gets busy with more wives and concubines to give birth to more children.

Now it's back to those arch-enemies the Philistines, and David is told by God to wait for the sound of marching in the trees to launch his attack. God intervenes at certain times for certain reasons, not the least of which is to remind people that they can't take sole credit for their accomplishments. This should, but often doesn't, result in humility.

## **2 Sam. 6**

Now David sets his sights on retrieving the Ark of the Covenant, but along the way someone touches the Ark to keep it from tipping over, and God strikes him dead on the spot. Godly as David is, he is very distraught and wonders how anyone will ever be able to safeguard it. So he leaves it at that place, but since the family on whose land it's been resting was being very blessed because of it, David is renewed in his quest to bring it to Jerusalem.

When it arrives, they all have a big party, but David dances with such manic energy that his wife Michal despises him. Scripture doesn't tell us why, but we can only assume she felt it unbecoming of a king. So when the party ends and David comes home, Michal scolds him for his public behavior, but he doesn't see any shame in it because of the reason for the celebration. From that day on, Michal had no more children. There is a lesson here for us as well, that we should not impose our own tastes in propriety on others, as if we have authority over them. But at the same time, if you're going to make a public spectacle of yourself, try not to shame anyone else in the process.



## **2 Sam. 7-10**

Now we meet the prophet during David's reign, Nathan. David wants to build a temple for the Ark, but God tells him through Nathan that he has shed too much blood and the honor will go to his son.

Skipping over more of David's mopping up of Israel's enemies, we come to the establishment of his officials, including a priest named Zadok. That name will figure prominently in the millennial kingdom prophecy of Ezekiel after ch. 39, which is the time of the restored Davidic kingdom mentioned in Amos 9:11, which the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 quoted in reference to a yet future kingdom.

Now you may recall the crippled son of Jonathan, Mephibosheth, and ch. 9 is where David takes him to his palace to live, to honor Saul's memory. But when David extends the same honor to another person in the land of the Ammonites, they don't trust him, so they humiliate his messengers and sent them back. Then the Ammonites muster an army because they expect David to retaliate, and more battles ensue.

## **2 Sam. 11**

It's in the time of these battles that we meet the famous Bathsheba, whom David sees bathing on her rooftop, since he did not go out to battle this time. Some will make her out to be a seductress, but bathing on rooftops was not uncommon, because no building but the king's palace would be high enough to see them. And David, with his multiple wives and concubines, apparently wasn't satisfied.

This only proves that excuses offered for cheating spouses are just that: excuses. Some so-called Christian leaders actually blame an unfaithful husband on his wife being boring, unhealthy, or unsubmitive. But Jesus said that it is our own eye or hand that

causes us to sin. God will deal with genuine tempters, but he'll also deal with the ones who give in to them.

Now David sends for her, and it turns out she's married to a man named Uriah the Hittite. We won't see until ch. 23 that he was no ordinary soldier in David's army. But David isn't in a sensible mood at all, so he impregnates Bathsheba. Again, commentators may condemn her for going along with this, but what woman was going to defy the king in those days? The scriptures do not condemn her but instead put all the blame on David.

Her husband was at the battlefield, so David concocts a lame plot to get Uriah to think he's the baby's father. He summons Uriah under the pretense of wanting a report on the military campaign, but he really expects Uriah to spend the night with his wife. Instead, he spends it in the barracks because he is more honorable than David, in that he can't allow himself to relax while his men are camped in the open field.

So David keeps him there another night, then tries getting him drunk, but Uriah just won't violate his conscience. So David is enraged and sends word to Joab to put Uriah on the front lines and then withdraw and leave him alone near the enemy city wall, where he will be killed. This is David rationalizing that he's off the hook for murdering Uriah so he can take his wife and add her to his collection.

This version of David's scheming actually works, but of course other men are killed as well because of it, so David has more than Uriah's blood on his hands. This chapter ends with a simple statement about God being angry, but we're about to find out just exactly how angry he is.

## **2 Sam. 12**

The prophet Nathan is sent to confront David, but he does so by telling him a crime story that David takes as an actual event. David gives the proper verdict for this crime, but then Nathan shouts in his face, “You are the man!” After continuing to ream David about his act of adultery, murder, and ingratitude toward God, Nathan informs him that though he himself will not die for this since he expressed deep regret, violence would never leave his family. Furthermore, his wives and/or concubines would be raped in front of him by his own son in broad daylight. In this way, David’s concealed crimes will be on public display in front of the whole nation. And on top of all that, the baby he conceived with Bathseba would die.

The critics scream about this apparent injustice against the baby, but it is David and Bathsheba who would suffer; the baby would be in paradise. Death is not the worst thing for the innocent and the righteous, who are much better off in the afterlife. And of course, no supporter of abortion has any right to fault God for this.

As the baby becomes more ill, David keeps begging God to spare him, but God’s decision is final. David fasts and prays for seven days, but the baby dies and the servants are afraid he’ll do something desperate. Yet to everyone’s shock, he gets up, washes, worships God, and eats a meal. They ask why he’s acting this way, and he explains that as long as the baby lived there was a glimmer of hope that God might relent. But now there’s no more reason to hope, so he has to move on.

Then he comforts Bathseba, and in time they have another baby, Solomon. In all of this, we see both the justice and the mercy of God, because he will keep his promises to David no matter what. God also honors the stolen and bereaved wife by making her the mother of the next king in David’s line.

## **2 Sam. 13**

After more battles the curse quickly becomes evident again. David's son Amnon has a half-sister named Tamar, and Amnon wants her as a lover. So his friend hatches a plot for Amnon to lure her to his bedroom so he can rape her. But as soon as he does, he instantly flips from being madly in love with her to hating her. So he sends her away in humiliation, but her brother Absalom just tells her it's nothing and he takes her into his home. David hears about it and is at least angry, but he does nothing to Amnon either.

Yet in time Absalom begins to hate Amnon and waits for the opportune moment to murder him. It takes two years, but he manages to lure Amnon to a place where sheep are being sheered and the men get drunk afterwards. So he has his servants kill him, and they all take off because they know David will be irate.

But the message given to David is that Absalom killed all his brothers, so David is beside himself with grief until another person refutes the false report. The sons return without Absalom, who had run away to another place and would stay there for three years. But David would keep longing to see him, which will turn out to almost cost him the kingdom.

## **2 Sam. 14**

Now because Joab knows David wants to see Absalom, he does something no self-respecting Christian man would dream of: consult a wise woman. And again I would confront the commentators and the likes of Josephus about their claims of women being unfit to give legal testimony.

She tells a story for the same reason Nathan did: to get David's decision on principle, before he knows who the story is really about. But this time David realizes what's going on, and he figures out who put her up to this. Even so, he grants Absalom's return to

Jerusalem, but he has to go to his own house rather than see his father, and he would stay there for two years.

Yet the family drama has just begun. Absalom is a handsome man from head to toe, and he has unusually thick hair that he has cut once a year. His father still won't see him though, and Joab won't relay any messages, so he decides to essentially throw a tantrum to get attention by burning one of Joab's fields. Now Joab has to go talk to him, and Absalom asks why he was brought home if he can't see his father.

## **2 Sam. 15**

So finally he's taken to see David, but in the meantime Absalom has collected a loyal group of men to serve as his own bodyguard. He starts what amounts to a political campaign by sweet-talking people at the city gate, and like any politician, he sows discontent with the ruling party and makes promises he has no intention of keeping. This goes on for four years, and then he makes up a cover story to leave the area and begin an insurrection without arousing his father's suspicion. Not even Absalom's men knew what he was planning.

Now when David gets wind of what's really going on, he and his men take off in fear, which seems really bizarre. But keep in mind that David loves Absalom too much to strike him down, so he probably runs away to avoid battle. Absalom had played his hand shrewdly by winning the people's hearts before making his military move, so David surely recognized that the best strategy for the moment was to retreat. However, he makes the mistake of leaving behind ten of his concubines to take care of the palace. Remember that curse from Nathan?

Then we're told that the priests of Zadok had taken the Ark with them as well, but David tells them to take it back to Jerusalem, to

which he will return someday to see if God is still with him. A short time later, David hatches a plan to infiltrate Absalom's advisory group and steer them the wrong way. He sends some of his own advisors to claim they were now siding with Absalom, and they would report Absalom's plans to the priests of Zadok who had returned to Jerusalem.

## **2 Sam. 16-17**

As David continues to run, he comes across a man from Saul's extended family named Shimei, who begins to hurl a continuous stream of insults and curses and rocks at David along the way. But though David's men want to kill Shimei, David won't allow it because he realizes that this is part of God's curse on him.

Meanwhile, back in Jerusalem, Absalom has been advised by a respected man named Ahithophel to unwittingly carry out part of the curse Nathan prophesied: Sleep with the concubines David left in the palace, in a tent up on the roof where everyone could see. The motivation was to fan into flame the antagonism between himself and his father, but this was God's curse coming to pass.

After this, Ahithophel advises Absalom to allow him to go and chase after David to the point of exhaustion, then strike him down and take his men back to join Absalom's army. But David's planted advisor Hushai suggests a different strategy, one that requires Absalom himself to go into battle. Obviously, Hushai just wants Absalom out where he'll be vulnerable. But his advice is accepted and the truly wise plan of Ahithophel is rejected, which was humiliating and devastating for any trusted advisor. Remember, this is all God's doing.

Another thing to remember is the communication line from Hushai to David. The infiltrators relay the message of Absalom's plans, but they're exposed and Absalom sends out men looking for them. They

hide in a well and the woman there covers them up, and once again we see the use of a (literal) cover story to send the men off on a wild goose chase.

So the infiltrators escape, and again we can only assume that if the commentators are consistent they will say that God really wanted them to die because the woman shouldn't have hidden them or told a lie. Then Ahithophel, the humiliated advisor, goes home and settles his estate and then commits suicide. People today underestimate the deep pain humiliation can cause, but God will hold to account anyone who assassinates a person's character.

## **2 Sam. 18**

Now we come to what is arguably the most painful episode in David's life. He intends to go out to do battle with Absalom's forces, but his soldiers wisely insist that he stay in the city, because David is the only one Absalom cares about killing. Even so, he instructs his generals to treat Absalom gently.

David's army soundly defeats Absalom's, though it says that the forest claimed more lives than the soldiers. But then as Absalom rides through the forest his ultra-thick hair gets caught in some branches, leaving him dangling while the mule he was riding just keeps going. But despite David's orders, when Joab comes upon Absalom, he thrusts three spears into him and kills him.

At the news of Absalom's death, the battle is called off and the enemy soldiers run to their homes. But when the news finally reaches David, instead of celebrating his army's victory he goes up to his room and weeps bitterly. Of course, weeping when your army wins demoralizes the soldiers and makes them ashamed in victory. So Joab goes to David and lectures him about such behavior; it can't go on just because of David's personal loss. If he doesn't pull himself together, he will have no loyal soldiers left by morning.

In his diatribe, Joab informs David that he seems to love his enemies and hate his friends. This is another lesson for the Christian community, which is known for treating each other like worse enemies than the devil himself. Outrage that should be reserved for those who deliberately subvert the faith is heaped upon anyone holding an opinion not in line with our own on disputable matters. Such attitudes have dismembered the Body of Christ into a thousand pieces.

Another excuse Christians make for loving God's enemies and hating his friends, is that we fear chasing away what is believed to be a potential convert if we dare to defend ourselves or our faith. But not only is that untrue, since not everyone is a "seeker" or will run away, the far greater sin is for Christians to devour each other in public, in front of the enemies of God who laugh at how we do their work for them. The Christian community has a reputation of shooting its wounded.

## **2 Sam. 19-21**

After this, David returns to Jerusalem and a united Israel. But Shimei, that annoying pest that cursed David and threw rocks at him, realizes he's in deep trouble, so he falls before David and begs for mercy, which David grants.

But there are always still some who don't like the way things turn out, so someone named Sheba decides to split the people of Israel from the people of Judah after some bickering between them. But Joab, who had been expelled for killing Absalom, goes after Sheba.

As they catch up to him and the army of Israel, they put up a siege ramp to break through the wall of the city where Israel was camped. Once again we meet a wise woman, who speaks to Joab and tries to get him to stop from destroying the city. He tells her that his only goal is to find this rebel leader, and she promises to throw Sheba's



head to him over the wall. When the deed is done, Joab returns to Jerusalem to see David.

But then a famine strikes the land for three years, and David finds out from God that it's because of the remaining evil men who had been loyal to Saul. So he goes to the Gibeonites to see what they want in reparations for what Saul had done, and all they ask is for David to hand over seven of Saul's male descendants to be executed.

Then it's back to dealing with those infernal Philistines, and we're told of the deaths of some giants, one of which was the brother of Goliath, and another having six fingers on each hand and six toes on each foot. Many seem to think that all the giants had this feature, but this is the first time it's mentioned in scripture.

## **2 Sam. 22-24**

Chapter 22 is a song of David, and chapter 23 records his final poetic words. He speaks of the covenant God made with him, to preserve his family dynasty. And then, as mentioned earlier in the account of Bathsheba and her murdered husband Uriah, we see the list of David's warriors, all having achieved extraordinary feats in battle.

But we're not quite finished with David's lapses of judgment just yet, and again we wonder why such faults would be recorded if the scriptures were Jewish fiction. David orders a census of the number of available soldiers in Israel, though Joab can't imagine why it's needed. Afterwards, David feels great remorse and asks God's forgiveness, but God tells him to pick his punishment from 3 choices: Seven years of famine, three months of persecution from enemies, or three days of plague in the land. David chooses door number three, and the plague takes the lives of 70,000 men. So

much for the census. But only then does David offer to exchange his life for the people, since they were innocent.

This is the end of 2 Samuel, so we'll have to wait for the study of Kings to read the circumstances of David's death. Yet his family still has some drama to play out before then.

# 1 Kings

## Introduction

1 Kings begins with the death of King David and the transition to the reign of his son Solomon, and ends with Israel divided and descending into idolatry.

## 1 Kings 1-3

The book opens with David being old and feeble, and a son named Adonijah taking advantage of this by claiming succession to the throne. But the prophet Nathan tells Bathsheba about this, and they manage to get David to formally name her son Solomon as David's successor, with the help of Zadok and some others. When Adonijah and Joab realize what just happened, they run for cover, but Solomon declares that he'll only execute Adonijah if he turns out to be disloyal.

Now David gives Solomon final advice and instructions, which include avenging those who he himself was not permitted to harm. Just because David wouldn't strike down someone sent by God to torment him, didn't mean Solomon couldn't. So after David's death, Solomon gets busy tying up the loose ends. Some try to use Bathsheba to unwittingly allow the throne to be usurped by marriage to one of David's concubines or wives, but Solomon is already a wise man and sees right through such things.

Meanwhile, Joab has run to take hold of the altar of God as a sanctuary from Solomon, but it does him no good and he is executed for his treachery against David. The same happens to that pest Shimei, and then Solomon has secure control over the whole

kingdom of Israel. He then gets busy marrying wives, starting with the daughter of Pharaoh, but he only partially re-establishes proper worship of God.

Then we come to the familiar story of how Solomon was granted extraordinary wisdom. God appears to him in a dream and asks what gift he'd like. And because Solomon asks for the wisdom to guide the nation, God grants him not only the most wisdom anyone would ever have, but also what he didn't ask for: riches, honor, and long life. But it's conditional; he must walk in the ways of his father David.

Then comes the first demonstration of his wisdom. Two prostitutes are fighting over a baby; one rolled over on her baby during the night and suffocated it, so she switched babies with the other woman living in the same house. So they go to Solomon to determine which woman is the real mother, and his test is hailed as ingenious. The real mother values the baby's life over having custody, while the fake one would rather the baby die than give it back to her real mother.

## **1 Kings 4-7**

Now the narrative moves to identifying the members of Solomon's royal court, and just as a bit of trivia, it's in verse 8 that we see the name Ben-Hur. It moves on to how Solomon became wealthy and famous around the world for his wisdom just as God promised, then says that he produced manuals on botany describing all sorts of plants, and on biology describing all types of animals and fish.

The construction of the temple began 408 years after Israel left Egypt, and four years after Solomon became king. From the details given, many have tried to visualize the structure, one example of which you can see [here](#). It took seven years to complete the temple, but thirteen to complete the palace. So in addition to being politically

wise, Solomon was also well-versed in the sciences and in structural engineering.

## **1 Kings 8-10**

Finally the Ark is moved from Zion to the temple, but for some reason, by this time the Ark only contains the stone tablets. When everything is in place, a cloud of God's glory fills the temple and Solomon proceeds with its dedication. In his long speech, we see repeated appeals for God to have mercy on his wayward people who are sure to go astray and bring disaster upon themselves. God appears to Solomon again after all this, reminding him that his continued blessings depend on continued obedience.

Now we meet the famous Queen of Sheba (or Saba), believed to have been in southern Arabia; in Mat. 12:42 she is called the Queen of the South. She comes to test Solomon's reputation of being wise, and once more we might ask why anyone could use Biblical facts to argue that women are not credible witnesses. But even Solomon would later seem to forget this in some of his Proverbs.

She is very impressed, not only with his wisdom but also his palace, food service, and everything else. So she returns to her homeland, and that's all scripture says about her. Some urban legends believe she had a child with Solomon, but there is no evidence of this. Then we're told more about Solomon's wealth, such that silver was as common as stones, and cedar as common as the local fig trees.

## **1 Kings 11-12**

When living is easy, people drop their guard, and Solomon was no exception. All the wealth and wives in the world couldn't satisfy him; he took wives from many nations though God had forbidden anyone

in Israel from doing so. 700 wives and 300 concubines from heathen lands is just asking for trouble.

So in his old age, having abandoned his wisdom, Solomon turns to the heathen gods at least partially, and we've already learned how deadly compromise can be. He even sets up shrines for the detestable gods Chemosh and Milcom, among many others his wives worshiped. So God tells him that the kingdom will be torn from his family after his death. But to keep his promise to David, God will leave one tribe in his line and reserve the city of Jerusalem.

The tearing begins with the rebellion of Jeroboam, one of Solomon's servants. But in verse 31, God says through the prophet Ahijah that God will only give him ten tribes and leave one for Solomon, so where is the twelfth tribe? We know from other passages that the southern kingdom would consist of Judah and Benjamin, but the exact number of tribes seems to have been somewhat fluid during this time, as you can see [here](#).

So God has selected Jeroboam to rule over the northern kingdom of Israel, but Solomon tries to kill him, so he takes refuge in Egypt until Solomon's death. Notice in verse 36 that God claims Jerusalem as his home, which is a critical piece of information in Bible prophecy. And then in verse 39 God says that he is humiliating David's descendants, but not forever, though some erroneously believe that God abandoned his promises to David after the first century a.d.

Finally Solomon dies and is succeeded by his son Rehoboam, and when Jeroboam hears the news, he goes to Rehoboam to petition for a lighter burden than Solomon had put on the nation. Rehoboam sends them off for three days while he consults with his advisors. The older ones wisely advise him to grant this request and gain the loyalty of Jeroboam and his people. But the younger ones advise him to be even harsher, and that's the advice he takes.

Yet this is God working behind the scenes, to complete the dividing of the nation. We see in verse 23 that God tells Jeroboam that Israel must not attack Judah, and oddly enough, he listens. But to keep anyone from thinking about defecting to his rival king, he has some golden calves made and puts one in Bethel and the other in Dan for the people to worship. You'd think he'd have some memory of how this sort of thing worked out for Aaron back in the day, but no. He also makes up festivals for the same days as the old ones, and a priesthood from non-Levites. Apostasy complete.

## **1 Kings 13-14**

As Jeroboam was about to make a certain sacrifice, God sends a prophet to pronounce curses on the altar. God will raise up a descendant of David named Josiah, who will take the fake priests and sacrifice them on that very altar. To prove this was from God, the altar would split open and spill its ashes on the ground. The now-enraged Jeroboam stretches out his hand and yells "Seize him!", but the hand shrivels up, and just then the altar splits apart as prophesied.

So now Jeroboam wants mercy, and the prophet prays for his hand to be healed. But a really bizarre event happens as the prophet returns home. God had told the prophet to not eat or drink in that place, but after he refuses Jeroboam's offer of food, he is met along the way by an older prophet who makes the same offer, using the lie that God told him to go ahead and eat. So the younger prophet eats, and during the meal God causes the older prophet to rebuke him for rebellion. This was obviously a test, so again our lesson is to stay true to what we know God has said, even if someone with impressive credentials comes along to "give new revelation".

So the younger prophet leaves, and along the way he is attacked and killed by a lion, but the lion doesn't eat him or his donkey. Again I would ask the critics whether a story like this would be something a

Jewish writer would make up. But even after all this, Jeroboam sticks to his evil ways, so his son Abijah becomes ill, which prompts Jeroboam to seek out the prophet that had told him he'd be king of Israel. He sends his wife and has her wear a disguise, but who would think a prophet wouldn't know who she was?

So the prophet gives her the message that disaster will fall on Jeroboam and his whole family, leaving none of them to ever sit on the throne of Israel. And it will begin as soon as she sets foot in her home, because her son will die at that moment.

Before we continue, notice 14:19's reference to "the annals of the kings of Israel". Some argue that if the Bible makes reference to a body of literature, then that literature should be preserved as scripture. This is especially the case with the Book of Enoch, which incidentally is not mentioned in scripture as a book but merely a quote. So why doesn't anyone claim that these Annals should be in scripture, and someone took them out as part of an evil plan to hide truth from us? The simple answer is that many want Enoch to be scripture, but they really don't care about royal exploits in history. The mere mention of a source in the scriptures does not qualify a body of literature to be on the same level, so this argument should not be used to say a certain thing was taken out of the Bible.

Then we read of the death of Jeroboam, whose son Nadab replaces him, and then the text switches over to what's going on with Rehoboam. Not surprisingly, Judah has also turned to evil, so God allows Egypt to attack them and loot the temple and royal palace. In time, Rehoboam also dies and is replaced by his son Abijah.

## **1 Kings 15-16**

From this point on, we see that the downward spiral of degeneracy continues, but God allows the dynasty to continue only for David's sake. Then came a king of Judah named Asa, who actually did good



things, including undoing all the bad things his predecessors had done. But there was always bickering and war between the two kings as long as they lived. After Asa came his son Jehoshaphat to rule Judah, and then the text turns back to pick up the reign of Nadab over Israel. Unlike Asa, Nadab is evil, and he is eventually assassinated and replaced by Baasha, who goes on to execute all of Jeroboam's family as prophesied. This is getting difficult to follow, but [this source](#) might help (image download). So we'll skip over some of the kings and go to the infamous Ahab.

Ahab is made king of Judah and is very evil. He marries an evil princess named Jezebel— yes, that Jezebel— and they're both worshipers of Baal. 15:34 briefly mentions the fulfillment of Joshua's curse on whoever rebuilt Jericho, and then the text picks up the thread of the prophet Elijah as he encounters Ahab and Jezebel.

## 1 Kings 17-18

God sends Elijah to tell Ahab there will be no rain or dew unless Elijah allows it, then has him hide out at a place near a stream, where God will supply him with bread and meat delivered by ravens. But the stream dries up, so God tells him to go stay with a certain widow. It turns out that she and her son expect to die of starvation after she makes one last meal with the flour and oil she has. But Elijah assures her that if she takes him in, they will all have food to live on, and that's what happens. But then the son becomes seriously ill, and the mother asks if Elijah only came to remind her of her sin, whatever that was. So he takes the boy to a room and begs God to heal him, which he does, so she is assured that Elijah is indeed a prophet of God.

After the famine had been going on for three years, God tells Elijah to present himself to Ahab. But the text mentions someone named Obadiah as a loyal follower of God who had hidden all the prophets when Jezebel was bent on killing them. So we only have a reference

to this backstory here, and we don't know if this Obadiah is the same as the Old Testament book by that name.

Anyway, because of the famine, Ahab had sent out Obadiah to help him find pastureland, and along the way he meets up with Elijah. He tells Obadiah to inform Ahab that he's back, and he arranges to meet him. This is where we see the epic showdown between the prophets of Baal and the prophets of God. They all gather at Mt. Carmel, where Elijah challenges the people gathered to watch the show and decide which God they will follow.

He goes on to tell them that he's outnumbered by Baal's prophets 450 to 1, but each side has the same challenge: get their God to light the fire on a prepared sacrificial animal, and Baal's prophets get to go first. The people agree that whoever's God lights the fire wins their loyalty. So Baal's prophets start their rituals and continue all morning without results. Elijah taunts them: "Yell louder! Maybe Baal is meditating, or took a break, or went on a trip, or fell asleep."

So Baal's prophets up their game by worshiping more frantically all afternoon, cutting themselves until their blood flows and working themselves into a frenzy. Then finally it's Elijah's turn. He builds an altar out of twelve stones to match the tribes of Israel, digs a deep trench around it, then has servants pour so much water over the whole altar and sacrificial animal that it fills the trench. The likelihood of the wood spontaneously bursting into flame is pretty much zero at this point.

Then at evening, Elijah prays to God to answer him, and he does by shooting down fire from the sky that consumes the animal, the wood, the stones, the dirt, and all the water in the trench! Take that, Baal. Finally the people start chanting that God is their God, and Elijah orders them to quickly seize Baal's prophets to be executed. Once that's done, he tells Ahab to prepare for a rainstorm.

## **1 Kings 19-20**

Now Ahab goes home and starts moping about all this, so Jezebel sends a message to Elijah that she intends to kill him. Then as if he's already forgotten what God just did, he runs and hides in the desert and asks God to take his life. He just lies down and falls asleep, but God's angel comes to revive him and he travels for forty days and nights to Mt. Horeb, the mountain of God.

This is where he hides in a cave and God speaks to him and passes by the entrance of the cave. It's also a familiar passage due to the manner in which God does so: not with a strong wind, not with an earthquake, not with a fire, but with a quiet whisper. We refer to this many times as Christians, waiting for "that still, small voice" instead of expecting God to shout. Being a good listener is vital.

What God tells him is to go to Damascus to anoint Jehu king over Israel to replace Ahab, and Elisha as his own replacement. And as for Elijah's claim that he was the only prophet left, God informs him that he still had 7,000 loyal followers. So Elijah finds Elisha, who attends to him from that point on as a kind of apprentice.

God is arranging the downfall of Ahab, so he has the king of Syria march against Samaria, where Ahab was. But God delivers Israel from the first attack so they try again. Of course, God plans to deliver them again simply to prove that it's by his power and not that of the small army of Israel. But Ahab lets the enemy king live, and God tells him it will cost him his own life.

## **1 Kings 21-22**

Now we come to the incident Ahab and Jezebel are most known for, the one that those teaching gender hierarchy love to cite. They claim that Jezebel's greatest sin was not necessarily idolatry or even murder, but "taking the lead" for her husband. From this false

narrative they invent something called a “Jezebel spirit”, which they use to beat noncompliant women into submission. Scripture says no such thing, neither expressed nor implied. We have already seen women like Abigail and Sarah take the lead, and they are commended by scripture. Modern Christianity is more restrictive and demeaning of women than anything God ever tolerated.

It happens that someone named Naboth owns a vineyard next to Ahab’s palace, and Ahab wants it, but Naboth won’t sell it to him. So Ahab sits in his palace and pouts, and like a child throwing a tantrum, he crawls into bed and won’t eat his supper.

So Jezebel, the adult in the relationship (though an evil one), is incensed that the high and mighty king doesn’t just take what he wants. She essentially pats him on the head, tells him it’ll be all right, and goes off to take Naboth’s field herself. She gets some scoundrels to falsely accuse Naboth of cursing God and Ahab, so they haul him off and execute him, and the field is now Ahab’s to take.

But God tells Elijah to go confront Ahab as he arrives at the stolen vineyard. He informs him that in the very spot where dogs licked up the blood of Naboth, they will do the same to Ahab. In addition, Jezebel will be eaten by dogs outside the wall of Jezreel.

Sometime later the kings of Judah and Israel decide to jointly attack land from the king of Syria, but they inquire of God first. However, the prophet they need to ask, Micaiah, is hated by Ahab. The two kings sit on their thrones while they wait, with all their prophets telling them what they want to hear. But when Micaiah arrives, he sarcastically tells him the same as all the other prophets, and Ahab snaps at him to cut that out and tell the truth. So Micaiah does, and he’s rewarded by being punched in the jaw by some guy named Zedekiah, then being sent to jail. Talk about shooting the messenger.

The battle begins, and an archer shoots at random and happens to hit Ahab between the plates of his armor. So he's taken out of the battle but eventually bleeds to death, and the prophecy was fulfilled that dogs would lick up his blood. We won't read about Jezebel's death until 2 Kings 9.

Then the text reports that Jehoshaphat becomes king of Judah, and he's a good king like Asa, for the most part. Then he dies and is succeeded by his son Jehoram. Meanwhile, Ahab's son Ahaziah becomes king of Israel, but he's evil like his parents. So ends 1 Kings.

# 2 Kings

## Introduction

2 Kings begins with the death of King Ahab and ends with the first exile of Israel and Judah.

## 2 Kings 1-2

The book begins with King Ahaziah, who falls out of a window and hurts himself. But notice the name of the god he seeks out to know whether he'll recover: Baal Zebub. That should sound familiar. However, the Greek text calls Baal a goddess, the fly god of Akkaron, which is a likely meaning of the name rather than a different god.

But notice a different usage of the phrase “angel of the Lord” here: The text makes it clear that this is Elijah, which helps us remember that the primary meaning of the Greek word *angelos* is *messenger*, not always *supernatural being*. Scripture refers to the supernatural ones as “sons of God”, “the angels of heaven”, or “the holy angels”, and context always has the final say on word meaning.

The king sends fifty men to arrest Elijah, who calls down fire from heaven on them. For some reason, the king repeats this futile effort twice more, but the third time the fifty men plead with Elijah not to turn them into a large order of fries, and God tells Elijah to go with them. But 1:15 uses that phrase again, “the Lord’s angelic messenger”, and this time it’s either a supernatural angel or a theophany. So they go back to the king and Elijah tells him he will die because he sought help from a false god. When he does, he is succeeded by his brother Jehoram, since he had no son.

In ch. 2 we come to the departure of Elijah from this world, in a way very similar to that of Enoch long before. He is told to travel to Jericho and tells Elisha to stay behind, but he refuses to leave him. Several times along the way, local prophets say to Elisha, “You know God is going to take your master from you today, right?” Elisha is understandably irritated and tells them to shut up about it.

They arrive at their destination, and as fifty prophets stand and watch, Elijah does a Moses by rolling up his cloak and striking the river with it to part the waters. After they cross, a fiery chariot and horses pulls up between Elijah and Elisha, and it takes Elijah up to heaven while Elisha watches and cries out. In case you didn’t know, this is where we get the phrase “chariots of fire”. Then Elisha, to see if he did indeed get the prophetic gift Elijah had, repeats the parting of the waters with Elijah’s cloak. So now the prophets that witnesses all this pay respect to Elisha.

The next section is another favorite of the critics, because Elisha asks God to deal with a pack of young troublemakers, who are immediately attacked and killed by two female bears. These were not five or six little boys but a gang of over forty young men, who by scriptural convention could be as old as twenty or thirty. Even if we take the median age from various commentators, they were at least teenagers and old enough to be responsible for their actions. Even so, it is not Elisha but God who deems the gang worthy of death.

## **2 Kings 3-4**

Now it’s back to the endless string of wars, and the kings of Israel and Edom call for Elisha to find out if God will help them. God grants them aid through miraculous provision, where he uses a sort of optical illusion to lure the enemy army to its death. Seeing that he was defeated, the king of Moab decides to try and please his god by making a human sacrifice of his own son who would have succeeded him to the throne. Now we know where the movie

*Avengers: Infinity War* got the idea for Thanos to sacrifice the only one he loved.

This concept should not be a surprise to Christians, since John 3:16 says the same thing: God showed his love for the world by giving up his only and beloved Son. Now before the critics cackle that this makes the God of the Bible no better than Molech or Chemosh, ask them whether the children in those religions had a choice in the matter, because Jesus clearly did, per passages such as Phil. 2:5-11. Jesus volunteered.

Now in ch. 4 it's time for Elisha to do a similar miracle to when Elijah helped that widow and her son. This time the widow is facing foreclosure and the taking of her sons as slaves to pay debts incurred after the death of her husband. So Elisha is able to miraculously provide her with enough olive oil to sell and pay the debts.

Like the widow's boy who was deathly ill, Elisha comes to another place where a woman is barren, and he asks God to give her a son in her old age. But one day the boy seems to suffer some kind of cerebral hemorrhage and he dies. So she goes to get Elisha, who goes back to her home, where he prays and God revives the boy.

The rest of ch. 4 gives several other instances of Elisha's miracles, including one that foreshadows Jesus' miracles of feeding thousands of people with a few loaves of bread and some grain.

## **2 Kings 5-7**

Now to another familiar incident, the one where the Syrian general Naaman contracts a devastating skin disease. He had acquired a Hebrew slave girl for his wife, and she recommends that Naaman go to see Elisha for healing.



When he arrives, Elisha tells him to wash seven times in the Jordan river to be healed. But Naaman feels insulted by such a demeaning exercise, so he stomps off in anger, but his servants talk him into doing it anyway and he is healed. So he offers Elisha a gift, but he refuses to accept any payment. Then Naaman makes a very odd request: a jar of dirt. His reason is so that he can take the soil of Israel with him and worship Elisha's God on it.

Notice also that he asks God's forgiveness for having to perform the duty of helping his master worship the god Rimmon. The lesson for us is that sometimes circumstances force us into "gray areas", but God knows our heart, and we don't know other people's hearts. We must be slow to judge and quick to forgive. However, as Christians we take our rules from the epistles, which teach that we should do everything possible to avoid the appearance of evil.

Now as Naaman leaves, Elisha's servant Gehazi runs after him and lies to him that Elisha changed his mind about the gift, but he really just wanted it for himself. So Elisha curses Gehazi and all his descendants with the very skin disease that Naaman was cured of. Again we ask why anyone would think a prophet wouldn't know about such a plot.

Skiping past a minor miracle of a dropped ax head floating to the surface of the river where it was dropped, we come to the time when Elisha defeats an entire army. Through a series of revelations of Syria's military plans, the Syrian king begins to suspect that there is a mole among his advisors. But one of them tells him that it's really Elisha who is getting intel from God.

So he sends a small army to arrest Elisha during the night. The next morning Elisha's servant looks out to see they're surrounded by this army, and Elisha says something totally nonsensical: that they outnumber the enemy. Then he prays, and God opens the servant's eyes to see the hillside covered with the same kind of fiery horses and chariots as what took Elijah alive to heaven.

Now he prays that God would strike the enemy blind, and he tells them they've come to the wrong place. He offers to lead them another way, but they don't realize where they had been until they find themselves in Samaria. So when the king of Israel sees them there, he asks Elisha if he should wipe them out, but instead Elisha tells him to throw a banquet and send them home. The result is that the Syrians would never again attempt to raid Israel.

However, they do invade Samaria, and the seige they put against it results in such hardship and starvation that the Samaritans decide it's all Elisha's fault. So they go after him, but he assures them that God will bring them food the next day. As it turns out, some poor diseased people decide to defect to the Syrian army, but when they get there it's deserted, because God had caused them to hear the sound of chariots and horses and a large army during the night. Still, after the poor people had eaten, they feel bad about keeping it to themselves, so off they go to tell the king the good news. But he thinks it's a trap, so he sends out scouts to make sure the report is true. And so Elisha's prophecy was fulfilled.

## **2 Kings 8-10**

Now it's back to the woman whose son had died and Elisha raised to life. He warns her that a famine is coming and she should move to another place for seven years.

Skipping past some more accounts of kings and betrayal, we come to the annihilation of Ahab's family and his widow Jezebel. An army assembles at Jezreel, where Naboth's vineyard had been. King Jehoram is confronted by King Jehu over his tolerance of Jezebel's idolatry, so he tries to get away but Jehu shoots an arrow and kills him. His body is thrown onto the field that belonged to Naboth, as God had prophesied.

Now when Jezebel hears about all this, she gets all dressed up and then leans out of a window to shout at Jehu, but he tells the eunuchs around her to throw her out the window. She hits the ground and her blood splatters all over the place, and then Jehu runs his chariot over her. That's what you call payback. But when he finally orders that her body should be properly buried because she had been royalty, they find nothing but her skull, feet, and hands, because as prophesied she had been eaten by dogs. Again, people love to gloat over her demise, but when compared with just about anyone else at that time, they all should be equally gloated over. Her sin and punishment had exactly nothing to do with her gender.

Now Jehu proceeds to finish wiping out Ahab's family, along with all the prophets and priests of Baal. But he fails to destroy the golden calves at Bethel and Dan, and by the time of his death, Israel's territory has begun to shrink from conquest.

## **2 Kings 11-17**

After accounts of restoring God's temple, and more kings and political intrigue, we come to where Elisha knows his days are numbered. We're often tempted to fault God when illness or disaster comes upon us, but in spite of being a loyal prophet of God, Elisha is stricken with a terminal illness and he dies. In 13:23 we are again reminded of God's determination to keep his promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, so the Hebrews were never completely destroyed as a people. But the narrative goes on to show how God's prophecies keep coming to pass in every detail.

Skiping past a long succession of kings, we come to where the narrative pauses to summarize this pathetic account of Israel and Judah, the end result of which was that Israel was deported to Assyria and Judah was decimated by robbers. In those days, a conquering king would populate the conquered land with his own people, and this happens in our day as well, though more slowly and

stealthily. Under the pretense of compassion for refugees, foreigners are being flooded into western lands to be supported on the backs of the working class, in order to ruin and humiliate the most loyal and productive citizens. This is proof that the evil leaders funding this operation consider the west to be conquered people.

But in a vain effort to appease what the Assyrians thought was a regional god, they simply added the worship of the true God to their pantheon, as many have done up to the present day.

## **2 Kings 18-20**

Now we come to king Hezekiah of Judah, and he turns out to be one of the few good kings in the list. One of his acts was to destroy the bronze serpent Moses had made, because people had turned it into an idol and named it Nehushtan. The lesson for us, as should be obvious, is that any good thing can become an idol, and when it does, we have to destroy it or remove it from our lives one way or another.

In time, Assyrian king Sennacherib invades Judah, and Hezekiah pays him off with gold from the doors of the temple. But Sennacherib tries to turn the people of Judah against Hezekiah, who seeks out the prophet Isaiah to speak to God on his behalf. God assures him that Syria will not prevail, and a long pronouncement is made against them.

But notice 19:28, where God says he'll put a hook in Sennacherib's nose and lead him back the way he came. This exactly matches the wording of another prophecy in Ezekiel 38:4 concerning the future war of Magog. Then notice in 19:34 where God states once again that the only reason a remnant of Judah will be preserved is because he keeps his promises, in this case the one to David. So God's angel kills 185,000 Assyrian troops in their own camp.

Now it's Hezekiah's turn to have a terminal illness, and Isaiah comes to tell him he won't recover. But when Hezekiah pleads with God to remember how he had served him faithfully, God grants him fifteen more years to live.

Yet notice the sign he had asked for to confirm the promise: The shadow of the sun, which moved along a set of stairs to mark the hours, would go backwards ten steps. Surely the entire world would have a record of this event and its severe effects on the earth, if the earth's alleged rotation had reversed. As with Joshua's long day, the simplest explanation is that it isn't the earth that moves.

Now when the king of Babylon hears that Hezekiah had been ill, he sends gifts and a letter. So Hezekiah naively shows his representatives all the riches in his whole kingdom, to be hospitable and of course to boast. So God sends Isaiah to tell him that in time all the things he showed the Babylonians would be carried off to their land, along with some of his own descendants. But all Hezekiah cares about is that it won't happen in his lifetime.

## **2 Kings 21-22**

As soon as Hezekiah dies, his son quickly undoes all the good his father had accomplished. This of course is the last straw, and now God has to completely remove the remnant of Judah from the land. A few more short-lived kings later, we come to Josiah, who faithfully follows God.

In the process of restoration, Hilkiah the high priest finds the scroll of the law, and he has a scribe named Shaphan read it to the king. Upon hearing the words, Josiah is very distraught and orders his officials to find someone to interpret them properly. So they send for another of that half of the human race deemed by sinful men to be incompetent as witnesses, a woman named Huldah. She is a prophet, and her husband supervises the king's wardrobe. That's

right, she's the spiritual leader and he's running the royal laundromat. This is not to demean him, but to give her the respect she deserves and has been robbed of by generations of Christian theologians.

Then she answers them by saying "This is what the Lord says", with all the authority of any male prophet. She tells them that God has decreed disaster for them all, and that nothing can be done to prevent it. But because Josiah is a decent person who honors God, none of this will happen until after his death.

## **2 Kings 23-25**

In the meantime, Josiah assembles the whole nation to make them hear the words of the law, and then he orders the destruction of all the implements of Baal worship, including worship of the heavenly luminaries. Again we see that such worship is forbidden by God, to answer the foolish critics' claim that the Bible promotes sun worship since Jesus is the Son of God. Yes, there are actually people who make that claim.

Finally, the shrines at Bethel and Dan are destroyed. Then in 23: 22 we find out that the Passover had not been observed since the days of the judges, in either Israel or Judah.

Then Josiah is killed in battle, and his son Jehoahaz goes right back to the evil practices of the past. Likewise for the next king, and that's when King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon attacks and subdues the entire region. He also carts off all the riches from the temple of God and the royal palace, then uproots the people of Jerusalem and transplants them in Babylon. Then he appoints a succession of vassal kings to govern the area, the palace, and all the houses in Jerusalem, and the walls of the city are broken down as well. Even so, a few poor families are left there, likely to keep the land from becoming a wilderness or being overrun by wild animals.

## Conclusion

The people to whom God had offered so much were completely removed from the Promised Land, because they couldn't help themselves from cheating on him. Even God's patience runs out eventually, but he never breaks his unilateral promises, even if almost all of his people have to be abandoned.

We sit here from our vantage point in time and think we wouldn't be like them, but the truth is that we forget what God has done for us, and we live like he doesn't matter, except as something like an elderly relative in a nursing home that we visit once a week. Like the Hebrews, we only run to God when we're desperate, and then we wonder why he doesn't seem to hear our prayers.

# **1 and 2 Chronicles**

The books of Chronicles are basically a recap of Israel's history before Christ, including detailed descriptions of rules for government and religious responsibilities. So we will focus mainly on the temple and its location, which is important in the study of Bible prophecy.

## **1 Chronicles**

The first nine chapters of this book are comprised of genealogies, though not always with the same details as the ones up to the time of the Exodus. There are a few brief mentions of battles, and ch. 9 lists those who returned to Jerusalem after the first exile. There is also a repeated section about David's warrior elite in ch. 11.

In the following chapters we also see the detailed instructions set up by David concerning the orders of priestly service, which for now doesn't seem to be of much interest, but which will come in handy when we get to the New Testament and determine the time of year Jesus was likely born. The main point is to know that this data exists so it can be referenced as needed, rather than that we must trudge through it out of a sense of duty.

In ch. 25 there is a list of organized groups of musicians to lead Israel in worship or celebration, rather than to entertain. In ch. 26 we see the divisions of gatekeepers and storehouse supervisors, and in ch. 27 the lists of army commanders and government officials. And that's pretty much the gist of 1 Chronicles.

## **2 Chronicles**



2 Chronicles begins with details of Solomon's temple construction, and 3:1 states the location as Mt. Moriah in Jerusalem, where God had appeared to David. We should know that Jesus said not one block of the temple would be left on top of another, so the present-day "wailing wall" cannot be part of that temple. The real location is 1000 feet south of the Dome of the Rock, the details of which you can study [here](#). The rest of 2 Chronicles is more recap of events already covered. The question remaining, as far as prophecy is concerned, is whether the Tribulation temple will be where scripture says God's temple should be, or whether it will be nearer the Dome of the Rock since it will be illegitimate. But we do know that the Millennial temple will be where it belongs.

# Ezra

## Introduction

The book of Ezra covers the return of some of the exiles to Jerusalem.

## Analysis

Ezra begins with the decree of King Cyrus of Persia to allow exiled Israelites to return to Judea and rebuild Solomon's temple, as predicted by the prophet Jeremiah. If you're familiar with the book of Daniel, you know that the Babylonian empire ruled by Nebuchadnezzar was taken over by the Medes and Persians, so the seventy-year exile is ending at this point. Had many of today's Christians been alive during this first exile, they would have interpreted prophecies of return as purely spiritual or allegorical.

Ch. 2 is a list of those returning, and notice that in verse 62 there were some priests who would not be permitted to serve as such until their lineage could be determined. Though the Promise to Abraham still stood, and anyone could be a convert, the priesthood required genetic descent from Levi.

Skipping to ch. 4, we see that there was opposition to this rebuilding project from people of Samaria who were partly related to the Israelites. They begin by saying they want to help, but the help is refused so they keep doing whatever they can to hinder the reconstruction, including sending letters to Babylon warning of possible rebellion and loss of tax revenue.

However, this appears to have reached the king after the temple was finished, so the work they want to stop is on the city walls, and the king grants their request. Our lesson so far is that even when God answers our prayers with a “yes”, it doesn’t mean we won’t face any obstacles, because testing is one of the purposes of this life.

Ch. 5 is the text of the letter they sent to the king, and ch. 6 tells us that King Darius the Persian searched out the original order to rebuild the temple, which clearly permitted the temple’s reconstruction—including death by impaling for anyone who would try to change the order. According to the Constable’s Notes, it was finished in early 515 b.c., fulfilling the prophecy of seventy years from when Nebuchadnezzar destroyed it. This one would stand until 70 a.d.

Ch. 7 is when the scribe Ezra leaves Babylon for Jerusalem, to teach the law to the Israelites there. Ch. 8 lists the others who went with him, ch. 9 is Ezra’s prayer of confession and repentance for the nation. and ch. 10 is when the people repent with him.

But notice starting in verse 14 that any who had married foreign wives had to send them away. Nothing is said about provisions for the divorced wives, but remember that Levite from an earlier lesson who threw his concubine to a violent mob of rapists? Marriages were less about love than property.

So the book of Ezra is mostly the account of prophetic fulfillment, the proof of God’s authorship of the scripture, and his control the historical events.

# Nehemiah

The book of Nehemiah, as does Ezra, covers the return of some of the exiles to Jerusalem.

## Analysis

The first chapters of Nehemiah are his own personal account of events. While Ezra focuses more on the temple and spiritual purification, Nehemiah focuses more on repairing the wall around Jerusalem. At the end of ch. 1 he states that he was the cupbearer to King Artaxerxes when he heard about the condition of the wall.

But in ch. 2 the king notices he appears to be depressed and asks him why, and when he tells him, the king grants him permission to go to Jerusalem and oversee the wall's repair himself.

Ch. 3 lists the names of the builders, and it serves as a good source of data for anyone interested in the details that identify the area. This is important because of the claim by some that parts of southern Africa as the real location of Jerusalem, based only on the most superficial similarities of terrain. It takes more than a few hills and rivers to identify a location.

Then ch. 4 records the continued opposition to the restoration from locals. But this time they're not content with sending letters of complaint to Babylon, so they assemble an army to move against Jerusalem. Nehemiah's advice is to have workers take turns standing guard, and to remind everyone that the God they serve will bless them if they're persistent and faithful.

Ch. 5 reports that the people had become impoverished during this time, having to go deep into debt and even selling their children into

slavery just to keep from starving. But Nehemiah discovers that the real cause of the poverty is the greed of the wealthy among them, who were ignoring the laws of Moses concerning not charging interest to the poor and making loans instead of gifts. So he makes them return everything they had taken and to stop the confiscation of property.

Meanwhile, in ch. 6 the enemies of the Israelites make up false charges of intent to rebel and choose a king, but Nehemiah calls their bluff and just keeps going. The people knew him as a man of integrity and didn't listen to the gossip, so that attempt to stop the work failed as well. After yet another attempt to lure him into a trap, the wall is finally finished, and the enemies realize that it was only done with the help of Israel's God. Then after appointing permanent guards and officials, the text lists the results of a genealogical search for the residents.

Finally, when all was done and the people were permanently settled, they gathered to hear the law read, just as had been done before the exile at one point. Notice in verse 8 that many needed the words translated as they were read aloud, since the exile in Babylon resulted in them only knowing Aramaic rather than Hebrew. Words are not an end in themselves; they are the means to an end, which is understanding. This is why even the translators of the King James Bible stated in their preface that the Word of God must not be locked up in letters and syllables, which ironically many today have done by forbidding the use of any translation since then.

Now in 8:9 the people had been eager to hear the words, which is often not the case with Christians today, and they wept at how far they had fallen from God's ideal. But Nehemiah tells them that this was to be a time of celebration, because "the joy of the Lord is your strength" per verse 10. The feast of tabernacles described in this section serves the purpose of having the people enact what they heard, to make them participate in the law rather than just hear it.

For us, the lesson is to live and breathe what we believe, to make it the focus of our lives instead of an afterthought or last resort.

Now notice 9:2. Among the assembly of faithful Israelites were foreigners, and they were separated from Israelites of pure genetic descent for one particular assembly where the people confessed the sins of their ancestors.

Then the people sign a written covenant to keep all these laws, and after the listing of assigned living areas in ch. 11, they march around the city to dedicate the wall. Then on to some final housecleaning, and a final plea from Nehemiah to God to remember all he had done for his honor.

# Esther

## Introduction

The book of Esther is the inspiring account of a lowly Israelite woman who is put into position to decide the fate of her people.

## Analysis

The Persian king Xerxes is throwing an extended party for his officials, and his wife Queen Vashti is throwing a separate one for the women. But when Xerxes and his guests get good and drunk, he orders Vashti to be brought to him to show her off to his guests. But she refuses, so the king gets irate. Though the text only mentions her refusal and not the reason, it is believed that it would have been shameful for her to appear there, since society kept women hidden from public view for the most part, especially from a room full of drunken men.

Commentaries list several other guesses as to motive, but the point is that her refusal was seen as a slippery slope to “a women’s liberation movement” as one commentary puts it. Society seems to fear nothing as much as freedom and equality for women. Liberation is not a dirty word, and modern Christianity should be ashamed to treat it as such. But the most important point lost on modern theologians is the fact that this is a heathen king in a heathen society, not a Christian marriage from which we should take any lessons or examples.

So Vashti is handed divorce papers, because disrespecting a drunken king for demanding his wife expose herself to shame is just going too far. They need to send a clear message to all the other

uppity women who might get wild and dangerous ideas of their own from Vashti's example. And yes, I am being sarcastic, because that's what such attitudes deserve.

So in ch. 2 the hunt is on for a replacement, and a beauty pageant is conducted. Once again we see God working behind the scenes, because the plot to eradicate his people will not take him by surprise. It "just so happens" that one of the exiles of Israel was a man named Mordecai, who was the guardian of his cousin Esther since she had become an orphan.

Of course, the commentaries can't resist making Esther a sinner for violating the laws of Moses, in spite of the fact that as a woman she would be in much less a position to disobey the heathen society in which she lived than a man would be. But a woman had far less choice even with an ordinary man, much less the emperor of the known world.

Some go so far as to accuse her of fornication and marrying a foreigner, as well as eating unclean food. As with Rahab and Bathsheba, this implies that God would have preferred for all the Jews to die, in spite of the fact that it was her foster-cousin Mordecai who advised her in all this. While some at least admit that she probably had no choice, why not lead with that thought? Scripture never condemns Esther or sees a need to overlook any alleged sins, so why do the commentators feel such a need to bring them to the forefront? And what would they have Esther do, defy the king or defy her foster-cousin? The Jews were in exile precisely because they had defied God, so why pick on Esther for non-compliance, especially while letting Mordecai off the hook, since he told her not to reveal her ethnicity? This is why we can't have nice things.

In time, Mordecai learns of a plot to assassinate the king, so he tells Esther who in turn tells the king. But for now, this patriotic act is forgotten, though recorded in writing.



Eventually a man named Haman is appointed to high office, and he loves to have people bow down to him. But Mordecai refuses, and when people find out he is a Jew, they report him to Haman, who decides that all Jews should die. That sentiment still persists to this day; many blame the sins of a few on the whole race and/or nation.

So Haman lies to the king that all Jews disobey the king's laws, and he recommends an irrevocable edict be issued to wipe them all out on a certain day. The king grants Haman's request, so he sends out letters to all provinces to wipe out the Jews everywhere, including women and children, and confiscate all their possessions. And it's all because one Jew wouldn't bow to an egotistical tyrant.

Mordecai gets wind of this, so he and the Jews in every province wail, which gets Esther's attention. Then he tells her to petition the king about this, but she tells Mordecai that she could very well die just for approaching the king without being summoned. He points out first of all that being queen won't get her out of the edict of genocide. If she refuses to act, God will raise up someone else. Now what does this do to the theologians' claims that women are God's last resort? But Mordecai is not like the theologians; he tells her that she was likely in this position for just this purpose. So she sends word to Mordecai that all the Jews should fast for three days, and then she will take her life in her hands and approach the king.

Now Esther's plan is to do much more than simply walk up to the king and expose the plot. She not only has a clever plan, she also is taking initiative. To most theologians, this is a great and terrible sin, but when the nobleness of the act cannot be denied, such impertinence is conveniently overlooked. So she first simply asks for a private dinner with the two of them and Haman, and the king grants her wish.

Now Haman is thinking he's really being honored by this, so he goes home that day to brag to his friends. But he still can't abide that Jew

Mordecai, so they all tell him to build a gallows and then hang Mordecai on it after the private dinner.

But God is still working behind the scenes, and that night the king can't sleep so he has historical records brought in to be read to him. (Sounds like an excellent sleep aid.) But "it just so happened" that the section read to him includes Mordecai's earlier act of patriotism that saved the king's life. The king is surprised that no honor was given to Mordecai for this, but before he can decide what to do, Haman shows up, intending to tell the king to hang Mordecai on his gallows.

When he enters the room, the king speaks first and asks him how best to honor someone. So Haman advises lavish honor, thinking he is the one the king wants to honor. But to his utter horror, the king tells him to do all that for Mordecai. Plot twist!

So off goes Haman to make sure everyone knows what an awesome guy Mordecai is, and then he goes home to cry about it to his friends and family. When they hear what happened, they realize he's doomed, and just then the king's servants arrive to take him to the private dinner. I'm guessing Haman suddenly lost his appetite.

After two days of this banquet, the king asks Esther what she wants, and she pleads for her own life and the lives of her people. The king is incensed that anyone would threaten his queen, so he demands to know who issued the edict. She points and says, "The enemy is this evil Haman!", who at this point is likely turning ghostly white and wishing he were invisible.

So the king leaves the room to ponder Haman's fate, while Haman throws himself at Esther's mercy. But seeing him close to the queen when he reenters the room, the king blurts out, "Will he even try to molest the queen while I'm still here?" Upon hearing this, the attendants put a bag over Haman's head, which likely is where some Hollywood movies got the idea. Then one of the attendants tells the

king about the gallows Haman had made for Mordecai, and the king tells them to hang Haman on it instead.

For more irony, Mordecai is put in charge of Haman's estate. But the problem still remained regarding the edict, so Esther begs the king to do something. His solution is to give Esther and Mordecai the freedom to write whatever edict they want. So they send a message to all the provinces that the Jews are permitted to do whatever they want in self-defense.

The big day finally arrives, the fighting ensues, and the Jews prevail. All Haman's sons are also hung on his gallows, and this whole event is remembered in the Feast of Purim. For the Jews, it serves as a reminder of God's providence even in exile, and for Christians, it should remind us that God takes any action against his people very seriously.

Notice another fact in all this: Esther does this with "full authority". Mordecai does well after this too, but if the theologians and commentators can go out of their way to lessen the achievements of women in the Bible, we can go out of our way to highlight them.

# Job

## Introduction

The book of Job, named of course after its central figure, is the account of someone whose life is made an example of righteousness and faith, in spite of having no advance warning from God that he was to be tested.

Job probably lived in the time of the patriarchs, and since his name means “persecuted”, it’s likely a nickname acquired after this ordeal. Some speculate that he was actually the builder of the great pyramid of Egypt, which by most accounts was done around 2350 b.c., but that was probably at least 400 years before Job was born. Though it seems to be one of the earliest books of the Old Testament written down, that doesn’t mean the events it describes happened earliest.

Overall, the book is a long discourse over the problem of the suffering of the righteous, and the supernatural war between good and evil. But there are also some very interesting sections about the “sons of God” and powerful creatures God made. So the goal of this lesson will be to highlight those points rather than walk through every chapter in detail.

There is an important principle to remember from the examples of the book studies before this: God does indeed bless or curse on the basis of behavior overall, but he also makes concessions out of his mercy and patience. The idea that every righteous act is rewarded in this life, and every unrighteous act is punished in this life, is not a rule but a generality, and even less so in this age of faith rather than sight. Yet this idea has been held to be true, not only by people but also angelic beings, as we’ll come to see in this study. Scripture always emphasizes the relationship of trust from us to God, even

when things don't make sense. Neither prosperity nor hardship are necessarily deserved.

## **Job 1**

The opening of the book introduces us to Job as a wealthy man with ten children. Even so, he was very conscientious about pleasing his Creator, to the point of offering sacrifices just in case one of his children had a sinful thought against God. Notice that it says he was “pure and upright”, the epitome of a righteous person. This flies in the face of the badly-misinterpreted phrase “There is none righteous, not even one” in Rom. 3:10. That verse quotes from the Psalms—which are poetry, which in Hebrew culture tended to make generous use of hyperbole or exaggeration.

Now the text says that “the sons of God” were in the habit of presenting themselves before God, and that Satan came with them. Clearly this refers to angelic or supernatural beings, since mortals could never do this. Reference along with this 38:7, where it says these same beings shouted for joy at the time God created the earth and sky, before any humans existed. We recall as well in our study of Genesis that “sons of God” married human women and produced offspring that by description were not ordinary humans. It simply cannot be denied that this phrase in these contexts refers to angelic beings.

Notice also that Satan has been in the habit of roaming the earth, which matches 1 Peter 5:8's statement that the devil goes around looking for someone to devour. This is evidence that Satan does not reside in hell nor have any jurisdiction there. It will not be until the end of history that he is thrown into the Lake of Fire, and he will not be the one dishing out torment. We could add Rev. 12:10 as well, which describes him as like a prosecuting attorney who continually brings charges against us before God.

Recalling the erroneous belief that blessing and cursing always have a direct correlation with our deeds in this life, we see that Satan believes Job only serves God because of his blessing and protection. What Job has is from God, so Satan is sure that he will abandon God if those blessings are withdrawn. God essentially says “game on!”, though he doesn’t give Job any heads-up for what’s about to happen. In fact he couldn’t, because that’s the whole point of the test. So God allows Satan to attack all that Job has, including his family, but forbids him to attack Job himself. Most of us would consider that the worst situation, as any decent person would rather take suffering themselves than see it fall on those they love. But the point is that Satan is on a leash and can only do what God permits.

Still, critics take such permission as evil, since God allows suffering that he has the power to prevent. The book *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* wrestled with this same criticism, concluding that God must be either evil or powerless. But the great error of that book and criticism is first of all that prosperity is as undeserved as hardship, and second, that just because there is no justice in this life doesn’t mean there will never be justice at all. And we’ve already made the point that God has purposes for our experiences in this life, so we must trust him regardless.

So off goes Satan to wipe out all Job’s wealth, and his entire family except his wife. But verse 22 tells us that Job held on to his integrity and refrained from charging God with being unjust. That is what faith does; this is evidence of relationship.

## **Job 2-5**

So Satan tries again, this time asking permission to strike Job himself, but God will not allow him to be killed. Then Job is stricken with painful sores, and to add insult to injury, his wife tells him to curse God and die, just like the critics of our day say. But Job’s response is exactly what’s been said so far in this commentary: Both

prosperity and hardship are God's prerogative. She, like the critics, assumed that God is unjust and there's no point in trying to please him.

Now when Job's friends hear about the disaster that had befallen him, they come to comfort him, and they're so horrified at his situation that they sit with him in silence for seven days. The culture held that the one suffering should be the first to speak, out of respect and compassion. Speaking too soon can be devastating to a soul already suffering, so the silence itself is often the most compassionate way to help someone.

Ch. 3 begins the long debate between Job and his friends, with Job lamenting that he was ever born. Then in ch. 4 his friends begin to respond, but their responses do more harm than good, since they, with one exception, assume Job has committed some terrible sin to deserve this tragedy. This is what we mean when we refer to people as "Job's friends"; the people we expect to sympathize with us turn out to be the most heartless antagonists, because they kick us when we're down. This is not the time for lectures but support.

## **Job 6-9**

As Job says in 6:14 and forward, such friends they are, as if he isn't suffering enough already! They undoubtedly thought, as many Christians do today, that since they all agree about Job's guilt, then Job must be guilty. Guilt by consensus rather than evidence is all too common.

Then in 7:11 Job turns his attention to God, who in his opinion owes him a fair trial. Who can blame him for thinking this? We suffer far less but are much quicker to fault God ourselves. He asks for an advocate, a defense attorney, which we know would eventually turn out to be Jesus.

Now in ch. 9 we see some interesting statements about cosmology, though we must keep in mind that this is wisdom literature. Verse 6 speaks of the earth's pillars, and verse 8 says God spreads out the heavens and walks on the sea. But who is Rahab in verse 13? It certainly can't be the woman we've read about before, who at this point was not even born. Rather, it is the name given in the ancient near east for a sea monster that symbolized evil.

Job continues in 9:14 with the understanding that even though he's innocent, his only plea on trial before God would be for mercy, since no one can sit as God's judge— though anti-theists consider themselves worthy to do so.

## **Job 10-11**

Now Job, though powerless before God, at least wants to know why this happened to him, and why life is so unjust and God seems so arbitrary in his blessing and cursing, since the innocent suffer and the guilty prosper. On one extreme is Job's friends' belief that prosperity and hardship have direct results in this life; on the other is Job's belief that God is simply raw sovereignty without justice or compassion. But both extremes come from ignorance of God's overarching plans which include reward in the afterlife, and of the unseen cosmic chess match between God and Satan.

Notice in verses 21-22 that Job believes the afterlife to be an existence in darkness, no matter how anyone lived. Such a view leads inevitably to despair over the injustices of this life. But Job is not charging God with wrongdoing, because we've just seen how he understands that no one can sit as God's judge. His friends are equally ignorant of God's ways, but their sin lies in the fact that they keep falsely accusing Job of having deserved his suffering.

In ch. 11 another friend speaks up, and this one accuses Job of arrogantly claiming perfection, showing no compassion at all for him



as a friend. He thinks he can shock Job into confessing, because he presumes to be Job's judge on the basis of mere suspicion rather than evidence.

One must stop and wonder at this point why many theologians can see so clearly the heartless legalism here against Job, but be totally blind to their own heartless legalism against fellow believers over just about any and every disagreement. This is especially despicable in the case of women suffering abuse from husbands wielding proof-texts like weapons against them. The same Pharisaical legalism was used at one point in American history to justify slavery. But the Bible's condemnation of "lording over" proves that no genuine Christian can put the letter over the spirit, especially when the letter is so badly twisted.

This so-called friend of Job stoops to the level of saying Job deserves even worse punishment than he's received, per his statement that God has forgiven some of Job's sins. Then he thinks he's showing compassion by telling Job that he can still be forgiven if he repents of his presumed but never-proved sin. This haughty attitude is seen on a daily basis in the Christian community, where in a twisted pretense of concern some believers tell other believers that they need to humble themselves, all because of a mere difference of opinion on a secondary teaching.

## **Job 12-25**

From this point Job keeps trying to deal with the clash between his friends' obvious false charges and God's apparent injustice. He knows he's innocent, but he has no answer for what has happened. Yet he is sure, in spite of everything, that God must be just, so there must be an answer, even if it can't be seen at the moment; he just wants to know what it is. His point in ch. 14 about the shortness of life is proof enough that we are in no position to demand anything from God, and he will indeed have his day in court, per 14:13-15. To

be fair, his friends have not been able to explain why the wicked so obviously prosper and the innocent suffer.

Then in ch. 16 Job sums up his friends once more: “What miserable comforters are you all!”, and in verses 19-21 he reiterates his belief that God will ultimately vindicate him. The more his friends pressure him to admit to some presumed sin, the more confident he becomes that God will declare him innocent. But like anyone in dire circumstances, Job rides an emotional roller-coaster between the heights of ultimate vindication and the depths of despair.

## **Job 26-37**

Here we see some interesting descriptions of the realm in which we live, and for this chapter especially I highly recommend checking many commentaries. But the overarching point Job is making is that he is the one in a position to educate his friends about the power of God; the friends have only scratched the surface.

Verse 5 speaks of “the dead beneath the waters”, and the meaning is somewhat obscure. Do the souls of all the dead reside beneath the seas? Do only the souls of the Rephaim reside there, since they were linked to the great worldwide evil that God had to destroy with the Flood? Is it all just a reference to the abode of the dead in general and not just under the sea, or the bedrock beneath the sea? Souls “under the earth” are also referenced in Phil 2:10 and Rev. 5:13 for two examples, and in all cases they seem to be speaking literally.

Now on to verse 7, and what can it mean that God “spreads out the northern skies over empty space and suspends the earth on nothing”? The commentaries offer various explanations, but the most plausible understanding of the “northern skies” in my opinion is that Job, from his location, could see the constellations revolve around Polaris (the North Star). Being high in the sky, a void or

“empty space” was between people and the stars, not “space” per the modern technical definition. Job is describing the power of God to do such a thing as to “stretch out” the vast array of stars.

As for the earth, the idea seems to be of something that is normally suspended from something above it, like a lamp hanging from a ceiling by a cord, but there is no such cord for earth. Yet as [the Cambridge commentary](#) points out, this does not rule out any support under the earth, since scripture is replete with references to the earth being on pillars, stable and unmovable. Pillars are also mentioned in verse 11, but as holding up the heavens from below, which the ancients believed to be the great mountain ranges.

Keep in mind also that this is in poetic form, such that the two lines express the same thought in different form:

- northern skies over the void
- earth suspended on nothing

Though commentators often find it tempting to use such terminology to claim that God was telling the ancients that earth is a spinning ball in a giant vacuum, we must guard against porting any modern ideas into ancient texts, even the Bible. Certainly we don’t need such things to prove the Bible is infallible; that is best accomplished by fulfilled prophecy, what I call the “fingerprint of God”. And why would scripture only specify the northern skies, if modern cosmology had been God’s intent to convey?

Verse 9 is just as intriguing: that God “conceals the face of the full moon” with clouds. The NET Bible differs from other translations and commentaries here. But though both the Hebrew and Greek use a word meaning “throne”, the moon seems a much better fit in the context, and the use of “throne” can be explained as a euphemism.

Now to verse 10 and the phrase about God marking out the horizon on the waters as a boundary between light and darkness. Most commentators understand it to refer to the circular horizon one

would observe out at sea, reaching to the point where sunlight gives way to darkness. The ancients seemed to believe that the earth was in the center of the celestial sphere, with the sun on one half and the moon and stars on the other, such that day and night was simply the revolving of this sphere around the earth.

In verse 12 we see Rahab mentioned again, and if one insists that it's merely a metaphor for the raging sea, they should consider that this begs the question of why such a comparison would be made if monsters never existed. It cannot refer to Egypt as some commentators do, since Job lived before the Exodus.

Now who is the "fleeing serpent" in verse 13? Some translations render it "crooked" rather than fleeing, and thus that it referred to jagged lightning, which seems to match with the first line of this verse about God making the skies fair. But as with Rahab, we need to consider why the writer of Job would compare lightning to a serpent or dragon, and some commentators hold that it's a reference to Satan's ultimate defeat. Yet it seems a stretch to think that Job would have this in mind in his discourse.

## **Job 38**

Skippping more verbal sparring, we come to the point where God finally steps in. We might find it disturbing that God chooses to begin his rebuke with Job, who has had enough of being grilled by his friends. But though his friends had only charged Job with sin, Job had essentially charged God with sin for punishing him for no reason. This is the great downfall of those who blame God when suffering comes to them. This is where we see what God thinks of anyone so presumptuous, so he demands that Job put his money where his mouth is.

God's first rhetorical question: "Who are you?" As another scripture puts it, the clay pot cannot critique the potter who formed it, yet

that's what people do. Though Job had demanded a fair trial, God demands to know his right to ask this of his Creator.

In verse 4 is the second question: "Where were you?" God now points out that he alone made the world, so no other being has a right to claim to be his equal. God's description of what he created is all in terms of a strong, stationary realm with a foundation, measuring line, bases, and cornerstone.

Verse 7 is the reference we checked briefly before about the "sons of God" shouting for joy, and it's paired with "morning stars". Many are tripped up by the term "morning star", as if every instance means either Jesus or Satan and they can substitute whichever meaning they choose into all contexts. But here, the phrase clearly indicates angelic beings, and in that sense could actually fit all contexts since the second person of the trinity is often called "the angel of the Lord". Remember that both good and evil angels are angels nonetheless.

Now back to God's description of creation, and we see things like shutting up the sea with doors, which bursts out as if from a womb, the clouds and darkness as clothing for the sea, putting bars and gates around the seas to contain them, and so on.

38:11 speaks of God commanding the morning and the dawn to know their places, the corners of the earth, and earth taking shape like clay under a seal and being dyed like a garment. So far, everything God has used as analogies we can understand has been in terms of a motionless realm. While the reader can still invoke poetic license, conspicuous by its absence is any hint of a spinning sphere in a vast vacuum chamber, spiraling behind the sun at breakneck speed. Analogies are meant to bring understanding, not hide it.

In 38:16 God continues by mentioning the springs that fill the sea, expanses of earth unknown to the people of the Middle East, the

paths of light and darkness, and storehouses of the snow and hail reserved for days of battle. We've seen God's use of those terms in some of Israel's battles, and they were quite literal. More descriptions include the direction of lightning, channels for the rain and thunder, and the fact that God sends rain on places where no one lives.

In 38:31 God turns to the night sky with its constellations following laws and schedules, which is exactly what we read in Gen. 1 about their purposes. The heavenly luminaries serve as a clock and calendar along with giving light, and it stretches credulity to think that this timepiece is as large and scattered as modern cosmology asks us to believe.

## **Job 39-41**

In ch. 39 God turns Job's attention to animals, and in ch. 40 Job briefly expresses his shame before God. But God isn't finished yet. In 40:15 we meet the famous Behemoth, which many commentators dismiss as hyperbole. Yet as we've learned before, analogies are made to real things for the purpose of bringing understanding, not mere exaggeration to make oneself appear greater than they are—which here, in God's case, is impossible.

Behemoth, which in the Greek means “beast”, is described as eating grass yet very powerful, with a tail compared to a cedar tree, bones to bronze tubes, and limbs to iron bars. God calls it pinnacle of his works, then adds that it rests among reeds in marshes, telling us of its habitat. And it cannot be captured.

Then in ch. 41 we're introduced to Leviathan, a terrifying creature impossible to capture as well. It's description is most certainly of a dragon: scales harder than the strongest armor, so tightly meshed that nothing can get between them, fearsome teeth, rows of shields on its back, breathing smoke and fire, glowing red eyes, impervious

to spears and swords, and its habitat is the sea, which it turns to thick white foam in its wake.

Most commentaries present some laughably pathetic attempts to write off these animals as hippos or elephants or crocodiles, but again we must remember that myths and legends have a basis in ancient reality. God is using them as proof of his infinite superiority to Job and his demands for justice. The details of the description certainly defy all “ordinary” animals, with more similarity to what are called dinosaurs. But the dragon is in many cultural records, which is no less worthy of note than such records describing the great Flood.

In all of this, the point God makes is that our realm is divinely and expertly designed, as opposed to the heathen evolutionary belief of some kind of cosmic egg that hatches out an expanding and growing universe. Whether the bars, gates, storehouses, and channels are physical realities or analogies of incomprehensible forces, the fact remains that this realm is designed by God, and there is no hint of any gradualistic progression, as if a building constructs itself. Even if it were programmed to do so from elementary building blocks, an intelligent being wrote the code and provided the material.

## **Job 42**

After all that, finally Job responds by admitting he had been arrogant, and then God has words for his so-called friends. He defends Job compared to them, saying that Job had spoken accurately albeit presumptuously. Then he tells them to humbly take an offering for Job to make on their behalf, as their intercessor or priest in this situation.

Then God restores everything to Job: his health, a replacement family, and more wealth than he had before. Notice also that in spite of the time and culture, Job’s daughters are named and honored with inheritances on a par with their brothers. But we should not

jump to the conclusion that everything we suffer in this life will be rewarded in this life, as it was for Job.

It should be obvious that God must have eventually told Job the reason all this happened, since it was written down for us. But it's a lesson in humility and the testing of our faith, even when all supports for faith are knocked away. Job is indeed an extreme example, but he proved that it's possible to pass the test regardless.



# **Psalms**

## **Introduction**

The Psalms, penned by at least eight different people over many generations, are essentially worship song lyrics or hymnals. They cover the span of human emotions in relation to God, and are generally divided into five 'books': 1-41, 42-72, 73-89, 90-106, and 107-150. But the New Testament seems to indicate that they also contain some prophecy, the primary topic of which is the Messiah and his coming kingdom.

## **Book 1 General Intro**

Being poetic hymns, the Psalms make use of a literary device known as parallelism, as opposed to the English convention of rhyming. A pair of lines either expresses the same thought two ways, or the positive and negative of the thought. So we have to be careful not to misinterpret them. The Psalms of the 1st book are mostly those of David and his experiences with God.

### **Psalm 1**

Psalm 1 contrasts the way of the righteous with the way of the wicked, which is the character of all the Psalms in general. It teaches and encourages holy living in practical terms, mainly that “bad company corrupts good character”. So as opposed to the practice of emptying the mind as meditation is in other religions, righteous meditation fills the mind with the instructions of God (the law or Torah), and of course for the writers it included obeying the law of Moses as well. Such a practice in daily life will be expressed in the way we live.

### **Psalm 2**

Psalm 2 shows the folly of trying to win against God, who is no more threatened by people or angels than a boot is threatened by an ant. It's widely held to be Messianic, which refutes the claim of critics that the Old Testament God is wicked and violent, while Jesus is holy and passive. Jesus, as Messiah, will return— not as a helpless infant but as the Lion of Judah, the Mighty God, as also stated in Isaiah 9:6. And as stated in Col. 1:16, he himself is the Creator. So it's impossible to separate the God of the Old Testament from that of the New Testament.

Verse 7 says that this Messiah is one of the Persons of the Trinity, who also became human at a point in time called 'today'. This is the Son of God, and no son can be as old as his father! This Son will rule with an iron hand as shown in verse 9.

## Psalm 3

Psalm 3 is a lament over the success of the wicked and God's apparent inaction, but it's coupled with confidence in God's eventual action. Some commentators see Psalms 3-7 as describing the eventual sufferings of Israel in the Tribulation, but of course they can also apply to persecution of the righteous at any time. The word *deliverance* or *salvation* in most cases in the Old Testament refers to this life rather than eternity.

Though David had multiplied enemies, he was confident that God would rescue and vindicate him. Even today, those who see our many enemies, either personally or collectively, claim it as proof that we're the guilty ones, because they all agree with each other. Likewise for the Jews as a people; critics say they must all be evil since many nations have driven them out.

## Psalm 4-8

Psalm 4 adds to the previous one that the wicked should think twice before opposing those who call on God for help. >Psalm 5 continues the theme, adding that the wicked are liars with vain, shallow hearts. David implores God that these people would be caught in their own traps and schemes.

Psalm 6 is a personal lament and a plea for God's discipline to come not in anger or wrath. We should never think that God disciplines us for any other reason than love and training. As for the question

about Hades, David's point is that the living need to hear the praises of God, which would be lost if the righteous were all in the grave.

Psalm 7 deals with being pursued by false accusers. As a righteous judge, God must both acquit the innocent and condemn the guilty. It is not loving or kind to deny victims the honor of being vindicated, nor to punish them twice by letting their attackers suffer no consequences for their slander.

Psalm 8 is a more general praise of God as Creator, whose existence is obvious even to children. But what exactly does it mean that God made people "a little lower than the angels"? The word there in Hebrew is Elohim (God), but in Greek, angelous (angel). The context is all about God, and the wonder of how we mortals have been placed in charge of everything else he made, so the meaning of *angels* seems out of place here.

## **Psalm 9-12**

Psalm 9 praises God for what he has done, which we often forget to do. It also speaks of those who know God's name and put their hope in him, which along with endurance and righteous acts was what "saved" a person before Jesus rose from the dead. The vast majority of Old Testament statements about salvation refer to peace and prosperity in this life, with only the most general references to eternity.

Psalm 10 pleads for God to put a stop to the success of the wicked when he seems far away. Though we should know, as in the previous Psalm, that God can be trusted to avenge and rescue us in his time, there's nothing wrong with pleading for that, as long as it's pleading rather than scolding.

Psalm 11 seems to have been written during a time when David was being pursued by enemies. But he is confident that even if all other

allies were to fail, God will bring rescue and justice in time.

Psalm 12 is another expression of despair at the times when God seems distant, but again David also expresses his confidence that God will come to his aid. Though he was chosen by God to be king, the path to his destiny was anything but smooth. So we shouldn't give up on God; it's a test of our faith and loyalty, the plan of God to make his enemies overconfident.

## **Psalm 13-16**

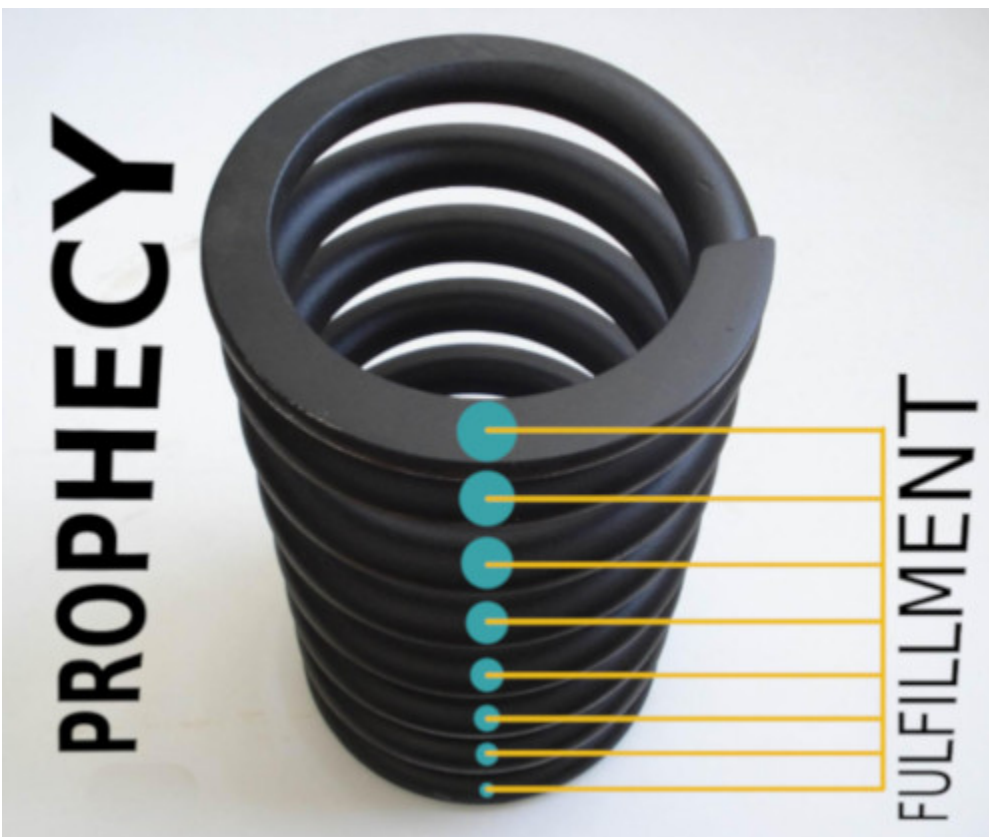
Psalm 13 continues the theme of despair and desperation, and it shows us that there is nothing wrong with honestly admitting this to God. David, like many of the patriarchs before him, appeals to God to defend his own honor by delivering his people. Though God already knows our words before we think them (Ps. 139:4), we see many instances in the Old Testament of God waiting for the people to cry out before he acts, which teaches us that God is one in whom we can confide and be close to.

Psalm 14 begins with the familiar phrase, "The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God'." But this could apply as easily to the one who hates God as to the one who believes no God exists. It's followed by statements also seen elsewhere in the Psalms, that some take out of context to mean everyone who ever lived is a vile sinner deserving of eternal torment. But this is a lament over unrestrained evil, a cry for kindness and compassion, not a dissertation on eternal salvation. Consider the prophet Elijah in 1 Kings 19:10, who whined to God that he was the only prophet left in Israel, and God told him in verse 18 that he had 7,000 reserved. Elijah was in the depths of despair then, and so was David here.

Psalm 15 is another list of contrasts between the godly and the wicked, and in Psalm 16 David shows how he has lived a righteous life, though of course not a perfect one. Verses 6-11 were quoted by

Peter on Pentecost as a Messianic prophecy, but of course it also applied to David, in that he would be spared from his present struggle. Paul also quoted verse 10 in Acts 13:35 as a prophecy of Jesus' resurrection.

This is the nature of Biblical prophecy, like a spiral. If you look at a spring on-end, it looks like a circle, but you can see by looking at the side that the circle moves as it revolves. So though there is an immediate fulfillment, there may be others as time goes on. But we don't know how long the spring is until the end.



## **Psalm 17-19**

Psalm 17 is another lament for God to act quickly on his behalf. Just as the wicked had David in the center of their vision, so also David

pleads for God to do the same. And at the end, David expresses his confidence that he will one day see the face of God.

Psalm 18 was, per the title in the Psalm itself, written after God had subdued all David's enemies, so it's a hymn of gratitude and relief. There's no peace without gratitude, and no gratitude without humility. Just as God treats the merciful with mercy, so also he treats the treacherous with treachery. Many who fault God for this are all too willing to practice this themselves.

Psalm 19 begins with familiar praises to God as the Creator. As also Paul wrote in the first chapter of Romans, people are without excuse for acknowledging that this realm was designed by an intelligent and powerful being. And the identity of this Creator is made clear in fulfilled prophecy, and especially Jesus rising from the dead. The one true God created the heavenly bodies other people worshiped as gods. The rest of the Psalm then compares the instruction of God to the glory of creation, which in comparison to both, should make us humble and respectful of God.

## **Psalm 20-24**

Psalm 20 is basically a pep talk before battle, and an intercessory prayer, and Psalm 21 expresses gratitude for God's deliverance.

Psalm 22 returns to lament the times when God seems far away. This is one Jesus quoted on the cross, so we can't think that he was actually saying God had actually forsaken him, but that it's an expression of deep pain and loneliness. The details here are clear evidence of divine prophecy, since David could not possibly know as a mere human that this would be literally and physically fulfilled in the Messiah. Even so, the Psalm ends in confident hope of victory, restoration, and rest.

Psalm 23 is one of the most familiar and memorized passages of scripture. It teaches us to rest confidently in God, whether in good times or bad, and that we are assured that he will keep us close to himself. The sheep are safe, but only if they follow the trustworthy Shepherd.

Psalm 24 begins with a phrase used in 1 Cor. 10:26 to teach that Christians are not bound by dietary laws. God, as the supreme sovereign of the whole world, can change rules for people without his own nature changing. But the message of the Psalm overall is that only the righteous can approach God, and as Christians our righteousness comes only from belonging to Jesus.

As noted in Constable's Notes, Psalm 22 is about the cross, 23 the Shepherd, and 24 the crown.

## **Psalm 25-30**

Psalm 25 is a plea for God to guide us, to forget our shortcomings, and to remember his promises and the honor of his name. Some wonder why we should bother to pray, since per Mat. 6:8 God already knows what we'll say. But not only is it for our own benefit since it reminds us of our humble position, it also seems from scripture that God sometimes waits for us to ask before he acts.

Psalm 26 is another plea for vindication, for justice against false charges, while Psalm 27 goes from confident trust, to despair and lament, then back to confident trust and encouragement.

Psalm 28 is a cry for immediate rescue from dire circumstances, as well as an imprecatory prayer against evildoers. We need to remember that the love of God is not in conflict with the holiness of God; both good and evil must be paid their wages.



Psalm 29 teaches that though the heathen believed storms and other natural events were caused by local gods, the real God was in command of all the forces of nature.

Psalm 30 is a praise song for the dedication of the temple, along with relief that God had rescued David once again. The temple had not been built, so it probably refers to the tabernacle, though it could also have been intended for the time when the permanent temple would be finished. Verse 5 is familiar to most Christians; though we may experience either persecution from enemies or discipline from God, it won't last forever, but God's love will.

## **Psalm 31-34**

Psalm 31 is yet another plea for vindication, and it includes expressions of revulsion for those who worship false gods. David's teachings, such as not to be quick to think God has abandoned us, come from his own experiences good and bad, not from dry philosophy or imagination.

Psalm 32 expresses David's relief that forgiveness came, but only after he admitted his sin. To forgive the unrepentant is to encourage more sin and deny justice to the victim, which in this case was God.

Psalm 33 is filled with praise, especially for God's creative power. The use of instruments was clearly encouraged, as opposed to the belief of some that worship should only ever be with our voices. As for the familiar phrase in verse 12, it likely only refers to Israel in context, as only Israel had a covenant relationship with God and the church is not a nation. A similar phrase is found in 2 Chronicles 7:14, and again, it's in the context of the people and land of Israel.

Psalm 34 is another praise song for God's deliverance. But can we take verse 10 as a guarantee that godly people never suffer lack in this life? Even David lamented at other times that this is not the case

at all, so it reminds us that this is poetry, not systematic theology. And of course, verse 20 is clearly another Messianic prophecy, cited in John 19:36.

## **Psalm 35-41**

Psalm 35 is another plea for help and vindication, as well as for paying back the wicked, who had repaid David's compassion with violence and treachery.

Psalm 36 is primarily an appeal to wisdom, and Psalm 37 continues with an emphasis on keeping faith in God when all seems lost.

Psalm 38 revisits the theme of repentance and appeals to mercy after sin, and Psalm 39 adds the determination to keep from returning to sin.

Psalm 40 is another look back at how God had always delivered David through all his trials, as a testimony for others. Psalm 41 is a practical lesson in kindness, which matches up with some of the Beatitudes. But then David cries out to God against those who keep wishing for his demise. And verse 9 is clearly prophetic of Jesus' betrayal by Judas, as cited by Jesus in John 13:18.

## **Book 2 General Intro**

The Psalms of the second book were written by the descendants of Korah 42, 44-49, Asaph 50, David 51-65, 68-70, and Solomon 72, but the rest are anonymous 43, 66-67, 71.

### **Psalm 42-49**

Psalm 42 is a lament familiar to many Christians. Critics of the faith taunt us by asking, “Where is your God?” But again, after lamenting, we should remember verse 5: wait for God, and in time he will vindicate us. Psalm 43 continues the theme of waiting for God’s vindication, and the strong desire to be home with God. How many of us today have this same desire, rather than being attached to this world?

Psalm 44 is a reminder that our battles are not our own but God’s. This hardly means we should do nothing, just as God almost always had the armies of Israel fight battles. But those battles were only won with God’s help, and so it is with our personal battles today. Yet we shouldn’t think that every lost battle is our own fault, because sometimes, as expressed in verse 18, God has other reasons for allowing us to be defeated.

Psalm 45 expresses admiration and respect for the king as God’s representative. But it also applies to God himself as the king of kings, since the writer of Hebrews cites this Psalm and applies it to Jesus. But some commentaries introduce an insidious false teaching in the section about the bride of the king, which starts in verse 10. They cite the creation account in Gen. 2:18 and 22 as the basis for making wives subservient to husbands, yet no such hierarchy is to be found in the cited verses. This was purely a societal tradition in a patriarchal culture, not the mandated will of God. While society only

viewed women's worth in terms of their beauty and bearing children for their husbands, God values women as made in his image Gen. 1:27, and as co-heirs with men 1 Peter 3:7.

Psalm 46 portrays God as like a strong fortress, and Psalm 47 calls all the world to worship him. While Constable's Notes went completely off the rails in Psalm 45, it makes a good point here: that though Israel certainly didn't exist in a cultural vacuum and had similarities to others, the modern belief that Israel only copied other religions and cultures with mere cosmetic changes is complete nonsense.

Psalm 48 is filled with admiration for the places God chose as his own, and Psalm 49 begins with encouragement to trust in this God. But starting in verse 7 it explains why only God in the flesh could redeem us, and that the fleeting nature of this life will not prevent the high and mighty from being humbled when it's over. Verses 14-15 reveal that they knew there would be life after death, though they had no detailed understanding of what that would be like.

## **Psalm 50-70**

Psalm 50 is a rebuke from God to Israel for breaking the covenant he had with them. He explains that the sacrifices are not for his need or benefit, since every living thing belongs to him already. He also rebuked those who say the words of worship but practice the deeds of wickedness. Like King David who had to be rebuked by his general for weeping when his army was victorious, Israel showed more love for God's enemies than for his friends. We all need to pay attention to our own actions and the message they send, which is much louder than our words.

Psalm 51 states plainly that David wrote this in deep remorse after his sin with Bathsheba, which also led to his murder of her husband Uriah. Though his sin was against this godly couple, David admits

that the ultimate offense was against God. But though this lament, like most others, is expressed with great exaggeration, some such as Constable's Notes take verse 5 as a proof-text for us all being born evil. Yet that belief comes from Gnosticism, not scripture. Besides, David has not mentioned his father, without whom his mother couldn't have conceived him. It is most unwise to derive Christian doctrine from highly emotional laments. Notice also in verse 11 that David pleads with God not to take the Holy Spirit from him; this shows that before Pentecost, no one was guaranteed the Holy Spirit for life as we are in the age of grace. At least Constable's Notes gets this right.

Psalm 52 describes once again the futility of opposing God, and that justice is what a holy God demands. Psalm 53 begins the same as 14, and the first few verses are quoted in Rom. 3:12. Psalm 54 is another plea for vindication against false accusers, and Psalm 55 ends the lament once again with David expressing his trust in God in spite of everything.

Psalm 56 continues to cry out to God for immediate help, and trusts him to respond. This same theme continues through >Psalm 57, but in Psalm 58 the focus turns again to corrupt leaders in Israel. Psalm 59 returns to pleading for deliverance from enemies, but notice verse 11, where David asks God not to strike them too quickly or the people might forget the lesson. Every experience in life can be a lesson, if we pay attention and try to see what that might be.

Psalm 60 is, per its own title, a teaching prayer, and the lesson is about reliance on God and trust in his timing. Psalm 61 continues the lesson, and Psalm 62 stresses the need for patience. Psalm 63 once again expresses David's longing to see God and find rest, and Psalm 64 continues on the theme of justice and vindication.

Psalm 65 is a song of praise for God's provision of food, even though we're sinners, and Psalm 66 continues the theme, with references to such provision in times past, including the miracles

that took place as Israel left Egypt. Psalm 67 still continues on the same theme, while Psalm 68 returns to praising God as a great military leader, but also a father and champion of widows and the homeless. Then it turns to the fate of those who oppose God, then back to more praise.

Psalm 69 is another cry for help against false accusers, and verse 9 is quoted in John 2:17 as a Messianic prophecy. The vinegar mentioned in verse 21 is also Messianic, referring to Jesus being offered vinegar when he was on the cross. But in the immediate context, David goes on to ask God to punish rather than forgive.

Psalm 70 continues this prayer for vengeance, while Psalm 71 turns back to a cry for help and vindication, when the psalmist was old and tired. Psalm 72 is another royal psalm and a plea for wisdom to rule properly, as we know Solomon did when God handed the kingdom of Israel to him. It looks forward also to the time of the Millennium, when the ideal kingdom becomes a reality on earth.

## **Book 3 General Intro**

The Psalms of the third book were written by the descendants of Korah (84-85, 87), David (86), Herman (88), Ethan (89), and the rest by Asaph. This book of Psalms is considered “dark” overall.

### **Psalm 73-89**

Psalm 73 describes the difficult life of the righteous in a world of wicked people. But at least it expresses what we all know to be true: that in this life, the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer. Yet hope and strength to endure come from knowing that a loving God loves the victim more than the oppressor.

Psalm 74 continues, but notice verse 13-14 regarding Leviathan; the wicked are compared to the creature, which would be a meaningless analogy had the creature been mythical. It's also described in Job 41 as a real thing.

Psalm 75 is another song of God's eventual judgment against the wicked, who have become overconfident that God will never act after so much time without consequences for their deeds. This same concept is seen also in 1 Peter 3:4, and Psalm 76 is a song of praise for when God finally did deliver his people.

Psalm 77 is an expression of restless worry, which is relieved by meditating on God's promises. Psalm 78 is a long piece of advice on learning lessons from the past, good and bad, and to pass on those lessons to the next generation.

Psalm 79 returns to pleading on behalf of Israel. Though they deserved the calamities that came upon them because of their sin, God waits for them to cry out to him before ending the punishment.

Psalm 80 continues pleading for God to act, and then Psalm 81 praises God when he does. God has to restrain himself from blessing his people at times, because they haven't learned the lesson and humbled themselves. Psalm 82 revisits the theme of unjust judges who must report to God who is judge over all. "In the midst of the gods" is a common expression in the OT in reference to even earthly rulers, which is fairly obvious in this context. Jesus quoted this Psalm in response to being accused of blasphemy in John 10:33.

Psalm 83 is another imprecatory prayer, but also a prophetic one according to many commentators. Whether it only came true in the distant past, or perhaps the 6-Day War, or in more recent times, or is yet to be completely fulfilled, no one can say for sure.

Psalm 84 expresses longing to return to God's sanctuary, but the idealistic language could also hint at how things will be in the future Millennial kingdom. Psalm 85 is a praise song for God's deliverance after punishing his people, and Psalm 86 is a time when David is again pleading for deliverance. Constable's Notes includes a chart showing that many of the verses in this Psalm are also seen in others.

Psalm 87 is another song of praise about Zion, but Psalm 88 is the exact opposite: a lament without any mention of hope. Psalm 89 is back to praise, especially concerning the king of Israel, but at the end it returns to lament. Yet it includes a Messianic prophecy, since David's dynasty was to last forever and it has been dormant for thousands of years now.



## **Book 4 General Intro**

The Psalms of the fourth book were written by Moses (90) and David (101, 103), but the rest are anonymous. Its themes are the fleeting nature of life, God's future earthly kingdom, the proper attitude and actions of his subjects, and the Creator's power.

### **Psalm 90-106**

Psalm 90 uses that creative power of God to remind us of our place and our need for both humility and gratitude. Verse 4 might be what 2 Peter 3:8 was drawn from, though it's in the context of patience there as opposed to here, where our very short lives can't be compared to God's timelessness. The phrase about the length of our lives in verse 10 is taken by many as a prophetic limiter in reference to what Jesus said in Mat. 24:34, but the context here is that not only are our lives short, they're also filled with struggle.

Psalm 91 has the familiar theme of God as our refuge. But notice that verses 10-11 are what Satan quoted when he tempted Jesus in the wilderness in Mat. 4:6. Jesus quoted Deut. 6:16 in response, and some take it as that he was calling himself God, which of course he is. But what he was actually saying is that if he had done what Satan tempted him to do, Jesus himself would have been testing God. So the lesson for us is that we too must not test God, even by citing scripture. The popular habit known as "name it and claim it" is one way people test God today. Also, Jesus referenced verse 13 when he sent out the disciples in Luke 10:19.

Psalm 92 praises God for his character of love and faithfulness to the righteous, but also his judgments against the wicked. Psalm 93 is another royal psalm, focused on both the earthly king of Israel and God as the ultimate undefeatable king over all. Psalm 94 exalts God

as the great avenger, who is certain to punish those who think that his patience means he turns a blind eye to their evil.

Psalm 95 is another royal psalm, with more lessons from history. Verse 10-11 are quoted in Heb. 3 and 4, which points to the literal nation of Israel being denied entry to the promised land as a lesson for people today, who by their rejection of Jesus will be denied eternal rest. Psalm 96 continues to focus on God as king, and that all the nations should honor him. This had been Israel's mission, to represent the one true God to the nations so they would want to abandon their false gods. But like many Christians today, Israel largely failed in that mission.

Psalm 97 stays with this royal theme, but focuses more on the yet-future time when God will finally establish his kingdom on earth. This is more obvious in the Greek OT, which has verse 1 as "The Lord BECAME king." God has of course been king in eternity past, so anything that happens at a point in time is NOT from eternity past. Psalm 98 is yet another royal psalm of praise for respect for Israel's God from all the nations, and Psalm 99 is another reminder of how the nations came to know him.

Psalm 100 is one of the most familiar and memorized of the Psalms along with the 23rd, being both short and happy. Notice that we should worship with joy, not always the somberness that many associate with being in God's presence.

Psalm 101 is another of David's songs, where he pledges loyalty to God by living a holy life. It reminds us as Christians that reaching out to a lost world doesn't mean sinking to its level. David's standards were much higher than that of many Christians. It's possible that this psalm extended beyond the historical kingdom ruled by David, to the future kingdom of God.

Psalm 102 is another lament and confession, and a plea for deliverance. Psalm 103 is a praise song, and once again we should

remember that the promises to deliver, forgive, and heal are not always realized in this life. The section beginning in verse 10 is a familiar description of God's forgiveness, mercy, and love, because God remembers that we're lowly clay pots that only last a short while.

Psalm 104 continues by describing God in regal terms, and that he is the Creator above all. Notice the descriptions of how the world was made: stretching out the skies like a tent curtain, laying the beams on clouds, setting the earth on foundations that will never move, and so on. Most take all this poetically, but nowhere in the Bible is the earth described as moving or spinning. This realm was made for us, so it seems reasonable to conclude that it is the heavens that move around us, rather than the earth "worshiping the sun" so to speak. Recall Genesis 1, which says the heavenly bodies serve to not only light the earth but also to tell us of hours, days, and appointed times. Was the clock made for people, or were people made for the clock?

Psalm 105 is a long praise of God for his faithfulness to Israel, which is named in verse 6 as Jacob. As stated in 1 Cor. 10:6 and 11, we should learn lessons from the history of the nation of Israel. Psalm 106 is the final one in Book 4, and it's another reminder to learn those lessons. One of the most important lessons is the dangers of compromise and appeasement, of longing for the world instead of God.

## **Book 5 General Intro**

The Psalms of the fifth book were written by David (108-110, 122, 124, 131, 133, 138-145) and Solomon (127), but the rest are anonymous. The overall character is praise for what God has and will do.

### **Psalm 107-119**

Psalm 107 is a reminder to not keep silent when God has answered prayer, and that suffering should humble us. Psalm 108 is believed to be drawn from various others, and it focuses on the nation of Israel. Psalm 109 is a lament and a plea for vengeance, which should be a last resort rather than a first one. God delays his punishments, and so should we. But as Jesus said in Mat. 7:2, God will judge everyone according to how they judged others, so be careful to remember the Golden Rule Mat. 7:12.

Psalm 110 begins with a very familiar section concerning the Messiah, one Jesus quoted in Luke 20:42, and was also quoted in Luke, Acts, and Hebrews. He was telling them that the Messiah could not be a mere human, and at the same time, telling us all of the triune nature of God. Though the Hebrew text uses two different words translated “Lord” here, the Greek of both Testaments uses the same word for each. As for “footstool”, it referred to the ancient practice of the conquering king putting his foot on the neck of the defeated king. Here in verse 4 see the Messiah identified as an eternal priest in the order of Melchizedek, which is cited many times in Hebrews 5-7. The original Melchizedek, David, and Jesus have or will rule from the physical city of Jerusalem.

Psalm 111 is another acrostic poem, meaning it follows in the order of the Hebrew alphabet, which aided in memorization. And again,

what needs to be memorized is the history of God with Israel. Psalm 112 continues, with emphasis on how we should live in light of that history, and Psalm 113 focuses on what God will do in the future if we learn those lessons.

Psalm 114 is a reminder specifically of God's miracles in Egypt. Psalm 115 includes a warning against worshiping idols, as Israel had done even after seeing the miracles God performed to get them out of slavery. Psalm 116 is praise for deliverance, Psalm 117 calls on all the nations to praise him, and Psalm 118 describes God once again as a strong fortress.

Psalm 119, the longest acrostic psalm of all, is all about the commands (really teachings) of God. So we shouldn't think of it so much as limited to the laws of Moses, but rather any and all that are part of the Word of God. We'll make brief observations about each section, to highlight the differences from all the repetition.

- 1-8 blessings for heeding God's instruction and seeking him out
- 9-16 the importance of starting early to take God's teachings seriously
- 17-24 the importance of being teachable
- 25-32 sustaining power that the Word provides
- 33-40 a plea for wisdom to live a holy life
- 41-48 a plea for deliverance
- 49-56 a plea for God to remember his promises
- 57-64 a plea for God to remember our faithfulness
- 65-72 a plea for discernment and vindication
- 73-80 acknowledgement of God as our powerful but merciful Creator
- 81-88 another plea for deliverance
- 89-96 praise for the permanence of God's instructions and faithfulness
- 97-104 hunger and thirst for God's teachings; do we have that?
- 105-112 God's Word as the lamp that illuminates our path in life

- 113-120 an expression of loathing for those who despise God's instruction
- 121-128 an appeal for God to remember when we suffer unjustly
- 129-136 another comparison of God's words to light
- 137-144 the justice and fairness of God's teachings
- 145-152 a plea for deliverance from the God who isn't really far away
- 153-160 the fate of those who reject God's teachings
- 161-168 choosing suffering for God's honor over our own life
- 169-176 an appeal for God to hear and act

## **Psalm 120-135**

Psalm 120 through 136 are all “songs of ascent”, because they were sung as the people of Israel traveled “up” to Zion for the annual feasts. This one pleads with God for vindication and deliverance from liars.

Psalm 121 looks to the hills around Mt. Zion and is often quoted as a parting blessing, and Psalm 122 expresses the joy people should have at the thought of being in the presence of God. Psalm 123 reminds us of our dependence on God, and Psalm 124 is praise from David for delivering Israel from all her enemies.

Psalm 125 once again uses Zion as a symbol of God's protection and blessing, and Psalm 126 praises God for proving it true. Psalm 127 is often quoted as a warning against forgetting God in our daily lives. But it also promises blessings for remembering God, though some twist verses 4-5 to mean Christians must have large families. Cherry-picking, which ignores context, has given birth to many heresies and damaged many lives.

Psalm 128 praises God again for his blessings, and Psalm 129 recalls the many times God delivered Israel. Psalm 130 is another

cry for deliverance, and Psalm 131 urges people to follow the examples of godly people. Psalm 132 is where David expresses his frustration at being denied the honor of building a temple for God, as Solomon stated in 1 Kings 5:3.

Psalm 133 expresses the delight when people actually manage to get along, and Psalm 134 is about temple priests praising God. Psalm 135 continues by extending the call for praise from all the people, along with more lessons from Israel's history to justify such praise.

## **Psalm 136-150**

Psalm 136 is a responsive hymn of praise between song leaders and congregation, about the enduring love of God. In contrast, Psalm 137 is a lament during Israel's exile in Babylon, when singing praise songs was most difficult. Notice that verse 8 says "daughter of Babylon" and not just "Babylon", so we should be careful not to always think the word "daughter" means someone else, as many do when studying prophecy.

Psalm 138 is a praise from David for God's deliverance, blessings, and empowerment, and in Psalm 139 the praise is for God's omniscience, omnipresence, and superiority in every way. Verse 15 is proof that our spirits exist before we're born, so it's a strong rebuttal to abortion. Yet verse 16 is often taken out of context to teach that we have no free will, but what it actually says is that the number of our days is predetermined, not whether we'll spend eternity with God.

But what about verses 21-22 where David expresses absolute hatred for those who hate God? We know from John 3:16 that God loves the whole world, and from Ezekiel 18:32 that God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked, and from 2 Peter 3:9 that God doesn't want anyone to be destroyed. Yet we also know that God will

punish the wicked themselves, not just their deeds, per Mat. 25:46 and Rev. 14:11. But God's punishment is not out of hatred but holiness, so was David wrong to hate? Notice that he follows that thought with a plea for God to examine his heart and to lead him in the right way; could it be that he knew it was wrong to hate? This seems, at least to me, to be a better solution than that the clear expression of hatred doesn't mean what it says. The last two verses are often prayed by Christians today, but we need to make sure we really mean those words.

Psalm 140 is yet another plea for deliverance, and verse 3 is quoted in Rom. 3:13. Psalm 141 continues that theme, as also does Psalm 142 and Psalm 143. Psalm 144 continues as well, and verse 3 is quoted in Heb. 2:6. Then it turns to confident hope, which continues into Psalm 145. Then Psalm 146 reminds us that we only overcome evil by God's power.

Psalm 147 praises God for his wisdom and provision, while Psalm 148 invites all of creation to join in the praise. Notice that verse 4, written well after the Flood, still refers to waters above the sky. Psalm 149 is a praise of victory for Israel, and finally Psalm 150 is nothing but praise, in the most loud and energetic terms.



# Proverbs

The book of Proverbs is a collection of wise sayings or teachings to live by. Think of them as micro-parables, with the shortness of each saying being helpful for memorization. Most of them are attributed to Solomon, but someone named Agur wrote chapter 30, and a King Lemuel wrote chapter 31.

## Prov. 1

The book is introduced in ch. 1 as being for those who would be wise, and it seems aimed primarily at young people. But wisdom is more than applied knowledge; it's also applied morality, since only fools despise the counsel of God. Verse 7 is very familiar to most Christians, since the uniqueness of the Bible's wisdom is this personal relationship with our Creator. A wise person will listen, learn, and apply the lessons.

The wise are also cautioned to be on guard against enticement for material gain, since in the end it consumes the consumer. Then wisdom itself is personified starting in verse 20, which the false teaching of Gnosticism takes as an actual being called Wisdom. They also take the Greek word for wisdom, Sophia, as her actual personal name. But true godly wisdom advises people to not be naive, which is all too common in the Christian community when it comes to false or unwise teachings, since so few actually study the Bible where God's wisdom is found. This personified Wisdom will mock when calamity strikes those who despised it.

## Prov. 2

Here the emphasis is on the value and preciousness of true wisdom from God, as opposed to the worthlessness of folly. The mention of only adulterous women in verses 16-19, as in other proverbs, is more a matter of cultural norms than God's ideals. Many unwisely take it as that only adulterous women are despised by God, while adulterous men are admired, as has been the norm throughout history. But as Jesus stated in Mat. 19:8, God never meant for anyone to have more than one spouse, or to treat them as dispensible property. Not everything even the best of the Bible patriarchs practiced was the will of God; in fact, it was often these polygamous marriages that led to generations of suffering.

## **Prov. 3**

Now the text turns from the wages of folly to those of wisdom, and verses 5-8 are another widely-memorized proverb. But be careful not to take verses 9-10 as an endorsement of tithing for Christians, who of course didn't exist when these proverbs were written, and they never applied to Gentiles. Also notice that tithing was on profit or increase. The last two verses are quoted in Heb. 12:5-6, and the teaching of both passages is that if God is disciplining and training you, it's because you're his child. Then the text returns to extolling the virtues of wisdom, and verses 19-20 describe God's power in setting the world on foundations, and his wisdom in making the world self-sustaining. Verse 27 begins a series of specific faults to avoid, such as not helping someone when we have the power at the time, and not slandering others. Verse 34 is quoted in James 4:6, and they both warn against being proud.

## **Prov. 4-5**

Ch. 4 returns to the theme of valuing wisdom, and adds that such a life will bring peace to the person who acquires it. Ch. 5 returns to the theme of the adulterous woman, which again must not be

twisted into the belief, even today, that women are all temptresses who need to be controlled by equally sinful men. Girls were typically not included in the education of the young, so the sayings are from the perspective of males. But again, to take this as meaning God does not value women as equal to men is a sin of its own.

## **Prov. 6-8**

Ch. 6 is a warning against becoming ensnared in unwise business deals, against laziness, and against scamming people with deceptive practices ourselves. The “seven things God hates” starting in verse 16 are common in the Proverbs, so they’re probably important lessons. Notice also that verse 20 includes children listening to their mothers as well as their fathers; God clearly endorses the training and wisdom of women. One should wonder how anyone expects women to be wise if they’re never supposed to be taught. Again the adulterous woman is used as a warning starting in verse 24, but the nature of the crime is in a class of its own. Even if we sympathize with someone who steals out of desperation, they still have to pay for what they’ve done. But in the case of adultery, no amount of money can repay what was taken. This same principle is seen in 1 Cor. 6:18.

Ch. 7 continues warning against adultery, so the wise will realize how important it is to resist this particular sin. Ch. 8 returns to the personification of wisdom as what God used when creating the world, continuing into ch. 9. The familiar teaching in verses 7-9 is a way to tell whether the person you’re trying to correct is wise or foolish, by their reaction to instruction. Jesus taught this same principle in Mat. 7:6 about throwing pearls to swine. Of course, many foolish and arrogant people view themselves as teachers, and they use this passage to condemn all who reject their false teachings, but in the end it is God who will remove the masks from the ones in the wrong. Verses 9-10 repeat that all wisdom begins by fearing God, and then in verse 13 the opposite is described. If, as

the Gnostics teach, Wisdom is a goddess, then so also must be Folly. But of course, these are just personifications, and since both of them are symbolized as feminine, then God is clearly not portraying women as only bad.

## **Prov. 10-15**

Ch. 10 begins a writing pattern of “couplets”, pairs of statements contrasting the wise with the foolish. Ch. 11 continues this pattern, adding in verse 13 the virtue of being trustworthy and reliable, which Jesus explained also in the parable of the two sons in Mat. 21:28-30. It’s interesting that the wisdom and generosity of a woman, such as the example of Abigail in 1 Sam. 25, is contrasted with “ruthless men”, such as her husband Nabal.

Ch. 12 emphasizes the need to make sure our words are used to build up rather than tear down. Verse 11 means that though it’s fine to have ambition, we shouldn’t chase every “great idea”, especially without making sure we have a practical, reliable source of support. We all struggle with verse 16 about being slow to be offended, and in verse 27 we’re warned against quitting too soon, so those are actually related concepts.

Ch. 13 continues the theme of the foolish and wicked being their own worst enemies, and verse 8 points out that with great wealth comes great worry, whereas the poor have nothing to lose. Wealth and prestige can make us more prone to compromise. Ch. 14 once again compares wise and foolish women, which again shows that wisdom is not exclusive to males, as many have taught over the centuries. And verse 31 reminds us that oppressing the poor is an insult to God, so the wealthy need to be very careful what they do with their riches.

Ch. 15 begins with another favorite memory verse, which teaches that harsh words cause needless arguments, but gentle words make

true conversation possible. People can become impatient when it seems nothing is being done, but we should never act rashly and impulsively.

## **Prov. 16-20**

Ch. 16 seems to turn away from the couplet pattern, and the emphasis turns from us to God, and especially to how kings should rule. Verse 18 is very familiar but largely ignored: Pride and arrogance lead to a person's downfall. The same for verse 25: We would be wise to consult God and others before choosing a path. And for verse 28: Slander and gossip will destroy even the strongest friendships.

Ch. 17 continues to advise good priorities among other familiar sayings, such as not taking or offering bribes, or putting up security for other people's debts. Ch. 18 reminds us that we should value the input of others when making decisions, and that it's foolish to only want to talk and never listen. Vss. 13 and 17 are very important but usually ignored: Don't spout an opinion on something you've never investigated, and don't settle on an opinion before you've cross-examined it many times. Too often we "jump ship" after the most superficial case is made for an idea, and we're foolish to think we've made an improvement when in fact we've only gone from the frying pan to the fire. The warning about the tongue in verse 21 doesn't mean words have magic power, as some claim today, but that careless speech can lead to real and deadly consequences.

Ch. 19 verse 2 is like 18:3; enthusiasm is fine, but get the facts before you start. Also, we need to remember that though this is wisdom literature, it still can contain a fair amount of hyperbole. So when we read that a poor person's friends hate him, we should be careful not to jump to wild conclusions.

Ch. 20 personifies wine and strong drink to show what those substances do to people, which is to turn them into mockers, fighters, and fools. This is not to say drinking is wrong, but only allowing drink (or anything else) to consume and control us. Whoever seeks to become incapacitated is a fool. But perhaps a greater fool is seen in verse 20, since though parents are often terrible at the job, God will hold children to account if they curse their own parents. Certainly some parents are absolutely evil, but let God curse them per verse 22, and this doesn't mean we have to forgive them if they haven't repented.

## **Prov. 21-23**

Ch. 21 is more about contrasts between the wise and foolish, the righteous and the wicked, and ch. 22 adds that it's foolish to see danger coming and do nothing to prepare. We should note the balancing principle in Mat. 6 about not storing up treasures in this life and not worrying about tomorrow. These principles don't conflict, because worry and hoarding are very different from carelessness. The wise person will discern the difference.

Verse 7 is difficult to avoid in modern times, since the entire world's financial system is based upon debt and couldn't exist without it. But slaves we are, though God will surely reimburse us eventually for what the financial controllers have done to the world. Verse 15 advises corporal punishment for foolish children, which some sects have twisted into justification for child abuse. Good parents will only do the minimum necessary to correct behavior that is dangerous or unwise, and wise parents never need to resort to any degree of violence. Remember that this is wisdom literature, not an excuse to be abusive.

Ch. 23 includes one of the most commonly-misapplied passages of scripture, that being verse 7. The whole thought is expressed in verses 6-8, and it means that if a stingy person gives you

something, it isn't out of generosity or friendship but to get something from you that's worth the investment. Most take verse 7 out of that context and interpret it as that "you are what you think". This is why the later addition of verses to scripture was such a bad idea. Then verses 13-14 revisit the teaching about child discipline, adding that the purpose is to rescue them from the consequences of foolishness. Then in verses 20-21 it teaches that we should carefully choose the crowd we run with. The rest of the proverb revisits the themes of staying away from people who are promiscuous or in the habit of ingesting mind-altering substances.

## **Prov. 24-26**

Ch. 24 includes a reminder in verse 17 not to gloat when the wicked get what's coming to them, and verses 23-25 warn against unjust judging.

Ch. 25 is mostly about speaking wisely, and not imposing ourselves too often on friends and relatives. But it begins with King Solomon advising the purging of wicked fools from the king's court, and verses 6-7 match the advice of Luke 14:7-11 about humbling ourselves. Verse 19 advises against trusting people who aren't trustworthy, and verse 20 rebukes the idea that what the sorrowing need is to just pretend they're happy.

Verses 21-22 are quoted in Rom. 12:20 as meaning that we should leave vengeance to God. Putting coals on a person's head meant to fill up a container they'd put on their head and carry home to rekindle their fire. So it was an act of kindness, because they needed a source of heat and the righteous person provided it out of human compassion, even though the other person had made themselves their enemy. Notice also verse 26, which says that a righteous person who appeases or kowtows before the wicked is like a polluted stream. Contrast that with Eph. 5:11, which says that we

must expose the deeds of darkness, rather than let them run unchecked.

Ch. 26 verses 4-5 are puzzling on the surface since they appear to contradict themselves, but it's really a matter of discernment and restraint. As a modern saying goes, "Never argue with stupid people, because they will drag you down to their level and then beat you with experience." Rather, offer correction, and if it's rejected, walk away. Verse 7 is exactly why scriptures are often twisted: the people reciting them rarely understand the words in context, and they invent whole belief systems on that broken foundation. Verse 12 describes the folly of arrogance, and verse 17 rebukes those who jump into other people's arguments. Verse 19 rebukes the person who provokes others and then tries to avoid retaliation by saying it was only a joke. The remainder of the passage advises against passing gossip and flattery.

## **Prov. 27-29**

Ch. 27 Verse 1 is quoted in James 4:13-16, and verse 2 advises against self-praise. Verses 5-6 caution against being too timid to rebuke when it's necessary, verse 13 seems to advise against putting up security for a stranger, and verse 14 advises knocking on the door before entering the house of a friend; respect other people's boundaries. Verse 17 is often quoted as advice on how to have a productive argument, but pointless quarreling is cautioned against as a balance in such passages as Titus 3:9.

Ch. 28 begins with the observation that wicked people are always looking over their shoulders, while the righteous have peace and confidence. Then it observes that a country with many layers of bureaucracy is a country filled with rebels. References to "the law" here are in the context of kingdoms and countries, so they refer to secular law. Verse 8 is about charging outrageous interest rates, not any and all interest. Scripture allows interest on loans taken out for



the purpose of business investment, but not for the purpose of buying necessities. The rest of the proverb centers on the need to choose, if possible, wise rulers.

Ch. 29 teaches that those who continually resist correction will come to ruin, and in verse 13 that the choice to be either wise or foolish is our own. Verse 18 means that messages from God keep people from foolishly throwing off all restraint.

## **Prov. 30-31**

Ch. 30 begins a separate section of Proverbs. The focus of this one is on the vast superiority of the wisdom of God to our own, and verses 7-9 are a plea for God to keep us from extreme tests.

Ch. 31 focuses on the wise ruler, who needs to stay alert and sober in order to rule justly. But verses 10 onward serve as a kind of balance to all the other Proverbs' references to women as bad examples. Though most commentaries try desperately to shoehorn the subservient housewife into this passage, it cannot be justified. The emphasis is on the ideal woman's character, her wisdom and strength and valor.

She is neither lazy nor dependent, running not only her household but also a business. She makes major purchases without asking for approval or needing oversight, and she gives generously to the poor from her profits. Her husband respects and honors her, even though he may be an official in the city. She has the foresight to plan for difficult times, and she has a reputation of being wise and valiant. The proof of her character is seen also in the kind of children she has raised, but above all, it is her fear of God that should bring her the respect she deserves. Historically, women have typically been robbed of any credit due them in society. The man who chooses a woman based only on her physical attractiveness is indeed a fool.

We might summarize all the Proverbs with the modern one about leading a horse to water but being unable to make it drink. All the wisdom literature in the world won't make us wise if we don't read it and heed it.

# **Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon**

## **Introduction**

The book of Ecclesiastes gets its name from the Greek word for “congregation”, but the Hebrew title refers to the teacher or speaker to the congregation. The teacher was possibly Solomon, and if so, it was likely written after he traded his wisdom for a huge harem of foreign women, and possibly after repenting. Its theme is the futility and meaninglessness of mortal life. All the teacher could conclude is that meaning is found only through faith in God and living accordingly.

The Song of Solomon (or Song of Songs) could have been written by someone other than Solomon, possibly even a woman, since it seems to be more from the woman’s perspective. That is, “Solomon’s Song” could mean the song about him rather than by him. It’s written as drama or at least a vivid love poem.

Rather than restate the many ways in which the futility of life is expressed, we will only touch on highlights of Ecclesiastes and then move on to the Song of Solomon.

## **Ecclesiastes**

We see in 1:5 the description of the sun from our perspective, and again we see that any description of earth as moving is absent from scripture. 1:9 shows that “there is nothing new under the sun”, that whatever will be done has been done before. We today might think that we’ve invented many new things, but we really don’t know the level of technology before the Great Flood, since God’s purpose was

to wipe everything out. There is evidence that it could have matched or exceeded what we have today.

1:12 begins the Teacher's own experiences with trying everything the world had to offer, to see if anything had enduring meaning. But it was all "chasing the wind", purposeless in itself. If this life is all there is, no meaning or purpose can be found in it.

1:16 asks whether all the wisdom we learned about in the Proverbs is really worthwhile. Similar to a line from the movie Spiderman (which may have gotten it from this passage), "With great wisdom comes great frustration". The deeper we look into the ways of the world, the uglier the picture gets, and there's little the average person can do to bring real, lasting change. Yet Jesus never taught us to try and topple the dark forces of the world, but to change it one life at a time wherever we can. So while the message of Proverbs has value in this life, it only has ultimate meaning in eternity.

2:1 begins the Teacher's tests for meaning from many angles. First was the indulgence test, denying himself no pleasure. Next was the materialism test, including beautiful public works, then the wisdom test, and then the workaholic test.

3:1 begins with a well-known passage that's also been put to music, "a time for everything". The gist of it is discernment, knowing when to do what. But God also has times for everything, and we can't know what that is until he tells us. So as the Teacher will also conclude at the end of the book, verses 12-13 say that the meaning of life is to try and enjoy our time here and find some pleasure in whatever it is we have to do.

3:14 emphasizes the point that meaning only lasts if it is grounded in God. But notice also that the repetition of history ("nothing new") is a principle found throughout scripture regarding prophecy as well. Just

because something was fulfilled in the past doesn't mean it can't apply again in the future.

In 3:16 the Teacher observes the rampant injustices of life. But then he observes that both people and animals die and their bodies return to dust. Verse 21 asks how anyone can know whether people's spirits rise and animal spirits fall— which at least seems to say that animals have spirits. But until Jesus came, no part of scripture really explained the details.

In 4:1 is the observation of oppression and wickedness, and how the dead or never-born are better off than the living under such conditions. Then we see the issue of working to “keep up with the Joneses”, and that the lazy are actually better off compared to those who work hard just to appear successful. It's a form of greed, and hard work only has meaning if the fruit of the labor is shared; teamwork is better than doing everything alone. Then 4:13 goes back to the value of wisdom in this life.

5:1 addresses the issue of not taking our promises and commitments seriously, then turns to corrupt government officials and the love of money and power, and that such people constantly have to worry about protecting what they've acquired. 5:13 continues on the issue of materialism, including the familiar phrase that we will leave the earth with as much as we arrived: nothing. Then 5:18 repeats the theme of finding a balance between labor and pleasure.

6:1 continues with the futility of having to leave the fruit of our labor when this life is over. Though some might take as the Calvinistic idea of predestination, it's talking about mortality rather than free moral choice. We won't go over the rest of the book, since it's pretty much made its point already.

## **Song of Solomon**

Caution should be used against the temptation to interpret this book the way many have over the years, whether concerning prophecy or the church or a hundred other things. The text itself doesn't give any indication that deeper meaning is intended, but the main assertion for it being allegory is that it otherwise seems to be out of character for sacred writings. Yet remember two points: that including a book in the Bible had more to do with who wrote it than the subject matter, and that allegory can mean pretty much anything and everything without the text itself giving us the meaning.

So although there certainly is symbolism in the book, the primary meaning is that it describes a real couple. It's just a love story, and an illustration of the happiness God intended for us from the beginning of creation. And because it's a love story, analysis seems rather out of place. The best advice is probably not to read too much into it at all.

# Isaiah

## Introduction

Isaiah is one of the major prophetic books, and many consider it a “mini-Bible” of its own. Though chapter/verse markings were not part of the early copies, it happens that the 1st 39 chapters are more about judgment just as the Old Testament’s 39 books are, while the last 27 chapters are more about consolation just as the New Testament’s 27 books are. Isaiah literally means, “The Lord is Salvation”, which summarizes the book. Isaiah’s focus was on Jerusalem and Judah, and his message was that they would be overrun by Gentiles for their sins. But though God’s judgment had to be harsh, he would never abandon the people of Israel forever. He deals with Israel as a nation, not necessarily as individuals, and the prophecies are not necessarily in chronological order.

## Isaiah 1

Judah had forgotten God, in spite of all he had done for them. After a long description of their pathetic condition, the only reason they weren’t yet destroyed was because God prevented it in the hope they might come to their senses. It had sunk to the point where God was repulsed by their sacrifices and festivals. He kept pleading with them to clean themselves up and stop all the sinning, and in verse 18 he offers to sit down and discuss the matter rationally. The offer of washing away sins is the very thing the Messiah would come to do, but the people still had to choose their path. Then the text turns back to describing their miserable condition after having begun so well, which is the essence of what Jesus told the church at Ephesus in Rev. 2:1-5. But then God promises to clean them up and punish their enemies.

## Isaiah 2

Ch. 2 is a prophetic message from God, and the descriptions all have to do with an earthly kingdom, which is as literal and physical as the pathetic kingdom that was just described. It includes the familiar phrase about beating swords into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks, which refers to the future Millennial kingdom since no such thing has happened yet. But it can't refer to eternity, since it includes the settling of disputes between nations.

It goes on to describe the prosperous enemies of Israel, and promises their downfall in the day of judgment. But notice the part about them hiding in caves and holes in the ground. This is quoted in Rev. 6:15-17, so we know that Revelation is set during that future day of judgment— rather than gradually played out over centuries, as the Historicist prophecy theory asserts. There's an interesting perspective in Constable's Notes about the worthlessness of gold and idols, as symbolized in the plot of Lord of the Rings; the "precious" golden ring turned decent people into monsters, so it had to be given up and destroyed.

## Isaiah 3

Ch. 3 begins by showing that dependence on people never lasts. It also says that putting the young or incompetent in charge of a nation is a judgment from God— as is putting new believers in positions of spiritual leadership in the Christian community. As 3:5 puts it, youths will defy the elderly, and the riffraff will show contempt for respectable people. Those who have lived long enough to remember the mistakes of the past are brushed aside as senile or regressive, so the same mistakes are repeated. People tend to choose as leaders in either secular or spiritual realms those who promise them what they want, instead of what they need.



3:9 goes on to describe the proud look of degenerates, yet promises reward to the innocent. But we see in verse 12 a statement most translations render disingenuously as “Youths oppress my people, women rule over them.” It should read, as it does in the NET translation and the LXX, “Oppressors treat my people cruelly; creditors rule over them” (see [Lesson 621](#), p. 222-223). Most commentaries get this completely wrong, as do those who use the bad translation to declare that women must never rule a nation. Rather, the judgment is that people have allowed themselves to go into debt, and as the Proverbs stated, “the borrower is slave to the lender.”

3:14-15 continues the theme of greed and oppression, and it sounds a lot like when Jesus rebuked the Pharisees in Mat. 21:33-45 and 23:4. 3:16 is the part that actually does talk about women, who like the proud men mentioned earlier, will be paid back for their sins. Then the focus returns to men primarily, and continues through the next chapter.

## **Isaiah 4-5**

Now the text turns to the future time when the Messiah will clean and purge Israel, leaving only a remnant. Ch. 5 seems to be an abrupt change of topic and style, but it's really a scathing denunciation of what Israel had done to the blessings God had provided.

5:8 goes on to describe the judgments to come, but the people bury their heads in the sand and keep on partying, as if this will fend off the judgments. Such denial is rampant in the world today, even in the Christian community. Any who raise warnings are shouted down as being too negative and are blamed for preventing the good times from continuing. Christians especially should be the voice of alarm in these deceptive times.

Then in verse 20 comes the familiar judgment about those who reverse the meanings of good and evil, and following that is a list of other vices: being skilled at drinking, condemning the innocent and acquitting the guilty, and ultimately rejecting their Creator. This brings judgment, which comes not only through natural disasters but also other nations against Israel.

## Isaiah 6

This chapter marks a major shift in the book, which leads commentators to conclude that the first 5 chapters are more of an introduction or overview. Isaiah is being shown a vision of God on his throne, surrounded by a class of angelic beings known as seraphs. The word seems to mean *beings of fire*, but it only appears here in the whole Bible. Some commentators argue that these also were serpentine in form, but remember that fallen angels wouldn't necessarily have changed form, such that we can't equate the form with evil in all cases in scripture. But by description, they aren't what we'd describe as serpents, and they hold the same place around God's throne as the four living creatures in Rev. 4:6-8.

Isaiah is terrified at the sight of all this, but one of the seraphs makes a kind of temporary atonement so he can be in God's presence. We see a very familiar phrase in verse 8: God asks who will go out on his behalf, and Isaiah's response is, "Here I am, send me!" Too often we're afraid to respond this way because of what God might put us through, but we must not be afraid.

The task was for Isaiah to give Israel another familiar message, one that's quoted in John 12:38-41. So we know from that reference that Isaiah saw Jesus in his former glory, which he would put aside during his incarnation as explained in Phil. 2:5-11. But the blinding and deafening of Israel is not to end until the judgment is complete. So this is an instance where the prophecy long predated the fulfillment, and the people of Israel remain in unbelief to this day. Yet even a tree

cut down to the roots can still revive with a tiny shoot, and so it will be with the nation of Israel.

## Isaiah 7

This chapter begins a long section through ch. 12 focused on Assyria and the poor decisions made by King Ahaz during that time. Isaiah was to tell Ahaz not to fear the army coming against him, but to trust God instead. God even has Ahaz ask for a sign that God would really protect his people, but Ahaz refuses. So God gives the sign in verse 14, and it's the core of the message of salvation for all: A woman would conceive and give birth to a son.

Pay attention to two levels of prophecy here, and also take a look at [this article](#) regarding the proper meaning of the word translated *woman*. The Hebrew word is *alma*, which some claim means *young woman* rather than *virgin*. But remember that this is the Masoretic text, which went out of its way to obscure Messianic prophecies. The Greek word here is *parthenos* which means any male or female virgin who is old enough to be married. It's the Greek that Mat. 1:23 quotes here, and that context clearly indicates Mary's virginity. This concept will be a thread running through the coming chapters. But on the other hand, an ambiguous term might better fit the dual prophecy.

Of course, no virgin birth happened in this immediate context, so now we see the other layer of the prophecy: that before the child to be born to "this woman" is old enough to know right from wrong, something will happen. This is where we get the concept of "age of accountability", which means that before this age (which may vary from one child to the next), a child is innocent and not charged with sin against God. Also, the diet the child would have seems to indicate poverty.

Now what's the "something" that will happen? There are two ways to interpret the text here: (1) that the two kings coming against Israel

would be defeated, or (2) that the two kingdoms Ahaz was tearing apart (meaning Israel and Judah) would be destroyed. This seems a better fit with verse 17, which speaks of disaster to come upon Ahaz and his people.

## **Isaiah 8**

The text continues here with the prophecy of disaster, and God repeats the reasons for it. Though the child was to be named Immanuel per 7:14, the contextual description seems to indicate that the child named in 8:1 is the one the immediate fulfillment of the prophecy was about. In both cases, it is God who names the child, in spite of the biased Constable's Notes' claim that the woman named him Immanuel but God overrode her choice. It's quite remarkable that a commentator of this quality would make such an obvious blunder without prejudice blinding him.

Verse 11 turns back to warnings for people to repent before disaster strikes, and verses 14-15 are quoted in passages such as Rom. 9:33 as pertaining to Jesus, the "rock that would make them stumble". Verses 17-18 are quoted in Heb. 2:13 as also being ultimately fulfilled in Jesus.

The next warning is about enticement to seek out oracles and conjurers. The solution is to remember God's words, which we can't do if we've never read them. The last part of ch. 8 begins a very familiar passage to Christians, and it continues into ch. 9.

## **Isaiah 9**

This is quoted in Mat. 4:15-16 as being fulfilled in Jesus the Messiah, but there will be an ultimate fulfillment in the Millennial Kingdom. And of course, verse 6 is one of the best-known Messianic verses, but pay attention to all the Son's titles, including the Mighty God and the

Everlasting Father. No clearer statement can be found in scripture that this Messiah, Jesus, is God in the flesh. As it's put in Col. 1:15-20, the entirety of God is contained in Jesus, who is the visible appearance of the invisible God, and the maker and sustainer of all creation. He will rule on the throne of David for a thousand years, and then in the New Jerusalem for eternity.

Now notice also that this obviously future event from the time of the prophecy is written in the past tense ("has been born, given"). When a prophecy cannot be changed for any reason, the Hebrew prophets wrote them as if they had already happened. Keep this in mind when reading Revelation to avoid some confusion and wild speculation.

9:8 through 10:4 focus on the northern kingdom of Israel, whose enemy will be God Himself because of Israel's pride and self-reliance. The judgments would come in waves, much the way the Seals, Trumpets, and Bowls of Revelation come in sequence. The phrase in verse 20 about eating their own arm is a euphemism for turning on their own brothers and sisters— a habit often employed by Christians today as well.

## **Isaiah 10**

Here the focus is on injustice and oppression, to the point of robbing orphans and widows, as also stated in Luke 20:47. Now that God has told Israel what to expect from Assyria, he then tells Assyria what to expect from God. As with Pharaoh, God often uses the already-hardened to punish Israel, then the punishers themselves get their judgments too. They arrogantly believed their success against Israel was by their own power and gods, so now they too need a lesson in humility.

As God goes on to explain, Assyria was but a tool in his hand, and the tool can't boast of wielding itself. Then, finally, in verse 20, the few remaining of Israel will come to their senses and trust God

instead of other nations, and then God will restore and heal them. Notice that Jacob/Israel is named; this means that the entire twelve tribes will be restored, not only two as many assert so they can invent a story of ten “lost tribes” that can be anyone from the western world to sub-Saharan Africa.

Verse 27 describes details of the punishment preceding this restoration, and though Assyria was decimated by God in 605 BC according to ch. 37, there remains an ultimate fulfillment of the Millennial Kingdom of Israel.

## **Isaiah 11**

The Millennial Kingdom is described here as regarding a clear Messianic prophecy. The Son mentioned earlier becomes the adult wise ruler, and his kingdom even enjoys rest from deadly animals. But we have to pause at verse 6 to address a grievous false teaching that has arisen in recent years. It’s called “the Mandela Effect”, and it’s basically a superstitious belief in some dark magic that can change the past, including the words on Bibles sitting on your shelf at home. They remember the phrase “lion will lie down with the lamb”, then look at verse 6 and cite it as proof that scripture has been changed. But it’s a simple case of imperfect memory, since both lion and lamb are mentioned, just not immediately together. Yet the believers in this theory insist they have perfect memory, so it must be the scriptures that were changed. This is one of the results of Christians neglecting both rationality and Bible study, and by that I don’t mean a light devotional reading. A Christian ignorant of the Bible is ripe for deception.

The focus on the “root of Jesse” continues with the centrality of earthly Israel in the Millennium, when God will give to Israel the land formerly occupied by their enemies.

## Isaiah 12-13

Israel finally praises God for delivering them. But then in ch. 13 the focus turns to the nation of Babylon. There's a chart in Constable's Notes of the various nations to be addressed, but this prophecy came about 100 years before Babylon had risen from a subset of Assyria to an empire of its own. Yet the prophecy itself doesn't give a clear sequence or timeline of the events to come. This is typical of all Bible prophecy, with the exception of the clear sequence of Seals, Trumpets, and Bowls in Revelation.

Speaking of those judgments, verses 9-11 match up with Isaiah 34:4, Ezek. 32:7, Joel 2:10, 30-31, 3:15, Zech. 14:6-7, Matt. 24:29, and Rev. 8:12 regarding the cosmic disasters that will accompany God's wrath. These are clear indictments of those who worship the sun, moon, and stars. And as in Rev. 6:8 and 9:15, the population of the world will be severely reduced. Notice also that the earth itself will be shaken from its foundations, and the description of Babylon's grisly end is similar to what the future Babylon will do to Israel in Zechariah 14:2. But it is God who will destroy Babylon, and when this is finally fulfilled no people will live there again, as shown in Rev. 18. So again, there is the typical "soon" and "in the distant future" fulfillment of prophecy.

## Isaiah 14-16

Contrast that with how God will restore Israel as his chosen people and cause them to prosper in their land. Here again, the Christian community has no land, and appeal to allegory cannot make us Israel. But notice that as part of this restoration, Israel will taunt the king of Babylon. The wicked kings of the past stand up to wait for mighty Babylon to be brought down to their level in weakness and misery, and this is the immediate context of the controversial passage starting in verse 12.

In the midst of a description of the underworld is that of the realm of heaven, and many have taken this section as referring to Satan. The Latin Vulgate translated “shining one” as “lucifer” since that’s the Latin equivalent, rather than a proper name. But why would a human king be described in such terms? The consensus of scholars seems to be that these were terms Babylonian rulers used for themselves, claiming to be like God. So the prophecy is mocking their claims by contrasting their boasting with the fate that awaits them.

Yet at the same time, Ezekiel 28:11-19 is a prophecy against another earthly king, the King of Tyre, and the language there seems clearly about more than that king. But there is no such term as “lucifer” in that passage, and it doesn’t seem to address earthly boasting. So there are enough differences of context to consider the passage here in ch. 14 to be solely about the human king of Babylon. Though Jesus uses the term “bright morning star” for himself in Rev. 22:16, the critics’ claim that Satan is Jesus by virtue of both being described as “light” or “shining” is refuted by 2 Cor. 11:14, which says that Satan can only pretend to be an angel of light. The overall point is that while pretenders to the heavenly realm of God try to rise up to get it, the real God steps down to our level to give it.

The harsh sentence upon Babylon’s king is not wickedness, as the critics charge God, but justice, paying the wicked the wages they’ve earned. God gives life, and he has the right to take it away.

The next nation to be judged is the Philistines, arch enemies of Israel. After driving out Israel from Judea late in the first century a.d., the Romans named the area Palestine after the Philistines to humiliate the Jews, and that name stuck. So the original Palestinians were actually Jews and then Philistines, and they had no more right to the land of Israel than today’s so-called Palestinians, who are more genetically-related to the people of Jordan than any other ancient line. The Philistines in this context had become overconfident at the demise of their enemies, but God assures them that their turn would soon come.



Next it's Moab's turn, and their devastation is so harsh that Isaiah, likely also God, is moved by grief. After all, we know from Ezk. 18:23 and 2 Peter 3:9 that God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked. But by the end of ch. 16 we see that a precise time is given for the prophecy to be fulfilled, so there will be no averting it.

## Isaiah 17



Damascus, the capital of Syria, is one of the oldest continuously-inhabited cities in the world, going back to at least 3000 BC. But the prophecy centers more on Israel than Damascus, which is only addressed in the first three verses. The area will only be good for grazing animals, rather than for people to live. So as devastated as Damascus is today, people still live there, and it's still considered a city. Some commentaries take it as having been fulfilled around 732 BC, but the LXX uses the word “forever”, and if that's the correct rendering, this has not been fulfilled on that account either. For more on the future view see [this article](#). But I disagree with Constable's Notes that this is a hodge-podge of Isaiah's prophecies, and that the

course of events is less important than the problems they're meant to address.

All commentaries seem to take verse 3 onward as fulfilled in the past, yet there would be a few survivors in Syria, though none are mentioned for Damascus. Jacob and Ephraim, representing the northern kingdom of Israel and its capital Samaria, are described as being "skin and bones". This referred to its ruling class being deported to Assyria, leaving only the poor to work the land, as was the custom in ancient times when a nation was conquered. It was the mix of survivors from Israel and Assyria who became the despised Samaritans of Jesus' day. Here's a quote from the Damascus article linked earlier, which destroys the "lost tribes" theory:

A quick reading of 2 Chronicles 11:16 shows that all the faithful from the 10 northern tribes moved south at the time of the civil war that divided the nation after King Solomon's death 150 years earlier. From then on, all 12 tribes were represented in the Southern Kingdom of Judah, so the 10 tribes from the North weren't totally lost. The Lord has always preserved a believing remnant from all the Tribes of Israel.

Verse 7 then shifts to a more distant future ("in that day" or "at that time"), when people (not just Israelites) give up their idols and false gods to turn to the God of Israel. Verse 9 gives the reason as "because of the Israelites", who at the time of the Assyrian conquest were as decimated as anyone else, so this can't refer to that former time.

Verse ten says that the people had forgotten God, so their plans all come to nothing. God himself would destroy the Assyrian army, as we'll see in ch. 37. But the distant future fulfillment can't be easily dismissed, since Assyria was only one nation, while verse 12 speaks of many, and since those lands still persist in rebellion against God and hostility toward Israel. Some take verse 14 as applying to the destruction of Damascus, but this is in the context of the "many nations". Anti-Israeli sentiment has been growing louder in the last

few decades, which makes perfect sense as preparation for this prophecy's final fulfillment.

## **Isaiah 18**

Now who is the nation being described here? The various commentaries agree that we can't be precise, but the impression I get from them and also the Greek translation is that it refers to the people of Cush/Ethiopia at the southern end of the Red Sea, and those living along the Nile river. It was common for small, lightweight, papyrus boats to be used in waters too narrow or shallow for normal ships, and Nubians, who live in Sudan on the western side of the Red Sea, can be described as "tall and smooth-skinned".

But the text and the commentaries are somewhat confusing, since it seems that both the messengers and the tall people are the same, yet one is to bring the message to the other. Were they to bring the message to themselves? And does verse 3 mean only the world as Israel knew it, or the whole world as we understand it? Also consider that after God waits, a trumpet is blown, and in verse 7 tribute is brought to Mount Zion. This has not happened, so it refers to the Millennium.

## **Isaiah 19**

Now God's attention turns toward Egypt, whose history was filled with upheaval and whose existence depended entirely on the Nile River. By taking advantage of their disunity and attacking the river, God would show them how little power they actually had.

The prophecy in verse 16 looks to the distant future ("in that day" or "at that time"), when Judah will be feared and the Egyptians will bring them tribute and speak the Hebrew language. Also, per verse 19, the Egyptians will build an altar/temple in their land, as well as a pillar at

their border honoring the God of Israel. Once again, if this were all an allegory about eternal bliss, there would be no designations of nations or borders, nor any need for a highway between Egypt and Assyria. God specifies his blessing on Israel, Egypt, and Assyria because they will be literal, physical nations during the Millennium.

## **Isaiah 20-22**

Then there is a brief prophecy with a more immediate fulfillment in Isaiah's day, regarding the fact that Assyria would conquer and humiliate Egypt and Cush. This was a clear object lesson to Israel about either fearing or trusting Egypt, as stated in verse 6.

Then in ch. 21 it's back to Babylon, "the desert by the sea". Like the historical hot desert winds from the Negev, God's judgment would devastate the land. Here again, the land to be devastated cannot be an allegory of judgment, since the desert wind is the symbol of literal, physical judgment from God against a literal, physical land. The reason for the judgment is specific to those people, for all their deception and destruction of others.

Verse 9 is quoted in Rev. 14:8 and 18:2, and though Babylon has fallen before, one final fall still remains. The lesson once again is that Israel should never trust in powerful nations instead of God. Verses 11-12 seem strange and cryptic, but according to commentators they refer to the people of Edom asking the prophet how long their punishment was to last. The reply was that they would get relief, but only for a brief time, and then they could ask again.

Now in verse 13 we see a judgment against Arabia, and it's short, blunt, and given a time. In one year it would be reduced to a handful of warriors, and there's no stopping it.

Ch. 22 is against Jerusalem and Judah, the southern kingdom. Though at the time of the prophecy they were happy and content, this "valley of vision" had no vision at all for what was coming.

Nebuchadnezzar and his allies would soon lay siege to the city and defeat it by starvation. The people had forgotten and abandoned God because of their self-reliance, so their celebration was foolhardy, to the point of that familiar phrase in verse 13, “Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die!”

An individual named Shebna is singled out for doom for his arrogance, and another named Eliakim would be Shebna’s replacement. Both of these people will be mentioned again in chapters 36-37, so this fulfillment takes place after that. Notice in verse 22 a phrase quoted in Rev. 3:7-8 for the Congregation at Philadelphia; it means that Jesus holds the ultimate position which for now would be held by Eliakim, the steward who protects the house. And unlike overconfident Jerusalem, this faithful Congregation would be kept safe from the calamities to come. Even so, verse 25 says that Eliakim would falter at the end.

## **Isaiah 23-24**

Now we turn to the prophecy against Tyre, a major port on the Mediterranean Sea west of Damascus. While Babylon had become powerful on land by conquest, Tyre became powerful on the sea by peaceful trade, though it too had corrupted God’s people. And like Babylon, Tyre is also compared to a harlot. So the earlier phrase about Babylon being “in the desert by the sea” may refer to its connection here with Tyre, and together they symbolized the entire world from east to west. The lament of seafaring people matches up with the fall of Babylon in Rev. 18:17-20.

Tarshish (“refinery”) is believed to have been in what is modern Spain, but “ships of Tarshish” was the term for the largest ships of the day, so Tyre’s downfall would impact all major shipping in the region. Verse 10 calls Tarshish “daughter”, and it’s believed that the “mother” was the sea itself. So we could connect Tarshish and Babylon again on this account, since we’ll see the name “daughter

Babylon” in ch. 47, which has even more descriptions quoted in Revelation. The same name appears also in Ps. 137:8, Jeremiah 50:42 and 51:33, and Zech. 2:7.

In verse 11 we see Sidon, also called a “virgin daughter”, another city whose prosperity depended on sea trade. All the people who would flee the devastation would find no rest or refuge. But in verse 15 it gives the duration for Tyre’s demise: seventy years, which as it says in the text was the average lifespan of a king. Then to rebuild its former glory, Tyre would advertise itself like a prostitute. But, surprisingly, it would use its profits to serve God. Clearly a gap of time is indicated here, between the selfishness of motive for the wealth and its eventual use for service in God’s temple. Like Egypt, Tyre will also give tribute to Jerusalem during the Millennium. One wonders how the allegorical interpretation would explain these other nations.

In ch. 24 the prophecy turns to the world as a whole and continues through ch. 27. Constable’s Notes shows that it takes the form of a chiastic message centering on Mount Zion, and it shows a sequence from the Tribulation, to the 2nd Coming, to the Millennium, and then to eternity. God stands poised to strike the world with suffering and destruction, with no preference given for anyone’s social status. And the reason is given in verse 5: People have defiled the earth and must be repaid for their guilt. The phrase “the inhabitants of the earth” is seen in Rev. chs. 6-17 to describe unbelievers, but then in verse 14 the few survivors shout praises to God.

Then it’s back to the lament of the wicked, and in verse 20 we see a curious statement: The earth will stagger like a drunkard and sway like a hut in a windstorm. These analogies just don’t fit modern cosmology. Verses 21-22 show that this is the time when even wicked supernatural beings will be thrown into a pit and only released to be punished after a long time. This is what 2 Peter 2:4, Jude 6, and passages in Revelation refer to. Verse 23 matches up with the

cosmic disturbances of many other passages, such as Joel 2:30-32, Rev. 6:12-17, and Rev. 21:23.

## **Isaiah 25-26**

Now we approach the centerpiece of the prophecy, the return of the Messiah at the end of the Tribulation. The banquet mentioned in verse 6 is referenced in Rev. 19:9 as the “wedding supper of the Lamb”, which happens at the beginning of the Millennium, though Death won’t be eliminated till the end of that time per Rev. 20:14 and 21:4. The description of celebration continues into 26:1, focusing on the people of the land of Judah.

But what about verse 13-14, which seem to say that the wicked will never rise again? Look carefully, and you’ll notice that it leaves out the crucial part about when and where their spirits don’t rise. We can’t read into it that their spirits were destroyed, because it doesn’t say that. Instead, the context speaks of the masters who had oppressed God’s people not rising again in this world. In contrast, verse 19 says that the godly will rise in this life, since it mentions their formerly dead bodies coming back to life, but certainly in immortal form. This is what happens when all the righteous dead awaken, not from “soul sleep” but from “body sleep”. The passage could also be referring to nations rather than individuals, though individuals seem more in view here.

But what of the curious statement in verses 20-21? While on its own it could refer to the Rapture of the Church, in context it clearly points to Israel. Rev. 12 depicts a woman representative of Israel, and in verse 14 there she’s taken to a place of safety for the final 3-1/2 years of the Tribulation, during which time Judea will be overrun. This is also what Jesus referred to in Mat. 24:15.

## **Isaiah 27-28**

Ch. 27 begins with “at that time”, which is further support for this being the future Tribulation. But what is Leviathan the sea monster doing here, which was seen first in Job and also the Psalms? Though Constable’s Notes calls the creature “a Caananite myth”, from the passages in Job it seems to have been a real creature, very much like what we’re told about ancient dragons. Here of course, it’s being used as a symbol of fearsome nations and/or the spiritual entities behind them.

Then after more descriptions of the restoration of Israel in the Millennium, verse 12 speaks of their being gathered from all over the world at the sound of a trumpet, to worship God in Jerusalem. The trumpet seems to be a reference to the Feast of Trumpets or Day of Atonement, which is fulfilled in this ingathering of Israel rather than the Rapture of the Church. Unlike Israel’s many enemies over the centuries, Israel itself will survive and reach the ideal level of prosperity and blessing promised so long ago.

Chapters 28-35 were given during the reign of King Hezekiah, when Judah was tempted to trust in Egypt. The leaders are being foolish to do so, and there will be dire consequences. But in the end, when only a remnant exists, the people will be restored and blessed. The frequent reference to drunkenness describes the leaders’ stupor and lack of vision.

Verse 10 is a likely reference used in 2 Thes. 2:11 regarding the “strong delusion” God will send to those who hate truth, only next time it will be to the unbelieving world, whereas here it’s to Judah’s leadership. Though the foolish mock, and though they boast of making a pact with death and the grave in a pathetic attempt to cheat them both, God will not be denied his judgment on them. This passage is (or should be) very familiar to Christians, and along with Psalm 118:22 it is quoted in passages such as Mat. 21:42 as a Messianic prophecy. The rest of the chapter describes the principle that though judgment comes for a time, it will fit the crime, and then God will restore Israel and establish it firmly.



## **Isaiah 29-32**

Judah thought it could go on performing religious rites while also living in rebellion in every other way, but God despises such hypocrisy. Christians, pay attention! In verse 9 we see again that God will harden the hearts of those who have persisted too long in rebellion, so they get the full measure of consequences for their sin. Then in verse 16 we see what was quoted in Rom. 9:20, about the clay pot presuming to tell the potter he has no skill. This is the essence of the anti-Christian attitude; the degree of arrogance it takes to judge our Creator is extreme. Yet only God can turn a desert into an orchard and make the deaf hear.

Now in ch. 30 the prophecy gives more specific details about Judah choosing Egypt as an untrustworthy substitute for God. Verse 10 could be said of many Christians today: "Don't tell us what we need to hear, tell us what we want to hear." We see this as well in 2 Tim. 4:3. Yet in spite of Judah's folly and punishment, God promises not to allow them to be completely wiped out forever, and again the Millennial Kingdom is described.

Ch. 31 returns to describing the demise of those who look to Egypt for help and protection, but again God promises to keep a remnant preserved.

Ch. 32 goes back to the ideal life that will characterize the Millennium, then back to a lament about disasters to come within a year of the prophecy, then back to the Millennium.

## **Isaiah 33-35**

Now the text turns from Judah to its destroyers, who will see not only their own destruction but the restoration of their former victims. Ch. 34 is where God calls out to the rest of the world, to warn them about defying the one true God. Verse 4 is quoted in Rev. 6:12-14, which is

the literal, physical fulfillment of the symbolism here describing the fate of the ungodly nations.

Verse 5 turns to focus on Edom on the southern border of Judah, which scripture sometimes uses to represent all the enemies of Israel. But though the details of destruction are certainly symbolic, they are just as certainly literal and physical, as also were Sodom and Gomorrah. Since the description starting in verse 9 has not yet happened, it must refer to the duration of the Millennium. Though earth will be restored after the Tribulation, there will be reminders of the past, and ch. 35 gives more descriptions of the Millennium.

## **Isaiah 36-37**

Here the text looks back at when the Assyrian king invaded Judah during the reign of Hezekiah. The names Eliakim and Shebna should sound familiar from ch. 22, and they are sent to speak to Sennacherib's envoys, who offer a pleasant life in another land if the people will surrender peacefully. But they also mock Israel's God and tell them their king is misleading them. And notice that the envoys claim (but not truthfully, as we see in verse 20) that Israel's own God had sent them there. But though they presumed this meant they were guaranteed victory, it was really a test of Hezekiah's faith in and loyalty to God.

But Hezekiah's officials took the ultimatum to him, and after expressing deep grief and anguish, we see in ch. 37 that Hezekiah went to the Temple to ask God's help. Then he had a message sent to Isaiah to find out God's answer. Isaiah's answer in verse 5 was that God would whisper in Sennacherib's ear and cause him to chase a false rumor back to his home country, where he would be murdered. After another round of taunts, in verse 21 Isaiah gives God's retort to Sennacherib and taunts him back, including the ominous phrase in verse 28, "I know where you live!" Then we see a phrase that will be repeated in Ezekiel 38:4 concerning a different

situation, about God putting hooks and bridals on a nation to make it go where he chooses.

Verse 30 turns to focus on the blessings Judah will enjoy a couple of seasons from then. Not a shot will be fired in Jerusalem, because God himself would drive away the invaders, as happened in verse 36. The Angel of the Lord (a possible preincarnation of Jesus) cut down 185,000 troops during the night, and when the survivors woke up, they took off back to their homeland. But Sennacharib was murdered by his own sons as he worshiped his god.

## **Isaiah 38-39**

King Hezekiah, who had done the right thing and sought God's will against the Assyrian king Sennacharib, was nonetheless stricken with a terminal illness before God delivered Jerusalem from the Assyrians. From our perspective it looks like following God didn't pay off after all. But the answer is given in 2 Chron. 32:24-26: Hezekiah had become proud and ungrateful. But he repented, and God gave not only the specific number of years he'd live, but also a sign: The shadow of the sun, on steps whose purpose was to mark the hours, would go backwards, just as God would "give back" years to his life.

Constable's Notes makes a feeble attempt to explain this miracle while keeping the earth a spinning ball, but what kind of miracle would it be to merely move a local shadow, and how would that symbolize the giving back of time to Hezekiah? Per 2 Chron. 32:31, this miracle was recorded by the Babylonians, who had come to ask about it, which means it wasn't merely a local phenomenon. Verse 9 records the prayer Hezekiah had prayed.

Ch. 39 shows that an official in Babylon sent gifts to him to celebrate his recovery. But this flattering gesture, which was a test from God per 2 Chron. 32:31, caused him to do something incredibly stupid: show off all his wealth, his armory, and the loot to be had from his

kingdom, instead of crediting God. So Isaiah went to confirm from Hezekiah what he had done, but God's response was that everything he showed the Babylonians would be hauled away as plunder, including his own descendants. But all Hezekiah cared is that this wouldn't happen in his lifetime! So we should learn from this example that God's tests aren't always simple or obvious, and that consistently honoring God is a wise path to follow.

## Isaiah 40-41

Now begins the "New Testament" portion of Isaiah, which some compare also to the Trinity: 40-48 focus on the Father, 49-57 on the Son, and 58-66 on the Spirit. In this chapter, God has finished paying Jerusalem for their sins, and verse 3 is very familiar because it's quoted in the Gospels as pertaining to John the Baptist preparing Israel to receive the Messiah. And of course, verse 8 is the well-known phrase about the permanence of the decrees of God.

Verse 12 begins a section extoling the greatness of God above all, but notice once again the cosmological descriptions in verse 22. The "circle" or "ring" or "curve" (LXX) of the earth is the visible horizon, which has more to do with the physics of light than the shape of the earth. Many argue that scripture only describes our world in terms the ancients used for what they could see. Yet this argument collapses when similar terminology is used for what is not seen, such as the abode of the dead, "the deep", and the earth's pillars and foundation beneath the waters.

But what does it mean that God sits on (really, above) the horizon? The LXX says "controlling" rather than "sitting", because to sit there means to have sovereignty over it. The sky above has been "stretched" the way one might stretch a curtain, meaning something thin and flat, though in another context this same word clearly refers to something very strong and forged. Also, the purpose of the sky is to provide a "tent" or dwelling place, obviously for us, who should

remember that in comparison to God, we're no more than tiny insects. So in verse 25 we should ask who could possibly be compared to this great God? Not only has he created all this, he even calls the stars by name— all gazillion of them, and they dare not leave their places. Some speculate that these are actually sentient beings, and that the “planets” (wanderers) are fallen angels since they disobeyed and left their assigned places.

At any rate, the point of the passage is that this great Creator, lofty as he is, cares about us, to the point that, as Jesus said in Mat. 10:30, even the hairs on our heads are numbered. So God is both transcendent and personal, separate from creation yet in absolute control over it. Then we see another favorite memory verse in 31.

We see in ch. 41 that the coastlands were the ends of the earth from the perspective of Israel, but we should check context carefully to see whether the world then is in view, or the world now, or possibly both. Here, the point is that God is not just the God of Israel but of the whole world, and the proud nations shouldn't think they can defy him.

Then the text focuses on Israel, who is to be summoned from around the world to return to the land. No other ancient people who have been destroyed and scattered have returned, more than once the way Israel has, and it's because of God alone.

Verse 18 begins a familiar passage some apply to modern-day Israel, which actually did turn a wasteland into a thriving agricultural region. But the context seems more about the overall condition of blessing, which of course will have a literal, physical fulfillment in the Millennium as well. We can at least say that verse 20 is not yet fulfilled, since Israel is still in rejection of the Messiah, as they were in the 1st century a.d.

Now God taunts the nations by demanding evidence that their gods and magic arts have successfully predicted anything of importance. Again, this highlights the fact that fulfilled prophecy is the fingerprint

of God on only the Bible, and that Christians are negligent if they ignore it, especially since nearly 1/3 of the Bible is prophecy.

In contrast, God gives examples of his fulfilled prophecies, and the one starting in verse 25 is believed to have been fulfilled by Cyrus the Persian about 150 years after this prophecy was given. The text says Cyrus would call on God's name, but Constable's Notes claims that this only means God used him for his purposes. Other commentaries put this as a question, "Will he call on God?", and Ezra 1:2 quotes Cyrus as saying that the God of heaven had given him the kingdoms of the world. The best solution would seem to be that he would simply invoke the name of God as he might invoke the name of any other so-called god, not that he actually served and worshiped the one true God, since there's no evidence that he did so.

## **Isaiah 42-43**

This is a clear Messianic prophecy, since this one of all the servants of God would accomplish his mission without any fault or flaw of his own. He would not come as a violent conquerer but a gentle lamb, yet one whose spirit could not be crushed by the violent. Verses 6 and 7 are what Jesus read in the synagogue per Luke 4:18-19, along with several other references in Isaiah.

But what does it mean in vs. 8 that "the Lord" is God's name? The Hebrew has YHWH, but the Greek (LXX) translated that always as kurios. Some claim that the LXX was corrupt, but the New Testament quotes of it also use kurios for YHWH and theos for Elohim. So since it's undeniable that God allows name changes between languages, the "sacred name" of God is who is meant, not the syllables in our human languages. The name in any language is made sacred by its owner. But whatever the language, the honor and glory due to God must not be reduced or shared with anyone else. This is why saying "we all worship the same God" is a filthy lie. God is identified by his character and deeds, which is what fulfilled prophecy is all about.

Verse 10 reminds people that God will one day make all the suffering end, and that only the one true God will accomplish this. Per verse 14, all this waiting hasn't been easy for God either, who has to hold himself back for a greater purpose. But when the time finally comes, nothing will stop him.

Then the text returns to Israel's present condition, at the time the prophecy was given. But though God himself had handed them over to their chosen fate, ch. 43 turns back to the future hope, because these were still his chosen people in spite of all they had done. God, who in verse 3 calls himself Lord (YHWH/kurios), God (Elohim/theos), and the Holy One of Israel, will gather them from all over the world.

The text turns back again to Israel at that time, and God calls the surrounding nations as witnesses in his case against them. The passage goes on to remind them of the miracles God performed in Egypt. But instead of turning water to dry ground, God promises to turn the dry, parched ground into streams of water for their deliverance from exile in Babylon. But for the time being, Israel was still deaf and blind and had forgotten all that God had done for them.

## **Isaiah 44-45**

Ch. 44 returns to the future of refreshing, both physically and spiritually. Remember that the future outpouring of the Spirit is directed at the people of Israel, and this will not be fulfilled to completion until the Millennium. Then it returns to God demanding evidence for the claims of false gods to be his equal, and of course the description "I am the first and last" is quoted as pertaining to Jesus in Rev .1:17, 2:8, 21:6, and 22:13. Then God shows the pathetic imitation idols as the mere work of human hands.

Verse 15 shows the insanity of someone taking some of the same wood he uses to cook or warm himself to make an idol, then bowing

down to it. Then after pleading with Israel to come to its senses and return to the one true God, the text turns back to Cyrus as the tool in God's hand that would be used to accomplish his plans. This continues into ch. 45, and in verse. 4 we see that Cyrus was to enjoy some of God's blessings in spite of the fact that he didn't submit to him as God. But what does it mean in verse 7 that God "creates evil"? The fact is that the word there means *calamity* rather than wickedness, because it's contrasted with peace, but critics love to use archaic translations to twist the Bible.

Then in verse 9 comes another reminder that it's just plain stupid to argue with our Creator, and this is quoted in Rom. 9:20-21. Likewise, in the following verses it's equally stupid for children to disrespect their parents and demand to know why they brought them into the world.

Verse 14 looks again to the Millennium, when the nations will respect both God and his people Israel, and verse 23 is quoted in Rom. 14:11 and Phil. 2:10-11 as pertaining to that time as well.

## Isaiah 46-47

Bel and Nebo were the two primary gods of Babylon. *Bel* is the Caananite equivalent of *lord*, which senseless critics think means that the God of the Bible is merely a heathen deity. But this was a title, and the actual name was Enlil. You may hear these names among amateur theologians as part of a fiction they've developed from a hodgepodge of false religions, largely based on the poor translation skills of someone named Zechariah Sitchin who is promoted by David Icke. Many are being deceived by these people and their stories, and Christians who don't study scripture are easy prey. You can read more about the Babylonian gods in Constable's Notes. But the point is that all of these so-called gods will bow down to the one true God.



So in verse 5 God asks once again why anyone thinks they compare to him, and 9-10 put an exclamation point on who the real God is. Prophecy is his fingerprint on the Bible as his Word. By the way, the eagle from a distant land describes Cyrus, not the USA.

Ch. 47 turns to Babylon, whose description is quoted in Rev. 18. This “virgin daughter”, called such because it had not yet been conquered, would be brought lower than dirt instead remaining exalted on a throne. She would be exposed for what she really is: pathetic, weak, and evil. Per verse 9, none of her sorceries and incantations will be able to save her, and her overconfident arrogance will be her undoing. She will not be able to conjure away her fate, no matter how faithful she had been all her life to her false gods and dark arts. Many today have returned to such things, thinking they’ll overcome the Creator, but they’re deluded.

## **Isaiah 48-49**

Now it’s back to unfaithful Israel, who were only preserved because of God honoring his promises, and ch. 49 turns again to the other nations who had been part of their punishment. The “Servant” in this passage and others is clearly the Messiah, though the Talmudists try to claim it’s Israel, even though the two are undeniably different entities as per vs. 6 for example.

Verse 14 is another familiar passage, where God again promises never to forget or abandon the people of Israel as a nation, and to restore them in a land that will soon become too small to hold all the people. But for the time being, God had divorced Israel per Jer. 3:8, which violated the covenant of Moses as you can see in the chart referenced in the description.

## **Isaiah 50-51**

Now God asks to see the certificate of divorce. Some presume this is similar to what Jesus said in John 8:10-11 to the woman caught in adultery, when he asked her where her accusers were and said he didn't condemn her. But it speaks of God divorcing her mother, and since verse 14 identified the "daughter" as Zion, the "mother" must be the northern kingdom. So what God is saying here is that the certificate of divorce must be presented to show the grounds upon which the divorce was granted, which was rebellion and unfaithfulness.

Verse 4 turns back to the Messiah who would do what Israel had refused to do, and verse 6 was literally and physically fulfilled when Jesus was being tormented even before he was put on the cross. There's a good comparison of the two opposite servants [here](#).

Ch. 51 continues to remind Israel of what God had done, which should assure them that his promises of eventual restoration are trustworthy. It goes beyond the Millennium to the time when God finally destroys the present world and replaces it with a new one—unlike the promises of God, which will never fail to come to pass. Now skipping down to verse 14 we see another description of the suffering Messiah. Some erroneously think it means Jesus was ugly or deformed at birth, but not only does it say he became disfigured by torture, he could not have qualified as the sacrificial Lamb had he been born with any defect.

All of these Servant passages are showing the Messiah to be both the one who suffered unjustly, and the one who will rule with absolute justice. In hindsight we know that these two conflicting attributes were to be resolved by two separate comings, but this couldn't be known beforehand by anyone but God. In the same way, when we see conflicting prophecies about Jesus' return in the New Testament (see [this source](#)), we should realize that two separate events are being described.

## Isaiah 53

We'll end this lesson with a look at one of the clearest and best known Messianic passages in the Old Testament. Some call it "the holy of holies", since it depicts the sacrificial Lamb in the temple. According to Constable's Notes, most of the approximately 80 New Testament references to Isaiah come from this passage alone.

It begins with an expression that today would be, "Who could have made this up?" The sheer magnitude of God's plan was unimaginable, unforeseen, unprecedented—and to too many people, especially Israel—unbelievable and unacceptable. The righteous Servant, the Messiah, would come first as a tender child of a poor family. Verse 2 is another one where people get the idea that Jesus was not pleasant to look at, but again, it refers to his lowly social standing, not his physical form. Verse 3 continues to describe him as an outcast, and his own people Israel would come to hate him beyond all reason. The fact that he experienced the trials and illnesses of life made them dismiss him as ordinary at best.

In fact it was not his own faults he suffered for, but Israel's, and of course the world's. People in general are always quick to blame the victim—unless it's someone they like. Though everyone had ignored and rejected him, God laid the sin of the world on this righteous Servant. Jesus did speak at times during his trial, but he never tried to get out of it beyond praying to the Father that there would be some other way. This is Jesus in his humanity, showing us to the last how we should relate to God. As stated in the Gospels, Jesus resolutely marched toward his own demise because of the greater good beyond it, per Heb. 12:2. He was not "murdered by his Father" as the senseless critics claim.

His trial by the Jews was illegal and unjust, but it had to be so, per 1 Cor. 2:8. Even his burial in a rich man's tomb was fulfilled literally and physically and could not have been prearranged by Jesus or any of his poor, cowardly disciples. But in spite of it all, restitution was made

for the sin of the world per John 1:29, which is why Jesus shouted “Paid in full!” on the cross, per John 19:30. The children are all adopted, per Rom. 8:15, 23, 9:4, Gal. 4:5, and Eph. 1:5, but children nonetheless. And because of all this, he will return as the conquering king, per Phil. 2:5-11.

## **Isaiah 54-57**

Ch. 54 begins with a familiar passage quoted in Gal. 4:27, whose context is the difference between faithful and unfaithful Israel. Here, the prophecy speaks of ultimate future blessings to come upon faithful Israel. The women in ancient Israel were in charge of putting up the family tent, so it is to the “wife of God” that such a happy command is given.

The blessing is a large nation with plenty of land, and verse 5 continues the “wife” theme by identifying the “husband” as the Lord of Armies. But be careful with analogies; too many leap to the conclusion that this means a wife must treat her husband as God, but that would be idolatry. Rather, this symbolizes the care and nurturing of God toward his people.

In ch. 54 the symbolism continues and explains that God had indeed rejected Israel in anger, but it was temporary. Ch. 55 begins with another familiar passage quoted in the Gospels by Jesus. By doing so, Jesus was offering to Israel the consummation of the earthly kingdom, but they rejected him so it was delayed. Verses 8-11 are yet another familiar passage, which should remind us to trust God, whose promises will be fulfilled.

Ch. 56 continues, but some read about keeping the sabbaths as applying to the church, when in fact it applies only to the people of Israel during the future Millennium. Then the text turns back to the present condition of Israel, the result of which is seen in Ch. 57: the famine of justice and compassion. This is also what happens when

churches bring the world into our midst instead of going out to the world to evangelize, which makes decent believers leave the congregation. And when only apostates are in the churches, the churches become the centers of disgusting acts and teachings, such as what's described in this chapter.

## **Isaiah 58-66**

Ch. 58 reminds us that sin must be faced and confronted, not hidden and denied. When we don't, yet we continue religious practices, we have the audacity to ask why God seems so far away. Then God tells us what a real "fast" is: to renounce sin, to free the oppressed, and to lift burdens. James 1:27 and 2:16 adds that true religion is to care for the helpless and needy, and strive for holiness. For Israel under the law of Moses, they also needed to do everything in that law.

In ch. 59 God assures Israel that he's quite capable of restoring and blessing them, but quite unwilling as long as they persist in rebellion. But then we see that God won't wait forever, but will have pity and intervene, out of shock that none among them would rise up and stand against evil. Do Christians today stand up and show any backbone while such grievous sins as abortion and the corruption of our youth continue? Do we stand for the truth of the Word of God against all other religions? It's no wonder that in Luke 18:8 Jesus asked if he'd find faith on the earth when he returns.

Ch. 60, as also Jesus taught in Mat. 5:16, reminds us that we're not here to hide ourselves away but to be light in a dark world. That was Israel's mandate, and for the most part it was never achieved, though it will be in the future Millennium. You can read details of that, and notice in verse 19 it moves beyond the Millennium to the time described also in Rev. 21:23,25 after the new heavens and earth are created. Notice also in verse 22 that it switches back to the Millennium, since people will still be mortal and having children.

Ch. 61 begins another passage quoted in Luke 4:18, but Jesus stopped short of the part where God was to bring vengeance, since it was not yet time for that. Here again we see an undeniable gap in prophecy, even within a sentence. Then there are more descriptions of the Millennium, continuing into ch. 62, and in ch. 63 is a passage referenced in Rev. 14:19 and 19:13 as applying to Jesus, who will indeed bring vengeance and wrath.

Ch. 63 and 64 turns to remind Israel of God's great deeds once again. Then in ch. 65 is a passage quoted in Rom. 10:19-20 which is applied to the Gentiles. Israel had failed in its mission to make the Gentiles jealous for God, and the church for the most part has failed to do the same for Israel, per Rom. 11:14. Then we see that during the Millennium only the rebellious will die young; since there's still mortality, it can't refer to eternity, and an allegory about good and evil makes no sense at all when it comes to dying young.

Ch. 66 begins with God calling heaven his throne and earth his footstool, in the context of showing that whatever puny humans do is no match for their Creator. No amount of temples or sacrifices could ever compensate for the people's rebellion. But notice verse 7 and forward; this seems to be an accurate description of how modern Israel, in unbelief though it is, literally became a nation at the stroke of a pen. Yet in context it certainly also means the future restoration of Israel after the Tribulation. Just as scripture prophesies both a secular and a spiritual Babylon, so also there is and will be both a secular and a spiritual Israel.

Verse 20 says that the nations will literally carry Jews back to their homeland, not in revulsion but in joy and love for God. Then God tells again of the new heavens and earth that will be made, awaiting the end of the Millennium, during which time people can still see the disgusting sight of the dead bodies of the wicked. There are some helpful maps of the names in this passage in Constable's Notes.

# Jeremiah

## Introduction

Jeremiah's prophetic ministry overlapped those of Nahum, Zephaniah, Habakkuk, Ezekiel, Daniel, and [Huldah](#), around the time the southern kingdom of Judah went into exile after wavering between alliances with either Assyria or Egypt. Jeremiah was dubbed "The Weeping Prophet" for good reasons; his entire adult life was spent delivering harsh, negative truth to his people, and such a life and mission invites personal attack. It's a very biographical book, in that it continually tells of the prophet's own feelings and experiences, and the tragedy of being denied the companionship and acceptance he always wanted, along with the refusal of Judah to repent. By the world's standards he was an abject failure, but by spiritual standards he was a hero.

## Jer. 1

This book focuses almost exclusively on Jerusalem and the consequences of being unfaithful to God. Like the book of Proverbs, it's more a collection of oracles than a developed or chronological theology, so there's a lot of repetition for emphasis. We should also be aware that this book has the most variations between the Hebrew and Greek texts, though it doesn't impact any significant theological teachings.

It starts off with a familiar phrase in verse 5, "before I formed you in the womb, I chose you." But like any familiar phrase, it's rarely understood and often twisted. It's a couplet, so we have to take both lines together, and the "choosing" was for a task, not salvation. God knew Jeremiah's character and personality, and raised him up to do

a certain thing, at a certain time, for a certain people, in a certain place.

His response to God's calling, which likely came when he was a young adult, was humble and realistic. But God's response was for him to be brave, because God would go with him. That should be all any of us needs, but we're often afraid of what God might ask of us. Do we really trust him if we're afraid to give him complete control of our lives?

Then Jeremiah is given a vision, where God gives the meanings of the symbols, which all have to do with impending doom on Judah. So Jeremiah is ordered to bring the message to them, and it comes with a serious threat from God if he doesn't carry it out. It's very much like one many parents have used: "If you don't stop crying, I'll give you a reason to cry!" He could expect to be attacked, but God had commissioned him, so there would be no excuse to be afraid of the attackers. It's never wise to rush into a hostile environment without God's sanction, but it's also not wise to fail to go there if God has ordered you to.

## **Jer. 2**

Ch. 2 begins with God lamenting "the good times" when the people of Jerusalem were faithful and could be blessed. But then God asks what he ever did to deserve their unfaithfulness, their idolatry and ingratitude. So he presents his case against them and their descendants: Who else among all the nations of the world has dared to change "gods"? It was a foolish trade.

After calling heaven and earth as his witnesses in verse 12, God then rebukes Judah in for its dependance upon alliances with foreign nations, who only turned on Israel and destroyed it. The chapter goes on to describe Israel's idolatry and stupidity, and how it eagerly pursued its enemies' favors. God says in verse 28, "let the "gods"



the people chose come to their aid”, yet all the punishment in the world had failed to make Israel come to its senses. It had gotten to the point in verse 33 where God said that prostitutes could learn a thing or two from Israel!

## **Jer. 3**

God says that a man can't take back a divorced wife who had married someone else. Some conclude from this that God could not have divorced Israel, even though it's clearly stated in Isaiah that he did. Yet even here, since Israel had been a prostitute and was thus defiled beyond repair, God eventually takes them back. Some translations have the end of verse 1 as a plea for them to return, but it's more accurately rendered as in the NET Bible, “What makes you think you can come back to me?”

But rather than God violating his own laws, he shows a degree of mercy not seen in Israel, and remember that those laws are by God, not for God. The purpose of the law was to keep men from treating women as worthless toys, which could never be the case with God. And we see in Hosea 2:16 and 3:3 that God ordered the prophet to take back his unfaithful wife, as a picture of God's great mercy in spite of Israel's great shame. So the principle behind the law stands, and God himself does not violate that principle by taking back sinners who repent.

Then after more rebukes for Israel's lust for false gods, God explains that this is why their land had been experiencing famine, though Israel still didn't learn the lesson, to the point of being so deluded as to think God would just overlook their continual habit of sinning.

Verse 6 begins another message, where God tells Jeremiah that though Judah saw what had happened to the northern kingdom of Israel it didn't repent, which is even worse since it had seen that and

still didn't care. So God orders Jeremiah to shout to his people in the north to come back, but only after admitting and repenting of their idolatry. Blessings would come to those who did so, but by the description it's about the Millennium, when the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah are reunited and the nations bring them tribute. There is no way to turn "from a land in the north to the land God gave as a permanent possession" into an allusion to Christian salvation, since "the north" has no meaning as a spiritual condition.

Verse 19 is still God speaking, and he expresses his deep disappointment in Israel for throwing away the bliss they could have had in exchange for many false gods, to whom the people cry and moan for help.

## **Jer. 4-5**

Now God gives them the ultimatum that they have to completely rid themselves of those disgusting idols before he will take them back. Then another message comes, warning the people of Judah and Jerusalem to make their choice quickly, because disaster is about to strike from enemies to their north. Then as Jeremiah hears this he cries out to God, but the message of doom continues, interrupted several times by Jeremiah's expressions of despair.

In ch. 5 God asks if even a single honest person can be found, and if so, God would spare the city— but there isn't even one. So the hope was that only the poor and ignorant were this way, because they didn't know what God wanted of them, yet even those who knew God's commands very well ignored them.

Skiping past more indictments against Israel and Judah, in verse 15 God pronounces judgment via an ancient nation from far away, which commentators believe was Babylon. Even so, God will spare a remnant, because he promised Abraham he'd be the father of many, and when God makes promises he keeps them. In the mean time,

the people will be deported to the land of the foreign gods they loved so much. But the whole case against them is summed up in verse 31: The prophets lie, the priests replace God's authority with their own, and the people love it that way. Are we any different? Many Christians choose "pastors" to rule over them and browbeat them for any disobedience; many citizens choose despotic leaders and keep re-electing them to abuse them more. We love the familiar and traditional more than the sensible and responsible, because we don't care who rules over us as long as the hamster wheel keeps turning.

## **Jer. 6-7**

Ch. 6 begins another round of dire warnings, and then after another prophetic message, Jeremiah asks God what good it does to sound warnings at all. But he's tired of holding in the message, so he's commanded to vent it anyway, though it will do no good. The passage goes on to show how, at every turn, the people rejected every blessing they could have had, without shame or remorse in spite of everything that had happened and was about to happen.

In ch. 7 God has Jeremiah give more warnings in the very gates of the temple, which the people considered proof of their invincibility. Then we see a passage Jesus quoted when he drove the merchants out of the temple, which shows at the very least that he had no problem with the God of the Old Testament, as the critics love to claim. They were doing the same thing in his day that they were doing in Jeremiah's day: only giving lip service to God while committing every imaginable sin.

In verse 16 we see a very surprising thing: God tells Jeremiah to stop praying for them! 1 John 5:16 says something very similar: Do not pray for "the sin that leads to death", which isn't identified, but the point is that we shouldn't try to find out! Even God loses patience, and when he does, there is no stopping the consequences.

But who is “the queen of heaven” in verse 18? It’s at least a false goddess according to the context, but it’s not mentioned anywhere else in the Bible. Constable’s Notes’ opinion is that it referred to the Babylonian goddess Astarte or Ishtar, whom the people of Judah worshiped during the reign of Manasseh.

Now let’s skip down to verse 31, to a place called the Valley of Ben Hinnom. This was where the people were actually offering their own children as burnt sacrifices to Molech, which God certainly never told them to do. But before we look at some details, we should ask ourselves if our apathy toward abortion is any better, since collectively we barely offer a weak protest.

This is the place Jesus called Gehenna, which he used as an illustration of eternal torment. In this context, the place where the people were murdering their children would become a mass grave for the murderers. The fact that they would never be properly buried was considered a terrible curse, which will happen again to the Two Witnesses of Rev. 11:9 and to the Gentiles in Rev. 19:17,21.

## **Jer. 8-10**

Now as if that hadn’t been enough humiliation, God says that later on the invaders will dig up the bones of the dead to be scattered and left out in the elements, so they can worship the sun, moon, and stars one more time. Even so, God says that the few survivors will wish they had been among the dead. It doesn’t get much worse than all that. Then after more expressions of exasperation, God says that even animals have more sense than his people. The teachers of the law had twisted its meaning, as many have done to the Bible over the centuries.

In ch. 9 we see where Jeremiah got his nickname “the weeping prophet”, and then it’s back to God lamenting that he has to punish

his people, and the warnings continue through the end of the chapter and into ch. 10.

But notice in 10:3 the details of making an idol: Cut down a tree, shape it, decorate it with silver and gold, set it on a stand, and then worship it. What does that sound like to you? If you said “Well, a Christmas tree, but we don’t worship it”, remember that gifts are also placed under it, and the materialistic frenzy of buying the gifts seems to be the most religious thing we westerners do these days. We mean well (hopefully), but sometimes we should stop and think about what we’re symbolizing or honoring. The passage goes on to contrast these worthless idols with the one true God.

Verse 16 states that God says his name is “Lord of Heaven’s Armies”. This presents a problem for what is called the “sacred name” movement, which insists that we call God by the Hebrew name Yaweh (or Yahua, or similar). Shouldn’t they now say the Hebrew for “Lord of Heaven’s Armies”, and then use something else out of respect, the way the Hebrews have always done? Again, what makes a name sacred is who is meant.

## **Jer. 11-13**

Then it’s back to a description of impending doom, and another message to remind the people of Israel of the covenant they agreed to so long ago, which they repeatedly violated. Again Jeremiah is told not to pray for them, and again God demands to know why the people think they have any right to be in his temple.

But then Jeremiah is shown that the people are plotting to kill him for all these messages of doom that God made him say to them. In their eyes he was a traitor, a “doom and gloomer”, an ant at their picnic. So now that it’s personal, Jeremiah turns from weeping to “let ’em have it!” I think “shooting the messenger” is the most ancient of

sports, which is why it's no fun to be the messenger. But there will be a day of reckoning for the shooters, per vs. 23.

In ch. 12 Jeremiah asks the question we all ask, "Why do the wicked prosper?" But though he wishes death upon those who want him dead, he doesn't take matters into his own hands but rather waits for God's vengeance. Though his own family had turned against him, God cautions him in not to trust those who seem nice on the surface, because things are about to go from bad to worse. Yet again, God also promises that the invading forces will be punished as well for their own sins, once God has used them to punish his people for their sins. Notice also that God will allow a surviving remnant even for them, but only of those who turn to him. And those who do will be considered part of his people.

In ch. 13 God has Jeremiah live out an object lesson, which was a common practice for the Old Testament prophets. But in verse 23 we see what seems to be an overtly racist statement: "Can the Ethiopian change the color of his skin?" The word for Ethiopian or Cushite was a derogatory term meaning "burnt face", so it's clearly about people with black skin. But what God is really saying is that this is what people say, and God would ask them what they think these Ethiopians are supposed to do to avoid being mocked for this. We know this is the meaning because of the next rhetorical question about how leopards can't change their spots. God made both the way they are, so who is anyone to mock on that basis? And the point in this context is that sinning had become so deeply embedded in the nature of his chosen people, they could no longer repent. The New Testament equivalent of this concept is seen in 1 Tim. 4:2 regarding those whose conscience has been seared as with a hot iron.

## **Jer. 14-16**

The text continues the details of what will happen to such people, including famine. Then the focus turns to the people's love of false prophets, which is often true of Christians today, who have no discernment because they can't be bothered to study the Bible or listen to those who have.

In verse 17 we see that it isn't just Jeremiah who's weeping, but also God himself, because the people he loves only hate him in return and must be sent away. Jeremiah begs God to remember his covenant and spare Jerusalem, but it was Israel and Judah who broke it. This is a common attitude against Christians today; people say we're intolerant and judgmental, but it's the critics who have those faults. Of all the faith communities in the world, ours is the one most others unite against, because they cannot tolerate salvation by faith in Jesus alone, or anyone defending the Bible instead of bashing it.

In ch. 15 God says that even if Moses and Samuel stood before him to plead for mercy for Israel, God would not grant it nor feel any pity for them because their sin was so bad. Whether that brought any comfort to Jeremiah we don't know. But as the passage continues, we see that it's God who has the right to ask "why" and to be given pity. Then God rebukes Jeremiah, not for whining about how he has had to suffer for the messages he brings, but for actually implying that God had been remiss in allowing it to happen. We have to be careful as well not to cross that line. And we haven't been made to suffer to the point Jeremiah was.

Ch. 16 where God tells him not to marry and have children in Israel. But the reason of course is that the land was about to be devastated, which Jeremiah knew, as opposed to our situations where we don't have any warning about the future for our personal lives. He wasn't even allowed to mourn the dead or sympathize with the grieving. And then we see that in spite of all they'd done, the people have the audacity to ask God what they've done to deserve the punishment! Yet God still gives the hope of return from exile,

distant though it was at that time, and then it's back to warnings of doom through ch. 17.

## **Jer. 17-20**

Critics love to taunt, "See, your God is so weak and narcissistic that he lashes out at people just for not loving and obeying him!" But who are they to talk, since they too lash out and oppress those who don't accept or agree with them? As Jesus said, the wicked only love those who love them, so what right do they have to condemn God for what they themselves do? We should also tell the critics that Israel had agreed to obey and serve God but broke their promises—not to mention that they were burning their own children in sacrifice to other gods. Even the most jaded anti-Christian should demand the death of those who do such things.

Verse 19 focuses on an example of that broken covenant, the people's abandonment of the Sabbath Day. Again, this was God's covenant with Israel, and we're not Israel.

In ch. 18 comes another real-life object lesson for Jeremiah to carry out: He was to observe a potter, who on occasion would give up on a piece he was making and form it into something else. The lesson was that Israel should have known its place as the clay and not the potter, such that they had no right to complain if he changed his treatment of them for their faults and unworthiness to be blessed. In fact, they would become an object of horror and disgust for their grievous sins.

Then after more pleas from Jeremiah for God to protect him, in ch. 19 it's another object lesson involving a jar of clay. But critics love to twist verse 9 into the Bible condoning cannibalism, though of course it does no such thing. The people will be so starved and desperate as to eat their own children and each other. This is a curse from God, not an endorsement of evil. Then in verse 10 Jeremiah is to



break the jar, to illustrate what's about to come upon all these proud sinners, who among their other sins have been worshiping the stars. As with other such passages, remember this when the critics say Christians are "sun" worshipers just because "sun" sounds like "son" in English.

In ch. 20 we see that Jeremiah was flogged and locked up in stocks for speaking truth that nobody wanted to hear. The stocks were designed to keep a prisoner in an uncomfortable position in view of the public, so it added insult to injury, which is hard to take when you've done nothing to deserve it. So we can sympathize with Jeremiah when he reminds God that he had to push him to accept being a prophet. It was the mockery and ridicule that hurt him most, but he could no more hold back from giving God's messages than he could hold back fire. If only Christians had that same problem holding back the Gospel.

We can also sympathize with what he said in verse 10 about his so-called friends who watched him closely to find an excuse to denounce and betray him. Yet like Jeremiah, we should cling all the more to God during such times, so that our suffering won't be in vain and the wicked will get what they've earned. Yet again, we can sympathize when Jeremiah wavers between singing God's praises and wishing he'd never been born.

## **Jer. 21-29**

Ch. 21 begins with a message from God after King Zedekiah asked Jeremiah to ask God for help when Jerusalem was under siege by Babylonian forces. But since God ordered Babylon to do this, he himself would be fighting against Jerusalem rather than helping it. But in verse 8 God offers mercy to anyone who surrenders to Babylon. Such people would be considered traitors by the people of Jerusalem, but not by God. Sometimes our choices aren't any easier, but we need to be sure of God's will as much as possible.

Then in verse 11 God turns to the royal court and admonishes them to stop being corrupt, but they keep refusing.

In ch. 22 God gives one more warning, and in verse 10 he says not to weep for the dead king but the surviving king, who will never see his homeland again. More dire predictions follow, including the exile of Jeconiah in verse 24.

In ch. 23 the rest of the leadership is indicted and judged, and in verse 5 we see another Messianic prophecy for the future Millennium. Verse 9 turns to false prophets and corrupt priests and the grief they've caused to God. This goes on for quite a while, and in verse 35 God rebukes people who say his messages are burdensome.

In ch. 24 Jeremiah is given a vision to show that it's the exiles who are the good people, and the 'patriots' who are bad, because they wouldn't heed the warnings. In ch. 25 Jeremiah is given another prophecy against Judah, because of their repeated rebellion, and the duration is given as 70 years. This is what Daniel would later read and lament about, as you can see in Dan. 9:1-2. Yet another vision comes in 25:15 about the nations being made to drink from the wine of Gods wrath, which is referenced in Rev. 14:10. Then we see a long description of what this means through the end of the chapter.

Ch. 26 begins another message, but they chose again to shoot the messenger. A court is hastily convened, and at least they allowed Jeremiah to make his defense. As a result, we seen in verse 16 that they relented from killing him. Ch. 27 revisits the issue of surrendering to Babylon via another object lesson, and it applies not only to individuals but also to nations. The people are also warned to ignore the false prophets who keep telling them everything will be all right. But in ch. 28 one such false prophet is named and confronted. Jeremiah tells him that the temple will indeed be restored, but not

until after the 70-year exile is completed. And in 28:17 the false prophet died.

In ch. 29 Jeremiah sends out a letter to the exiles in Babylon, and he tells them to settle down because they're going to be there a long time. They're also to do what they can to ensure and promote the prosperity of the city they live in, because God has plans to bless them in the future. Wherever we live, we should pray for peace. This never means wishing an evil government well, but only for them to let us live, as the scriptures also say in 1 Tim. 2:1-4.

Verse 8 repeats the warning against false prophets and the required exile, and verse 11 is the popular scripture about God's plans to prosper his people. But remember the context; this is a specific prophecy to a specific people at a specific time. Certainly we can all take comfort in such passages, but they aren't meant to be guarantees of deliverance, since we don't have direct prophecies for us as individuals.

The rest of ch. 29 are more words to the exiles, including using the horrible deaths of the false prophets as proof and a reminder that God means what he says. Then we're given the text of an exchange of letters.

## **Jer. 30-52**

In ch. 30 God tells Jeremiah to write this all down for the future. Then God addresses both Israel and Judah, and verse 7 is where we first see the phrase about "the time of Jacob's Trouble", which is to be followed by the Millennial Kingdom. See the link in the description for more detail as to how Jacob's Trouble, the Great Tribulation, and the Day of the Lord all overlap. God has to punish his people for their sins, but in the end a remnant will repent and be blessed.

The blessing portion continues into ch. 31, and in verse 10 we see that this must be literal, not the least of which reason is that the people who were scattered will be gathered, and that has never been a description of the church. But suddenly, in verse 15 all the happy talk reverses in a familiar Messianic passage referenced in Mat. 2:17-18 when Herod killed all the baby boys in Judah. Certainly it was to be fulfilled in the near future to this context in Jeremiah, but prophecy often goes through many cycles over time. But in verse 16 God comforts “Rachel” after they repent, because they will not be exiled or lost forever. And as we read the rest of the passage, we can’t miss the fact that God has, and will, never replace the nation of Israel.

But what is the meaning of the end of verse 22? Commentaries offer various guesses, but it seems to me that the word there for “encompass” or “protect” should be understood as a figure of speech meaning “to court or woo”, since in this context it’s Israel finally reaching out to God, instead of God reaching out to Israel. This “turnabout” would be unprecedented.

Verse 23 continues describing the Millennial Kingdom, and verse 29 matches Ezekiel 18 regarding the fact that we don’t inherit guilt. But verse 31 is where we see mention of a new covenant— with Israel and Judah during the Millennium, not with the gentiles or the whole world, and in that time people won’t even suffer the consequences of other people’s sins. Constable’s Notes spends a lot of time arguing for the church being in this new covenant, but the text here is very specific.

Ch. 32 covers a time when Jeremiah was in custody for all the negative prophecies. Then he’s given assurance that God is still speaking to him, and then he’s told to buy a parcel of land, the reason being given in verse 15: to serve as a witness that in the future, people will again settle in the land. Then Jeremiah prays to God about all this, and in verse 26 God answers by reassuring him that everything will happen just as prophesied.

In ch. 33 the prophecies are repeated, and in verse 14 we see another Messianic prophecy about the Millennium. But notice the next message starting in verse 19: Only if day and night stopped revolving would God ever break the covenant he made with David and the Levites. Remember that this covenant was specifically for them and concerned the land and people, and that after the Millennium there will be no more night. So this is a specific and limited covenant, not an eternal one with everyone.

In ch. 34 it's back to the impending exile to Babylon, but a new sin is being committed: The people had promised to release their slaves but enslaved them again later. So God sarcastically offers the slavers their own freedom: to choose the manner of their death.

In ch. 35 a contrast is made between unfaithful Judah and a tribe called the Rechabites, whose devotion to their ancestor Jonadab never waivered for 200 years. God promises to reward their faithfulness. In ch. 36 Jeremiah is told to write down everything he'd been given to prophesy, to be read to all the people in the temple. But after a private reading to the officials, they tell him and the reader to hide, and they themselves hide the scroll before telling the king what it said. But the king had them bring the scroll anyway and burned it as it was read.

In ch. 37 Jeremiah is falsely accused of desertion, then flogged and confined. After a long time the king asks him for a word from God, but then Jeremiah demands to know why he had been arrested, and the king sees to it that he is treated well as long as possible. In ch. 38 he's falsely accused of treason and thrown into a cistern, where he sinks into the mud at the bottom. But an Ethiopian, not any of his own people, has him rescued. (Did we mention he's called the Weeping Prophet?) But the king summons him again, and he repeats the dire prophecies.

In ch. 39 the siege finally begins. But Zedekiah tries to escape rather than surrender as Jeremiah told him, so he and his family come to a

violent end. Jeremiah himself is treated kindly by the Babylonians, and then the kind Ethiopian is told he'll escape and not be harmed.

In ch. 40 we see that Jeremiah was released and permitted to return to Judah, and a small province is set up for the poor survivors. Then in ch. 41 we see a murder plot, an ambush, and a rescue. In ch. 42 the survivors ask Jeremiah to pray for them, and God grants them safety if they listen to him and stay where they are. But in ch. 43 they do exactly what they said they wouldn't: go to Egypt. In spite of all the times Jeremiah has been proven right, they still call him a liar. And the warnings God gave if they did are repeated.

The warnings continue into ch. 44, where in verse 17 we see another reference to the Queen of Heaven. Ch. 45 is a brief message to Jeremiah's friend Baruch, and then ch. 46 begins a warning to Egypt concerning Babylon. But verse 27 turns back to distant hope for the remnant of Israel, and then it's back to judgment in ch. 47, this time against the Philistines.

In ch. 48 it's Moab's turn, and it goes on for quite a while. Ch. 49 turns to Ammon, then Edom, then Damascus, Kedar, Hazor, and Elam. Then in ch. 50 it's back to Babylon, and we see the same idea as expressed in Rev. 18:4, for the people of Judah to get out of Babylon so they don't suffer its judgments. The judgment is specifically aimed at Babylon's gods, which God calls "piles of excrement" many times in Ezekiel. Though this prophecy wouldn't be completely fulfilled at that time, it will be in the future.

This long oracle continues into ch. 51, where we see phrases used in Rev. 16:19 and 18:6: that Babylon will be paid back for all her sins, and that she would drink from the cup of God's wrath. The final chapter, 52, makes no mention of Jeremiah but simply records some final details about events during the reign of Zedekiah.

# Lamentations

## Introduction

This book's author is unknown, but there's good reason to presume it was Jeremiah. It was read on the annual fast for Jerusalem's destruction from as far back as anyone could remember, in the hope that future generations of Hebrews would not repeat the wickedness of their ancestors. The five chapters are five separate laments or dirges.

## Lam. 1-2

Using the analogy of a betrayed and abandoned woman, Jerusalem is described as a once-prominent and delicate lady whose friends and lovers have all forsaken her. The nation of Judah had chased after any and every nation that offered hope of escape from the wrath of God, only to earn more of it for their efforts. Not only have those nations not helped, they actively sought to harm.

So now the whole nation is in exile, away from the peace of God, while the Promised Land lies in ruin and desolation. On top of that, their enemies mock and gloat over their demise, but the nation as a whole had asked for it. Their repeated rebellion against God earned them the wages they were finally being paid.

The text goes on to describe their shame in the crudest terms, and the people knew that the reason they had to watch helplessly as their precious temple was robbed was because they had pushed God too far. After describing all this in the third person, the text then speaks from the nation's perspective. But they really had no right to complain, especially since on many occasions God relented from

punishing them because they said they were sorry, only to go right back to their wickedness. You can read through the rest, and the NET Bible has helpful headings that show who is speaking at a given point.

## **Lam. 3-5**

Even after describing a life of darkness and despair, “the prophet” still clings to hope in God and advises patience for those suffering for no reason. It’s easy to have faith when things go well, but faith is only really tested when it seems God is far away. As Christians, our faith must be rooted in an unchangeable fact: that Jesus rose from the dead. If it’s based on anything else, such as experiences or feelings, it will fail when we need it most.

We must also be very careful not to ascribe to Satan the acts of God, which as Jesus said in Mat. 12:31-32 is an unforgiveable sin. The people of Judah had called Jeremiah a traitor for speaking of God’s judgment of their sins, but Christians today often do the same thing. Any diversion from their opinions is deemed satanic, which is slander against fellow believers and the Holy Spirit who indwells them. The descriptions of judgment in this book and Jeremiah should serve as warnings to us today, not to do as they did.



# Ezekiel

## Introduction

Ezekiel was both a prophet and a priest, and though his book is part of the Major Prophets, no other part of scripture refers to him by name. He is most known for his vision of God, but there is a lot of other important material as well, including end-times events and the Millennial Kingdom. Unlike other prophetic books, this one seems to be largely chronological and includes frequent date markers, a chart of which appears in Constable's Notes under *Structure*. God refers to Ezekiel as "son of man" (human), and Ezekiel refers to God as "Adonai YHWH" (Lord of Lords).

## Ezekiel 1-2

The book begins with a vision of God's glory, which Ezekiel describes as best he can. As a strange, flashing storm approaches, he sees what appear to be four living beings whose characteristics you can see in verse 5 and forward. The four beings are very much like what John describes in Rev. 4:6-8, and they're described as the class of angels known as cherubim (see 10:15,20).



The text describes something in verse 13 we might interpret today as a kind of plasma energy source, which seemed to give the cherubim the ability to move at very high speed. But in addition to the cherubim there was a gleaming wheel beside each one, though it isn't clear whether the wheels were concentric like a target, or at right angles like a gyroscope. They all had spokes, and the rims were covered with eyes, but it isn't clear whether it's the beings or the wheels that didn't turn. Verse 20 says that the wind/spirit was in the wheels, but we can only guess what that means.

Then in verse 22 the focus turns to the sparkling platform over the cherubim's heads. Whenever they moved, they stretched out their wings, which made a loud sound like the noise of battle or rushing water, and as the Hebrew text adds, like the voice of God. When they stood still, they lowered their wings and a voice was heard from over the platform. On the platform was a throne that appeared to be made of sapphire, and the one sitting on it was a human-like form with an amber glow from the waist up, and something like fire from the waist down. All around was a bright light resembling a rainbow, and the whole scene caused Ezekiel to drop face-down on the ground. This again is similar to John's description of the throne in heaven in Rev. 4:2-6.

As noted in the introduction, the phrase “son of man”, which appears almost a hundred times in this book, simply means “of the human class of beings”, especially in contrast to supernatural beings. Jesus used this same term for himself many times in the Gospels. The only times Jesus referred to himself as “son of God”, meaning “of the God class of beings” (which only has one member!), was in John 3:18, 5:25, and 10:36, and indirectly in Luke 22:70. Both terms are true of Jesus.

So in ch. 2 Ezekiel is given his commission to prophesy to the nation of Israel, as well as to others who also have rebelled against God. His concern is not to care about the reaction but to just obey God’s commission. Now in verses 9-10 he’s given a scroll to eat, just as John would be given in Rev. 10:9-10. But while we aren’t told the content of John’s scroll, he was told immediately afterwards to prophesy to many nations. So there is a clear connection to this passage, and here we’re told that the scroll is filled with only bad news and laments.

## **Ezekiel 3-4**

We see here that this particular message is for exiled Israel, his own people. They’re repeatedly called stubborn and hard-hearted, which should remind us that the chosen people weren’t chosen because of their fine qualities, as we saw also in Deut. 7:7-8. So God makes Ezekiel as firm and unmoving as Israel is.

Then in 3:12 we see another supernatural act, where the cherubim carry Ezekiel to what sounds like Tel Aviv but has no connection to the modern city in Israel. There he sits in silence for a week, much the way Job’s friends had, and for the same reason: because of the spiritual and physical condition of the people. Then God reminds him to give his messages fearlessly, as a faithful watchman. Such a person must sound warnings, and there are dire consequences if they don’t. This same mandate is put upon anyone in the Christian

community who has been given the gift of watching over it; they are not to only comfort people but also to warn them against spiritual danger. There is certainly going to be an accounting for failure to do so, as stated in Heb. 13:17.

In verse 22 God tells Ezekiel to move to another location, where he sees God's glory. Then God uses him as an object lesson to the exiles: He is to lock himself in his house, where he will be unable to speak until God gives him a specific message.

In ch. 4 he's to build a model of a seige as a sign for Israel. Then he has to lie on his left side for the number of days corresponding to the years Israel must bear its sin: 390. The life of a prophet of God is no picnic! After this, he has to lie on his right side for the days corresponding to the years assigned to Judah: 40. During this demonstration, he is to eat and drink specific things at specific times, but he has to cook the food over human excrement, to show that the people are defiled by eating the food of foreign nations while they're in exile. But the human excrement is too much for Ezekiel to bear, so God allows him to use cow dung instead.

## **Ezekiel 5-6**

Then he has to shave himself with a sword, burn a third of the hair, slash another third with the sword as he walks around the city, and let the rest be scattered by the wind. All of this weirdness was to drive home the point to the people of Jerusalem that they had become more evil than the nations around them. So God would judge them, to the point where people would be so starved that they'd eat each other, and God would show them no pity. They would serve as an example to other nations of what happens to a wicked society.

In ch. 6 Ezekiel is to give a prophecy against the mountains of Israel, where the people had built shrines and altars to their false gods. The few survivors would serve as witnesses for coming generations

against their nation, in the hope that they'd learn the lesson and turn back to the one true God.

Notice in ch. 7 the phrase "the four corners of the land" (or "earth"). No one has ever seen corners on the far reaches of earth, and it seems to always refer to the surface where people live rather than the earth's foundations or pillars. Most take it to mean the four cardinal directions, in a figure of speech meaning the whole inhabited world. Yet this context specifically refers to the land or earth of Israel, so we can take it to mean that not an inch of it would be spared, because the people were getting what they deserved.

After descriptions of the horror to come, verse 19 says that their most prized valuables would be thrown in the street because there would be no food or water to buy. They had amassed wealth while divesting themselves of decency and faithfulness, and now that wealth would become useless. The temple itself would be desecrated as well. We see some of the fulfillment of this in Dan. 5:3-4, but also when Antiochus Epiphanes defiled it too, which you can read more about [here](#).

## **Ezekiel 7-10**

Now we see another vision Ezekiel was given, by the figure of God similar to the first one. He is transported to Jerusalem, and the layout of the temple is shown in Constable's Notes. "The statue that provokes jealousy" was an idol, and this is one of the reasons we know that the future Antichrist will desecrate the Tribulation temple in the same way. But God says in verse 6, "you ain't seen nothing yet!"

Next he's told to go through a hidden doorway to a place where the elders of Israel were committing vile acts of worship. People today think they can secretly practice evil, but nothing is hidden from God, and he'll wait until they feel overconfident to judge them. Still, Ezekiel hasn't seen how bad it's been. So he's taken to another location to

see what the women were doing as well: weeping for the false god Tammuz, who was both the brother and husband of Ishtar. Yet one more abomination remained to be seen, that being men worshiping the sun. They were all without excuse and deserved what was coming upon them.

In ch. 9 God turns Ezekiel's attention to the forces that would bring Jerusalem's ruin. But he sees what appear to be angels of God, and one of them is told to put marks on the foreheads of everyone who grieves over all the evil going on around them. This is similar to the sealing of the 144,000 Jews in Rev. 7:3, 9:4, and 14:1. Then the other angels are told to mercilessly destroy anyone not marked, beginning at the temple. Even so, Ezekiel cries out to God for mercy, but it's too late, and the people's sin is too great.

Now in ch. 10 it's back to the cherubim and the platform and the burning coals, which the one who had marked people was told to scatter over the city. Again, this is very similar to Rev. 8:5, where an angel takes fire from the altar in the heavenly temple and throws it onto the earth. After describing the cherubim wheels again, we see in verse 18 that the glory of God moves from the temple to the cherubim.

## **Ezekiel 11-14**

Now Ezekiel is transported back to the temple, where the leading men were arrogantly claiming it was time to start families since so many had died, as if the judgment was over and life would go on as before. But they were badly mistaken, so Ezekiel pleads again for mercy. But God assures him that though most would be wiped out, a remnant would eventually return.

Verse 19 is where we see a familiar passage: At that time, God would give the remnant a new spirit and a new heart, and they would finally follow him. We often misapply this to the church, but the context is

clearly focused on the exiles of Israel who will, in the Millennium, finally be the nation they were meant to be.

Another message comes to Ezekiel in ch. 12, and this time he is to act out going into exile. Then another message comes, where he's told to explain the meaning to the people of Israel. Yet another message comes in verse 17 to illustrate the anxiety people will have even while eating meager rations. But they've taken God's delay between prophecy and fulfillment as no fulfillment at all— just as many Christians do today, denying that anything remains but our individual arrivals in heaven at the end of our natural lives. It isn't the world but the church who has fallen asleep and lost faith in the literal fulfillment of Bible prophecy.

Speaking of which, now the message turns to false prophets. Christians today think nothing of claiming God told them something about the future, when in most cases it turns out to be their own vivid imagination. But God takes this very seriously, as being like putting whitewash on an unstable wall, and there will be consequences.

In ch. 14 the focus is on idolatry, and God will even give such people false prophecies himself, to then make fools of them. This will happen on a larger scale in the Tribulation, when according to 2 Thes. 2:11 God will delude everyone in the world who has hated the Good News that would save them. In this passage, even giants of faith such as Noah, Daniel, and Job would only escape with their lives due to the sins of the nation. We should take the hint that turning a blind eye to our people's rebellion against God can bring his judgment on us, no matter how righteously we may live otherwise.

It won't just be one judgment or another either, but all at once, and even with that the people still don't repent. Over and over scripture tells us not to pity those who bring such things upon themselves.

## **Ezekiel 15-17**

Like the wood of vines that can only be used as fuel for a fire, the people of Jerusalem have become good for nothing but destruction. One reason is seen in ch. 16, that being despicable acts God describes in very graphic terms. This analogy of the whole history of Israel is very lengthy and crude, but it only gives a hint of how bad Israel had been. God considered Israel lower than a prostitute, because they wouldn't even accept payment for their services, but paid for them instead. So the well-deserved punishment would surely come, and it's much like what will happen to Babylon in the Tribulation, according to Rev. 17-18.

In verse 44 we see the terms "mother and daughter", which the context tells us is a reference to nations such as Sodom and Samaria. Israel had exceeded their evil in spite of seeing their judgment, to the point that Israel made them look righteous, so they were even more deserving of their punishment. But notice in verse 60 that in spite of everything, God remembers and honors the covenant he made with them. This is the great blindness many have against Israel, deserved or not; God will never abandon them as a people, because of his promises which cannot be revoked. It's about God, not them or us, and their being chosen is for that reason alone. Abraham was promised progeny, and God will never go back on that promise, which was to physical descendants in a physical land.

In ch. 17 God speaks to them in a riddle, whose meaning is given in verse 11: It's a reminder of the king of Babylon's conquest, which wouldn't have been so bad if Israel's king had not tried to weasel out of it by soliciting the favors of Egypt. But in a reversal of this, we see in verse 22 that God will be the "eagle" who transplants Israel in the Millennial Kingdom ruled by the Messiah. But for the time being, there was also a matter of individual sin to address.

## **Ezekiel 18-22**



Ch. 18 is essentially a refutation of the concept of “original sin”, meaning we all inherit a “sin nature” from Adam and Eve. If, as God says plainly here, children don’t even bear the guilt of their immediate parents, then how can we all bear the guilt of the very first parents? Consequences, yes; but guilt, no. We are each responsible for our own sin, and we can’t hide behind an alleged “nature” which really amounts to taking that responsibility away.

We could also apply this to the modern, hypocritical, self-hating idea that only white people should feel shame over what their ancestors did. For Israel under judgment, it meant that they could not escape responsibility under the pretext that they were only suffering because of their ancestors and not their own wickedness. Yet in verse 25 the people have the nerve to charge God with injustice! Many critics of our faith have done the same, in extreme arrogance. Even so, as we see in verse 32, God takes no pleasure in the death of anyone—another strong rebuke of the Calvinistic teaching that God hates most of the people who ever lived, which they twist from Psalm 7:11 and Rom. 9:13.

Ch. 19 is a lament over Israel for all that Israel and Judah had done, and ch. 20 begins yet another round of wicked people playing innocent, to whom God must yet again give their history as a people. As anyone familiar with the Old Testament can surely see, no nation would invent such an unflattering history for themselves, which proves the Bible is the Word of God and not of mere human imagination.

In ch. 21 the focus returns to the city of Jerusalem and its impending demise at the hands of Babylon, as well as against the Ammonites. It continues into ch. 22, and in verse 30 we see the source of a common phrase about “standing in the gap”, meaning to intervene on other’s behalf. This is incumbent upon every Christian, not just some, to support each other. But many Christians today turn a blind eye to the suffering and oppression of their brothers and sisters in Christ.

## Ezekiel 23-28

Ch. 23 goes back to the crude and very graphic analogy of prostitute sisters representing Samaria and Jerusalem; neither has any sense of shame. Ch. 24 begins another analogy, this time of a pot of meat and bones boiling in water, representing the pervasive violence among the people. But then a harsh illustration falls upon Ezekiel in verse 15, when God tells him his wife will die but he's not allowed to show any grief outwardly. This was to represent the defiling and destruction of the temple, and how the people will react.

In ch. 25 it's back to the Ammonites, who gloat over all this. The nations will do the same during the Tribulation, when Israel and Jerusalem are ransacked, but they will pay for their gloating. Christians today should take heed that they don't make the same mistake, hating the land of Israel and its people. Then prophecies are given against Moab, Edom, and Philistia.

Now in ch. 26 it's Tyre's turn, and this continues into ch. 28. Like Babylon, it too was a great city that would come to utter ruin, and as we recall from earlier lessons, Tarshish would also be affected, since both were seafaring commercial centers. Again, as referenced in the destruction of Babylon in Revelation, this is why the sea captains mourn its demise.

Ch. 28 tells us that the prince of Tyre considered himself godlike, as many world leaders have done. But God doesn't let such arrogance stand forever. Verse 12 begins a lament for the king, but by description it's clear that he's also an analogy for Satan, since some of the listed attributes could only apply to a supernatural being. Some interpret it as applicable to Adam before he sinned, but the description doesn't really match the Genesis account very well, especially since verse 15 speaks of abundant trade. So though it's clearly about this proud king of Tyre, it also applies to Satan just as well. The commentaries are divided on this issue, because it just isn't

clear enough to push the interpretation either way with certainty. Then the focus shifts to Sidon, which was near Tyre.

## **Ezekiel 29-34**

Now the topic is Egypt, and remember the phrase “hooks in the jaws” in verse 4, because we’ll see it again in ch. 38. It means God will forcefully drag a wicked nation to places it doesn’t really want to go. Throughout the chapter, God describes how he maneuvers the nations as chess pieces to accomplish his will. Again, this is not God picking who should go to heaven, but the affairs of nations.

Chapters 30-32 continue about Egypt, and we see a repetition of ch. 18 in the section starting in 33:12. Finally, in 33:21, the fall of Jerusalem comes to pass, and in verse 31 God has Ezekiel remind the survivors that they have no intention of heeding God’s messages, so why do they bother asking for them?

Then it’s back to false shepherds in ch. 34, which should serve as a cautionary tale to anyone claiming to lead the Christian community today. As you read the passage, notice in verse 17 a reference to the “sheep and goat” judgment we’re familiar with in Mat. 25:31-46. Here it refers to the fact that the people can’t evade personal responsibility just because the shepherds are wicked. And of course, verse 23 is a Messianic prophecy for the time of the future Millennium.

## **Ezekiel 35-36**

This prophecy against Mt. Seir, representing Edom, is about payback for their gleeful abuse of the people of Israel. It’s never wise to gloat over our enemy’s demise, even if it’s deserved. Then in ch. 36 Then comes one addressed to another mountain or set of them, that being Israel. Though it takes till verse 8 to get to the point, the promise of eventual restoration is given again. But the real point isn’t until verse

22, where God reminds them that this restoration isn't because of them or their merits, but only because God will preserve his reputation in spite of them. In fact, he goes on to say that they themselves had done everything to ruin it. What do we do today concerning God's reputation?

Mercy, not merit, is often the real reason for our blessings. This is why it's dangerous to draw a direct cause-and-effect relationship between how life is going and how we behave. Blessings in this life are never guaranteed; it's the age of faith, not sight. So when people say either "I'm suffering because I don't go to church", or "I'm being blessed because I tithe", they're saying it depends on our works rather than our standing in Christ. We're to learn to trust God even when obedience makes life harder, and also to never think that God turns a blind eye to our sin. Focus on the relationship.

Verse 34 leads many to believe that since God is the one to bring Israel back, then the present nation of Israel is illegitimate. But who is any other nation to point fingers? And as we'll learn while studying prophecy in books such as Daniel, Israel must be in the land in unbelief so their purification as a nation can be completed. Is this not also God's doing, even if through the plans of the wicked, as he has done many times in Israel's history?

Another point here is that the heart of flesh replacing the heart of stone is directed at the same nation who has received all the other prophetic messages: the people and land of Israel. Certainly we Christians have received a new heart, but that isn't the topic here. We know this especially from verse 28, which states it has to do with the land God gave to their ancestors; the Body of Christ has never had a land. And the rest of the description makes it clear why there will be a sacrificial system during the Millennium: It'll be a reminder of God's mercy against an undeserving nation, as stated explicitly in verse 32.

## **Ezekiel 37**

Now we come to the meat of Ezekiel's prophecies of the end times. First is the vision of "the valley of dry bones". The bones clearly represent the fallen nation of Israel, so the question of whether they could live again is whether Israel would be a nation again, after a very long exile. It seems that seventy years in Babylon would be too short for the bones to become so very dry, but nearly 1900 years from the destruction of the temple to modern Israel would be a better fit. In fact, many non-literal prophetic interpretations grew out of the belief that Israel would never be a physical nation again, yet there they are, in unbelief, as God prophesied.

Notice also that this restoration would come in stages: first the bones being set in order, then the tendons and muscles, then finally life from God. So also would be the restoration of the nation of Israel in the land of Canaan. This is stated explicitly in verse 11, lest anyone try to interpret it as an allegory of personal salvation. Also, the nation in the first century was not ruled over by one king, as specified in verse 22, and it goes on to say that David will rule over this united kingdom of Israel. Though Constable's Notes insists that this must refer to the Messiah, can we switch so quickly from the literal nation of Israel, to David being only a type or figure of the Messiah? He will be resurrected along with all the other righteous people, so why must he be ruled out? Jesus will rule all the nations (Rom. 15:12, Rev. 12:5, 19:15), not just Israel.

## **Ezekiel 38**

Now comes the familiar prophecy against "Gog, of the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal." We need to break that down so we're less likely to misinterpret the rest of the prophecy. The notes in the NET Bible and Constable's Notes are in disagreement over the location and people of Magog, and of course it takes more than similar-sounding words to identify it. The

consensus of scholarship can't be more precise than to say it could refer to either western Turkey or the land of Russia.



But some research has been ignored for a long time, such as pointed out [here](#), concerning the identity of Rosh being a place rather than meaning “chief”. As with names of God, “Rosh” is transliterated rather than translated in the Greek Old Testament, whereas if it meant “chief” the equivalent Greek word would have been used. So I lean toward it being a city name. Even so, all factors need to be



considered, and it still can't be settled between western Turkey and Russia. Either way, the invasion comes from far north of Israel.

Notice the phrase "hooks in the jaws" in verse 4, as mentioned in an earlier lesson: God will turn this coalition in a direction it wasn't planning to go. Concerning this army from nations surrounding Israel for a great distance, the weaponry and armor is described in terms of ancient warfare without qualifying it with "such as" or "appeared to be". So some jump to the conclusion that it must have been fulfilled in the distant past. However, history has shown that on more than one occasion societies have reverted back to primitive conditions. So such weapons in a future war, where electronics may no longer be functioning, is within the realm of possibility. As we'll see next, this event takes place shortly after another war, so even if the setback is regional rather than worldwide, the scenario is possible in the future. And I disagree with Constable's Notes that this army is Babylonian, since it's not a city as required by descriptions in Revelation.

Now verse 7 gives the motive and setting: to plunder people gathered from many nations to the land of Israel, which has come to feel secure after war. Modern Israel has never felt secure, but after the defeat of the hostile nations all around its borders and acquiring their land and wealth, they would make a very juicy target indeed. So seizing the opportunity, the coalition will swarm to the mountains of Israel.

Verse 10 continues with the details, and notice the phrase "the center of the earth". This of course marks the land of Israel as the focal point of the world. But in the face of this impending attack, look at the weak protest of Sheba and Dedan in verse 13; that's all they can do, "they" being what is modern Saudi Arabia and the shipping centers of the region. Their concern isn't so much the destruction of Israel as it is the destruction of their source of income. But the purpose of all this is given in verse 16: God will be honored by all the nations. No war since the time of Christ has accomplished this, so it remains to be fulfilled.

In verse 17 we're given the outcome of the threat. First, God causes a great earthquake in Israel, so great that the whole world trembles in fear of God's presence. Second, God causes the army of Gog to turn on itself. At the same time, God rains down plague, bloodshed, hail, fire, and brimstone. These are not presented as metaphors, any more than prior prophecies were mere metaphors, so this has not yet been fulfilled. Though it can't be proved whether this all takes place at the start of the Tribulation or end of the Millennium, I think it's probably the former.

## **Ezekiel 39**

Notice that the people of Israel will use the defeated army's weapons as fuel for 7 years (see also the chart [Prophecy Timeline](#)). Here again, there's no need to resort to force-fitting modern weapons into this prophecy. If Israel has given up its weapons, due to feeling secure and as a possible part of the covenant mentioned in Dan. 9:27, it would make an easy target for nations with even the most low-tech weaponry. But we'll only know for sure when we see it fulfilled. The point is that Israel will plunder those who sought to plunder it.

Starting in verse 11 is the aftermath of all those deaths. There will be people employed during that time to go out and mark all the places where a dead body lies, and others will come along and bury them. Since this takes place "on that day", it remains to be fulfilled, but the question is when. It seems unlikely that such a situation as described here would take place during the second half of the Tribulation, when faithful Jews will have fled the land for the place of safety in the desert. Neither would such a graveyard be likely to exist on the new earth after the Millennium. So by process of elimination we're left with a either before or during the first half of the Tribulation, or during the first seven years of the Millennium. But we should make note of the fact that the motives and method-of-defeat of Gog are not the same

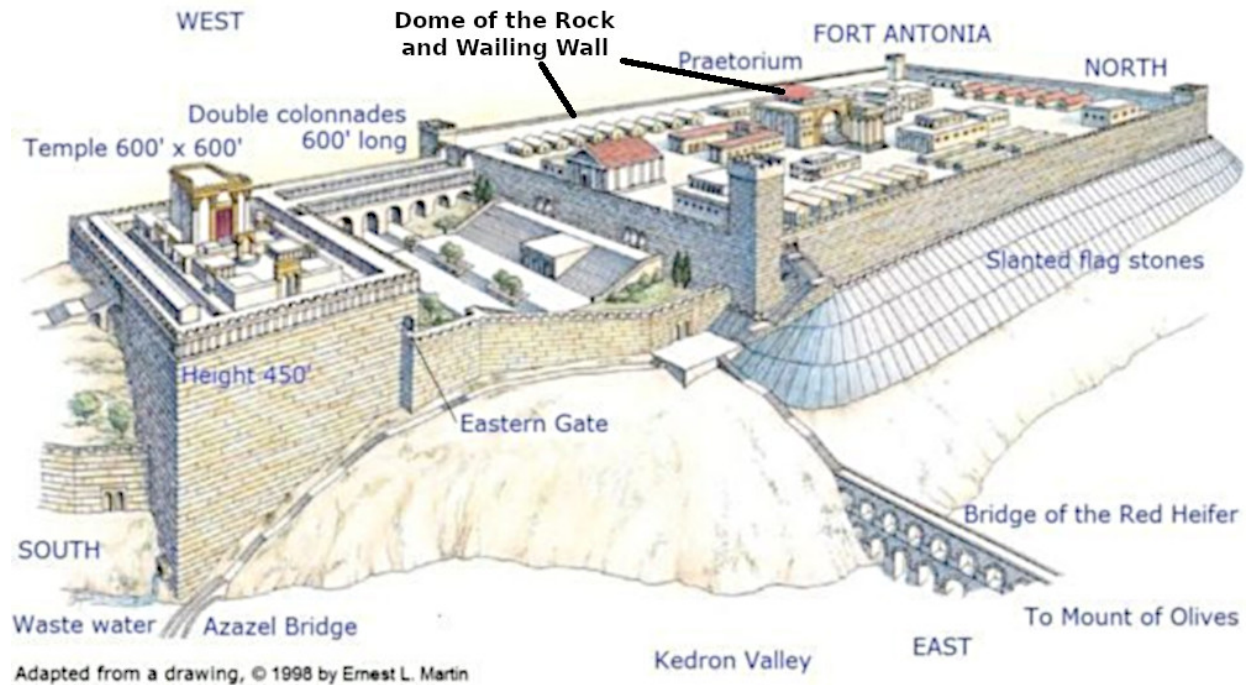


in this passage as in the only other passage about Gog, that being Rev. 20:8.

On the other hand, verse 17 is referenced in Rev. 19:17-18, which takes place at the beginning of the Millennium, and Israel turns to God as a result. Yet on the other other hand, the end of the Tribulation is a very unlikely time for there to be a Magog left to muster an army. We simply don't know where this event fits, but we know it will be literally and physically fulfilled. And remember that one part of a prophecy can be separated from another by many years. Verse 25 turns to what is undeniably the Millennium by description.

## **Ezekiel 40-43**

This is a separate, later vision about the Millennial Kingdom and Temple, which may try to be built as was Herod's Temple illustrated here. This is not to be confused with the Tribulation temple, which according to Zech. 14:2 will likely be destroyed when Jerusalem is ransacked during the Bowl judgments. The vision begins with the Millennial Temple, on the spot of Solomon's Temple, whose location was on the Gihon River and not the present-day Dome of the Rock. There's an excellent article [here](#), and this is one of the images, to which I've added the likely locations of the Dome of the Rock and Wailing Wall.



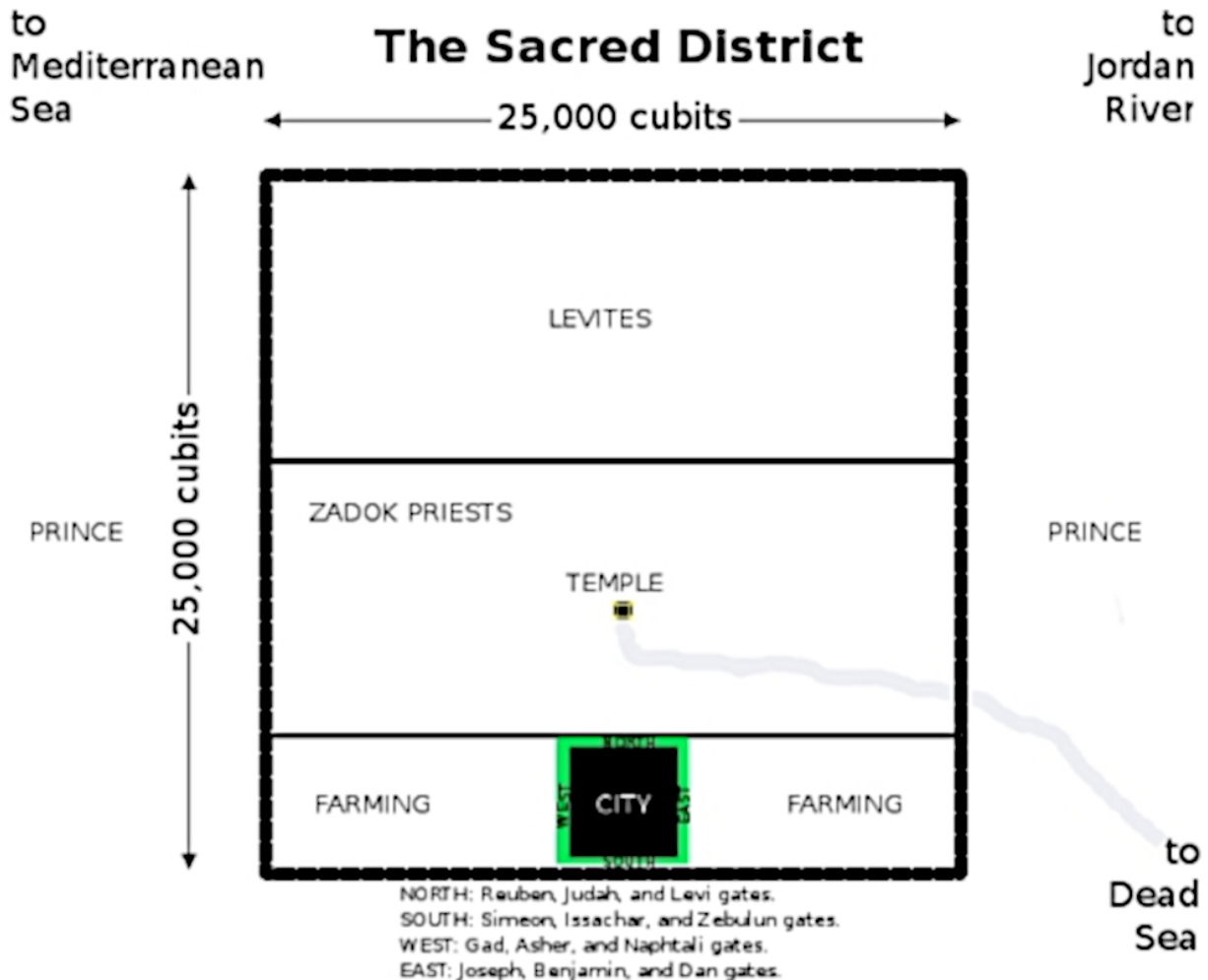
The next image is what the Millennial Temple will probably look like. The precise measurements and layout are given here, and there's also a drawing in Constable's Notes. This continues into chapters 41 and 42. Ch. 43 is where Ezekiel sees the glory of God again, coming from the east and filling the temple. Then after another reminder of past sins of Israel, it describes the altar itself with just as much attention to detail. But as rules for the sacrifices and rites are described starting in verse 18, beginning with a purification ritual, notice that these are not identical to those under the law of Moses. That system looked forward to the Messiah, while this one will look back as a reminder, especially for Israel. The priesthood of Zadok is connected with the reign of David, whose kingdom this will be.



## Ezekiel 44-48

Ch. 44 begins by explaining that the gate through which God enters the sanctuary will remain shut forever afterward. Then it turns to another vision of God's glory filling the temple, and another caution for Israel against ever repeating their violations of it. Then in verse 10 God states that the Levites will no longer be permitted to serve as priests, but instead will be relegated to watching over the gates, which includes managing the day-to-day business of temple activities. The exceptions will be the line of Zadok, as we see in verse 15. Following that are rules given for those priests.

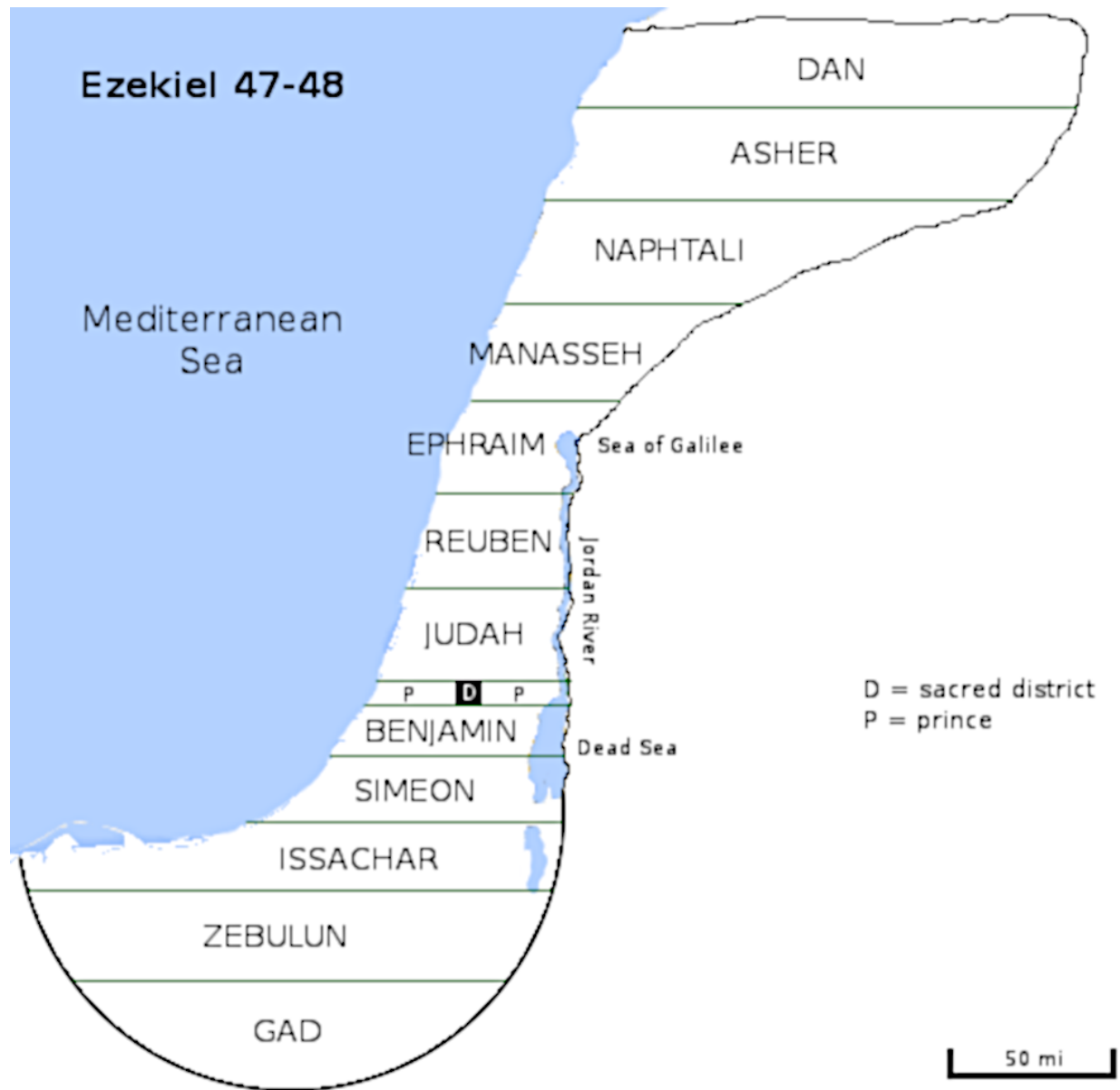
Ch. 45 begins a description of a special plot of land sometimes referred to as The Sacred District. You can see more details about this [at this source](#), which distinguishes the Sacred City in this district from both Jerusalem and the New Jerusalem.



The Sacred District is about 8 miles square. The total width of the land, from the Mediterranean Sea to the Jordan River / Dead Sea is about 50 miles, so the area of the Prince is about 21 miles on either side of the District.

This information is gleaned from Ezekiel chapters 45-48.

As you can see in the next image, the land is divided into places for the Levites, the priests of Zadok, the Temple, farmland, and the Sacred City. On either side of the District is land assigned to “the prince”, who can’t be Jesus since he has to make atonement for his sins and cannot enter through the Lord’s Gate. It would have to be either David or a descendant, though we should keep in mind that the resurrected David will no longer be mortal, while this prince will have children during the Millennium. (If the eastern river is the Euphrates, as per the original land grant to Abraham, then of course the tribes have much more area than shown here.)



Descriptions continue into ch. 46, and then ch. 47 focuses on a strange river of water flowing from under the threshold of the temple toward the east, which is crudely represented in the drawing here. As Ezekiel follows it along, the water becomes deeper and deeper, until it's too deep and wide to cross.

Ezekiel is told that the river empties into the Dead Sea, which becomes “alive” because of its source. Notice what it says about trees on the riverbanks: Their fruit is for food and their leaves for healing, which tells us that Rev. 22:1-2 must refer to the Millennium

rather than the new earth, since there will be no temple after the Millennium according to Rev. 21:22.

As for the rest of the land of Israel, it will be laid out roughly as shown here and in Constable's Notes, according to the boundaries and landmarks as given in the text (though some put the eastern boundary at the Euphrates much farther out). Levi and Joseph are replaced by the two tribes of Manasseh and Ephraim, since Levi has land inside the Sacred District.

The details continue through the end of the book, which makes sense of a lot of things in Revelation that otherwise seem obscure.

# Daniel

## Introduction

Daniel was a young man when he was taken into exile in Babylon with the people of Judah, before the group that would include Ezekiel. Many have tried to push the date of writing past the events predicted, out of nothing but bias against divine inspiration, because the prophecies concerning historical events are so accurate and detailed. Jesus referred to Daniel specifically, as also did Ezekiel.

## Daniel 1

The book of Daniel begins with historical context, that being his deportation to Babylon by King Nebuchadnezzar. But the king knew the value of people of character and intelligence, so he had his official search for standouts among the captives. These were to be treated well, fed from the king's table, and educated in the literature and language of Babylon. Some today would consider accepting such an offer an act of betrayal, but this is short-sighted; most rebellions require infiltrators in high places. However, in this case, it was God's long-range plan to bring a remnant back from exile. So always seek God's will if you find yourself—or are tempted to bash someone else—in a similar situation.

It turns out that Daniel and three of his friends were among the chosen, and all of them were given Babylonian names. It's curious that tradition has always referred to Daniel by his Hebrew name, while his friends are called by their Babylonian names. Now in verse 8 it says that Daniel didn't want to be defiled by the king's food, so he asked to be fed a vegetarian diet. Some take this as a divine mandate for vegetarianism, but it's nothing of the sort; it was a



choice to eat only that which was permitted by the law of Moses, in a foreign land where the meat did not qualify. The law allowed and even presumed the eating of clean meats.

Because of this brave stance, God blessed Daniel and his friends with great knowledge and skill, but Daniel was also given prophetic insight. So after the three-year training period, these four people impressed the king more than all the others, and Daniel himself would live through the entire span of the neo-Babylonian empire, as shown in verse 21.

## **Daniel 2**

Now begins the king's experiences of many strange dreams. But he doesn't remember a particular one, and he demands that his astrologers tell him both the dream and its meaning. After they become exasperated with the threat of a horrible death because they have no real psychic ability, we see in verse 10 that they and all the other "wise men", including Daniel and his friends, were to be rounded up and executed.

But Daniel was granted time to prevent the executions, so he had his friends all pray for God's mercy and interpretation. Upon receiving it, we see in verse 19 that Daniel praises God, another thing we Christians need to remember. Then in verse 25 he informs the official that he is ready to appear before the king with the answers. And he begins by crediting God with this insight, rather than taking credit for himself— yet another reminder for us Christians.





The dream itself was of the statue you see here, made of metals from head to toe in decreasing order of value. The interpretation begins in verse 37 and extends through verse 45. It is a prophecy of four world empires beginning with King Nebuchadnezzar as the head of gold. The next to come, the silver part, would be less powerful, which turned out to be that of Medo-Persia. After that would come the bronze part representing the even less-powerful Grecian Empire, followed by the iron legs representing the least-powerful Roman Empire. The feet of a mixture of iron and clay are not a fifth empire but a description of the fourth in its final stages. It will become weak because it will attempt to force together people groups who aren't compatible.

Some take the phrase "mingling with the seed of men" as meaning hybrid humans or Nephilim. But we should note first of all that the word for *men* means *common, ordinary people* as opposed to rulers

or elites, and the word for *mingling* means *trading* or *associating*. So it seems the interpretation with the best support is that this represents a mixture of incompatible cultures, governments, and economies, brought about by Rome's wide-ranging conquest. The present EU is a good example; it was forced into a *union* that has never really unified except in the power class, who keeps trying to force it on unwilling populations. We also see the desperate attempt to break resistance to it by injecting middle easterners in large numbers, but this too is failing.

Many have also tried to put significance into both the two legs and the ten toes, saying that the legs represent the eastern/western division of the Catholic Church (Roman and Greek), but then we must ask why a similar argument isn't made for the statue's two arms. The passage gives no indication that either the number of arms and legs or the number of toes has any significance. And last but not least, "in the days of those kings" the divinely-cut stone, representing the everlasting kingdom of the Messiah, will permanently destroy the Roman Empire in the end times.

When the king realized that Daniel had rightly described and interpreted the dream, he bowed to him and ordered people to make sacrifices to him. But we know he wasn't being made a god, because the king gave honor to Daniel's God as the one above all others. However, he was elevated to a very high government position, to which Daniel hired his friends as assistants. But as the saying goes, "No good deed goes unpunished".

## Daniel 3

We see here how short-lived such honors can be. The king decides to build a giant statue that everyone would be obligated to worship, on pain of death by being thrown into a furnace. Of course, the formerly demoted astrologers saw the opportunity to be rid of these Hebrew upstarts, so we see in verse 8 that they eagerly expose

Daniel's friends as lawbreakers who refused to worship the statue; there's no mention of Daniel here but only his friends. So the king, who seemed to have the memory and loyalty of a goldfish, has them arrested and gives them one last chance to comply.

But in verse 16 they issue a challenge of their own: They will gladly be thrown into the furnace, where either they'll die or they'll be miraculously delivered, but either way they won't worship the statue. So the king flies into a blind rage and has the fire stoked to much higher temperatures than normal, then has strong soldiers throw them in. But the only people killed are the soldiers!

Then the king sees four people in the fire, all walking around unharmed and unbound, and the fourth appears to be supernatural. So the king calls them to come out of the furnace, though the supernatural being does not. They're found to be completely unharmed by the fire, so in verse 28 the king comes to his senses and praises the God who protected them. Further, he orders all of Babylon to honor their God. Does anyone still think these Hebrews were traitors?

## **Daniel 4**

This passage shows the content of the edict from the king about all this, though the first three verses really belong to the end of ch. 3, and that's how the Greek text has it. What follows is a completely separate incident, another dream. This time he tells his astrologers the dream, but they still can't interpret it. So once again it's Daniel to the rescue.

The dream is about a huge tree, which is ordered to be chopped down but its taproot left in the ground, where it would be covered in dew and left with the animals. Then the text turns to the actual meaning and says that "his" mind would be turned into that of an animal for seven years, to teach him that God has authority over

human kingdoms. But the interpretation in verse 19 shows just how harsh the lesson will be, and it disturbs Daniel to the point where he's very reluctant to give it.

Daniel tells him that he will be stricken with the mind of an animal and driven from human contact, where he'll eat grass with the animals and live outside, for the allotted seven years. But like the preserved taproot, the king would get his mind and kingdom back, because he would finally understand that everything he is and has is only by God's decree and mercy. Notice that in verse 27 Daniel pleads with the king to stop sinning so this doesn't happen, because the king had been turning a blind eye to the plight of the poor.

But it isn't until a year later that the seven years of madness began, when the king boasted that everything was due to his own power and skill. As soon as the words left his mouth, a voice from heaven rebuked him and off he went. Now in verse 34 he is quoted as saying that his sanity returned as predicted once the seven years were passed, and the kingdom was restored to him.

## **Daniel 5**

Without any other explanation, the text turns here to the reign of Belshazzar, second in command to someone extra-Biblical texts call Nabonidus. This is why Belshazzar would promise to make someone the third ruler of Babylon, he being the second in command. Check Constable's Notes for more details of names and years passing in all this. But he's most famous for an expression many don't realize comes from the Bible: "the hand writing on the wall".

Belshazzar was partying and drunk when he made the grave mistake of having everyone drink wine from the gold and silver cups that had been taken from God's temple in Jerusalem. They even praised their gods of metal, wood, and stone while they drank. So God let them see something they didn't expect to see even in that condition: a

disembodied hand writing mysterious words on the wall. So the king calls for his astrologers and offers great wealth and honor to whoever could explain this, but of course his astrologers were as useless as all the others before them. Yet even today, people consult astrologers and believe they have “scientific” proof that the stars order their lives.

But at least the queen mother had a better memory than a goldfish, and she tells them to send for Daniel. When he arrives, he tells Belshazzar to keep his gifts and honors, because he’ll give the meaning for free. His message is that Belshazzar didn’t learn the lesson taught to Nebuchadnezzar and had no humility or respect for God. So in verse 25 we see that the words on the wall mean that Belshazzar’s days are numbered, that his life is not measuring up, and that the kingdom of Babylon was about to be divided up between the Medes and Persians, as we recall from the vision of the statue. He was killed that very night and replaced by Darius the Mede.

## **Daniel 6**

Darius kept Daniel as an advisor, who once again impressed the new king. But as before, the others were jealous of the honors bestowed upon him. Yet because he lived such a clean life that they couldn’t catch him on corruption charges, they hatched a plot to get him executed because of his God. That same tactic is used often today, whenever some pesky, clean-living Christian gets in the way of other people’s plans.

They advise the king to make a permanent and inflexible law: For the next thirty days, whoever worships any god or king but him should be thrown into a den of hungry lions. Daniel hears about it and immediately breaks the law by praying to God as he always had. Of course, the jealous schemers knew his habits and “just happened” to catch him in the act. So off they go to snitch to the king, who tries his best to find a legal loophole to get Daniel out of this predicament. But

the snitches tell him it's no use, so the order is given to throw Daniel to the lions.

At least Darius escorts him there, hoping that God would protect him. And this was no mere hole in the ground; it was covered with a heavy stone and sealed off, much the way the temporary tomb of Jesus would be done. After a sleepless night, the king hurries back to the den and calls out to Daniel, who as we can see in verse 21 was unharmed. So he is lifted out of the den, but the king quickly gives another order: to throw in the snitches and their families, who are chewed up before they even hit bottom.

Then Darius sends out a notice to the whole land that only Daniel's God was to be worshiped. Now we can't always expect to be rescued for our faithfulness, as we see in Heb. 11, but we do see that in this case it caused many to turn to the one true God. Verse 28 adds that Daniel lived on through the reign of Darius to that of Cyrus the Persian. So ends the primarily historical section of the book, and now it's back to more detail given in a different way about the vision of the statue.

## **Daniel 7**

Notice first of all that this vision comes during the reign of Belshazzar rather than Cyrus. Also notice that it is given to Daniel rather than to the king, and that the interpretation is given to Daniel by an angel. You might also want to view the chart in Constable's Notes on this passage, which compares the two visions.

These beasts all come out of the sea, meaning the Gentile nations. The first was something like a winged lion, whose wings were torn off, after which it stood on two legs like a human and was given a human's mind. The second was like a bear, and it had three ribs in its mouth and was told to go out and devour more. The third was like a

leopard having four wings on its back and four heads, and it was given authority to rule.

The fourth was not compared to any known animal, but it was fearsome and powerful, with two rows of iron teeth. It crushed and trampled everyone and everything, and it had ten horns. But as Daniel watched, a small horn grew up among the ten and three other horns were torn out to make room for it. This “little horn” had human-like eyes and a boastful mouth. Then in verse 9 Daniel sees the throne of God, and by comparing it to the description in the first chapter of Revelation, we see that this is much like Jesus in his glory before he took on human flesh as stated in Phil. 2:5-11. Notice in verse 10 that the scene is a courtroom, and the books opened should be understood in that context.

Daniel sees that the fourth beast was killed and thrown into the fire, which is described also in Rev. 19:20. Here, the other beasts were allowed to continue ruling for “a time and season”. But then in verse 13 Daniel turns his attention to someone described as human-like, who approaches the Ancient One by coming “with the clouds”, as referenced in Mat. 24:30 and Rev. 1:7. So both the Father and the Son are described in very similar terms, which shouldn’t surprise us if we understand that Jesus has always been God but also became human at a point in time.

Lest anyone try to guess the meanings, the fact that Daniel is given them means we can’t allegorize them, especially since the animals are the symbols. Again the vision reveals a succession of kingdoms, but Daniel is particularly curious about the fourth one. Notice additional detail in verse 21: The “little horn” waged war against “the holy ones” and was defeating them, which of course cannot apply to the church, since in Mat. 16:18 Jesus said that could never happen. But the Ancient One prevents their complete annihilation, and the court scene mentioned earlier is to judge in their favor.

The explanation of the fourth kingdom is given in verse 23: It will conquer and subjugate the whole world. Ten kings will rise to power

within it, followed by an 11th who topples three of them. He will blaspheme God and relentlessly persecute any who follow him. Then he will attempt to change “lawfully-appointed times”, a likely reference to either the Hebrew sacred calendar or to a doomed effort to thwart the prophecies of God. The phrase “a time, times, and half a time” throughout Daniel is held by pretty much everyone to mean 3-1/2 years, and we’ll see more about this in ch. 9. But that’s the length of the reign of this boastful king, which ends with the heavenly court’s decision to remove him from power and banish him forever.

Now before we end this vision of prophecy, notice more references in Revelation, especially ch. 17. As Constable’s Notes points out, Daniel and Revelation have similar structures: introduction, worldwide judgments, and focus on Israel. These are some of the many reasons why Revelation is the “unsealing” of Daniel’s end-times prophecies, and how we know that the judgments of Revelation span seven years. For those who say all of this was fulfilled by the end of the first century a.d., they must appeal to allegory since these things clearly have not happened.

## **Daniel 8**

Now we come to the vision about a goat and a ram. The ram’s horns were different lengths, with the longer one growing after the shorter one. The ram was unstoppable in conquest, but then came the goat with a horn between its eyes, flying toward the ram with blinding speed and easily destroying it. The goat, like the little horn, was very arrogant, but its power was short-lived, and the single horn was replaced with four others pointing to the four compass points.

A small horn grew up among them and aimed against the north, south, east, and Israel, “the beautiful land”. This same horn is then said to have “reached to heaven” and drawn away some of the stars, but it trampled them and then turned against “the prince of the army



of heaven”, from whom the daily sacrifice was removed and the temple destroyed. Truth itself was also hurled to the ground.

Taking one-third of the stars from heaven and hurling them to earth is mentioned in Rev. 12:4, but what can it mean that they’re trampled? Some say the stars here must refer to the people of Israel, since they had the Temple, but others say that they represent the fallen angels. Yet why would Satan destroy his own angels? A possible answer is that they had been defeated by heaven’s armies according to Rev. 12:7, so Satan destroys them in a fit of rage for their failure. But though we really can’t rule out either interpretation, Constable’s Notes considers it beyond dispute that it refers here to the people of Israel because of verse 12. So what we have here may be another type and shadow, the defeat of Israel foreshadowing the defeat of the fallen angels.

Now for interpretations of the ram and goat. The ram seems to represent Medo-Persia, which was also portrayed as the bear and the silver part of the statue in earlier visions, and it had pushed in those directions. The goat seems to represent Greece, especially its unprecedented conquest under the tactical genius of Alexander the Great. This was portrayed in the earlier visions as the leopard and the bronze part of the statue. This all played out in history, more details of which we’ll see later.

Then Daniel hears someone ask the duration of this event, and the answer is that it will last 2,300 “evenings and mornings”, a familiar expression from Creation Week, and equivalent to either 6-1/2 or 3-1/2 years, depending on how one takes the expression. A fulfillment took place after the defeat of Antiochus Epiphanes in 165 BC, and the subsequent rededication of the temple, which the Jewish feast of Hanukkah commemorates.

In verse 16 the angel Gabriel is sent to Daniel to explain the vision, which was for “the time of the end”. The ram’s two horns represent the kings of Media and Persia. The goat is Alexander, “the king of Greece”, after whose death four of his generals ruled: Lysimachus,

Cassander, Seleucus, and Ptolemy. We'll see more about them in chap. 11. The "rash and deceitful king" coming later was none other than the vile and treacherous Antiochus Epiphanes, who did not die in battle "at the hands of men" but from an infestation of worms. But though he fulfilled this prophecy, which Daniel is told to "seal" in verse 26, he was surely a type and shadow, so we can use him as a clue about what to expect from the future Beast or Antichrist.

## Daniel 9

Now we come to what is easily the most familiar and controversial passage in Old Testament Bible prophecy, the Abomination of Desolation. As mentioned in the study of Jeremiah, Daniel understood from his writings that the seventy-year captivity of Israel in Babylon was coming to an end, and you may want to look at the chart in Constable's Notes on this chapter for where this captivity fits in the timeline. But pay attention to the fact that Daniel interpreted Jeremiah's prophecy literally, so we shouldn't think that Daniel's prophecies aren't also to be taken literally, especially since history shows their literal, physical fulfillment thus far.

Daniel's response to this understanding was to go to God in prayer, confessing the sins of his people. Shouldn't we Christians do the same as "we see that day approaching"? Instead, many show either apathy or hostility to the study of prophecy. But Daniel prays for God's deliverance, even though he already knows it's coming, because that's how true servants of God behave.

As we see in verse 20, the answer was already on its way via Gabriel, who gives a short but massively important prophecy starting in verse 24. This is the famous "Seventy Weeks Prophecy", packed with significant details. Because of those details, we know in hindsight that the "weeks" or "sevens" refer to groups of years, such that seventy of them amount to a total of 490 years. These are divided

into three groups, but notice first of all the purposes and people involved:

1. to “your people” and “your holy city”
2. to end and atone for sin
3. to begin eternal righteousness
4. to seal up prophetic vision
5. to anoint and dedicate “the Most Holy Place”

”Your people” are Daniel’s people, the Hebrews. “Your city” is Daniel’s and the Hebrews’ city, Jerusalem. “The most holy place” is the Temple in Jerusalem. “Eternal righteousness” and “sealing up prophecy” refer to the end of all things in life as we’ve known it. So this is a very specific prophecy for the people and land of Israel, and only involves us as Christians insofar as it involves the righteous of all ages.

In verse 25 we’re given a starting point: the command to restore and rebuild the literal, physical city of Jerusalem. We know this because it happened in history that way. Various such commands are discussed in Constable’s Notes, but one in particular gave permission to rebuild Jerusalem specifically, and the calculations include the key fact that prophetic years were of 360 days rather than our modern 365. So counting  $69 \times 7$  (483) prophetic years from the decree of 444 b.c. gives us 476 of our years, and then we determine the year a.d. by subtracting the 444, bringing us to 32 a.d.. That’s the year Jesus was crucified or “cut off”.

But what about the “seven and sixty-two” for that first 69? It depends on how one understands the ancient languages here, and how it should be punctuated. You can check [this discussion](#) for some painstaking detail about all that, and for widely different views on what the verse actually says. But we should be able to point to something that happened  $7 \times 7$  (49) years after the decree, and then count  $62 \times 7$  (434) years from there to Jesus’ crucifixion. The part about it being built “with plaza and moat but in distressful times” is

the key; the rebuilding would begin first with the perimeter, and would only be completed in 49 years.

To say (as some do with meticulous arguments) that this prophecy cannot refer to Jesus, is to say that there was no significance of “the fullness of time” for Jesus to come per Gal. 4:4, no reason for the people of Jesus’ day to have been looking for their redemption per Luke 2:38, and no explanation for why Simeon had been told in Luke 2:26 that he wouldn’t die until he had seen the Messiah. I’m more inclined to reject the Hebrew upon which the linguistic arguments are made against this being a Messianic prophecy, especially since the Greek isn’t nearly as ambiguous. The prophecy in Greek says something like this, as far as I can determine, though no two translations seem to agree:

And you shall know and perceive, from the giving of word to respond and rebuild Jerusalem until an anointed prince comes, there will be 7 sevens and 62 sevens. The wall and square will be rebuilt in difficult times [or “when the time is exhausted”]. (26) After the 62 sevens, the anointed will be devastated for no valid reason. The coming leader will pollute the city and holy place, and they will be cut off as in a flood. Devastations will be ordered until war ends. (27) He will enforce a covenant with many for one seven, and halfway through it sacrifices and offerings will be terminated. There will be a very defiling desecration upon the temple, and there will be desolation until the completed time.

Needless to say, this passage is very controversial, but the whole of scripture must be considered in order to guide us when the ancient wording is in so much dispute. A consistent approach to Bible interpretation both allows and demands that this be taken as Messianic. And that all came from just verse 25.

Verse 26 is about an anointed one being cut off, which we recall was also spoken of in similar terms in Isaiah 53, a clearly Messianic passage. Then the city and temple/sanctuary would be destroyed by “the people of the coming prince”. It’s unclear whether the demise to

come quickly like a flood refers to the prince or to the city and sanctuary, but it could be both, and a similar expression was used in Isaiah 59:19. It's the people of the prince who do the destruction, not the prince himself. The destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple took place in 70 a.d., 37-38 years after Jesus' ascension. It came at the hands of the Roman general Titus, whose soldiers burned the temple and then took it apart piece by piece to get the melted gold. This is what Jesus spoke of in Mat. 24:2.

Now to verse 27. The "he" points to the nearest person mentioned, which was the one who would destroy the temple. But Titus didn't desecrate the temple or enforce any covenant. Some claim that "he" is Jesus, who destroyed the temple and ended sacrifices in the middle of Passover week. Yet not only does this theory make the seventieth seven a week of days rather than years like the first 69, Jesus didn't make any covenant with a seven-year limit. In fact, the New Covenant wasn't enacted until his death, which would be the start rather than the midpoint. And the temple system kept going until 70 AD. Another theory claims that Jesus' public ministry was ended after 3-1/2 half years, but not only is it impossible to prove that it lasted that precise length of time, once again he made no seven-year covenant when he was baptized by John.

But what does fit is a yet-future fulfillment, where someone in the manner of both Antiochus Epiphanes and Titus will come and do all these things. This also blends well with Mat. 24:15-16, where the people of Judea are to run when they see what happens to the temple, and Rev. 12:13-15, where Israel is taken to safety for 3-1/2 years. So here's the gist of the prophecy:

1. 483 years from the command to rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah is put to death
2. Armies under the Roman general Titus destroy Jerusalem and the Temple
3. War and disasters continue until the end
4. The Beast will confirm a treaty with many for the final 7 years

5. Midway through the 7 he will end Temple sacrifice and desecrate it
6. The end decreed upon him will come

## **Daniel 10**

Yet another prophetic vision is given here. Notice in verse 3 that Daniel had given up meat and wine for three weeks, which means the vegetarian diet he was on when he first came to Babylon was not his lifelong habit. He was shown a vision of a glowing being in white linen, resembling John's description of Jesus in Revelation. But the context indicates this is an angel rather than Jesus.

Notice also in verse 12 that God came to him because he had humbled himself and sought understanding. We often miss out on God's will for our lives because we won't do either or both of those things. But who is "the prince of the kingdom of Persia" in verse 13? To delay a heavenly angel requires another supernatural being, so we can deduce that the Prince of Persia was a fallen angel that ruled behind the human powers of the land. Its power was such that the archangel Michael had to come and help.

After giving Daniel the strength to even listen to the message, notice again in verse 20 that this angel wasn't looking forward to the return trip, which somehow would also involve the being ruling over Greece. Verse 21 mentions "a dependable book", a likely reference to a book of prophetic decrees in heaven. The angel or "prince" Michael is said to be "your" prince, with "your" being plural. This refers to Daniel's people, Israel, but this does not mean Michael is the Messiah, as some false religions teach. The angel's words about all this continue into the next chapter, which really should begin at verse 2.

## **Daniel 11**

In hindsight we know this is past to us today, and it begins with what would happen in Persia's near future to the time of Daniel. Three Persian kings would arise, and then a fourth who stirs up trouble against Greece. Yet another king would arise, and by description we can identify him as Alexander the Great. This is where we get more detail about all that, and it goes on for quite a while, so I'll just try to summarize.

Ptolemy I was the king of the south. The daughter was actually the granddaughter Berenice, who was given in marriage to Antiochus II in a doomed plan to achieve political gains by intrigue and deception. After various raids and generations, this king of the south was Ptolemy IV and then Ptolemy V. The king of the north was Antiochus III, who as prophesied was utterly defeated in 217 b.c.. The details fit historical record as with the Ptolemies, right up to the contemptible person Antiochus Epiphanes. It is he who is believed to have engineered the murder of a prince of the covenant, Onias III, the high priest. The first chapter of the apocryphal book 1 Maccabees details his plundering of the temple and other acts of savagery.

Again, though these things were indeed fulfilled in the past, we can't dogmatically state that no future fulfillments remain. But neither can we presume that these alliances and military campaigns will be repeated in the future. In all the details of the remaining prophecies given in Revelation, there is no mention of the kings of the north and south and details that would connect them to future events. So though a future fulfillment is possible, it seems unlikely.

Yet in verse 36 we read of the king who exalts himself, who has no regard for the gods of his ancestors or the desire of women. This means a god honored by women, not that this person will be a pervert, though that's certainly possible. Neither will this be a Muslim, since by definition he'd have to honor their god. Instead, he'll honor a god of fortresses, in whose name he attacks other fortresses, and he'll give out conquered lands as prizes.

We might still tie him in with the preceding discussion of Antiochus Epiphanes and the kings of the north and south, but in verse 40 we see the phrase “at the time of the end”, so there’s a shift in fulfillment here, and new details to follow have no historical precedent. A king of the north will attack this future king, and the attack is then joined by a king of the south with a huge multi-faceted force. But he still manages to attack the land of Israel, though the people now occupying the country of Jordan will escape the assault. Egypt and the countries on the south side of the Mediterranean will fall, but he’ll hear alarming reports from the east and north, so he’ll go off in a rage. However, as he camps between the Mediterranean and Dead Seas he’ll come to his end. Though the Beast will begin with the appearance of peace, per 8:25 and Rev. 6:2, we’ve seen that war will rage for most of its short reign.

## **Daniel 12**

Ch. 12 starts again with “at that time”, and again Michael is mentioned as the prince watching over Israel. This is where we see the phrase Jesus used, “a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then”. There has been much terrible suffering in the world since 70 a.d., such that the fall of Jerusalem at that time cannot have been the ultimate fulfillment of the prophecy.

Now because of this overlap and duality, teachers of Bible prophecy must exercise restraint and caution in looking for modern fulfillments. All we can be sure of is that those things without any historical match will certainly take place. And what it tells us here is that Daniel’s people, at least the ones whose names are in “the book”, will escape. We know that whoever sees the Abomination of Desolation and runs will be kept safe during the Great Tribulation, the final 3-1/2 years.

Then we see the first clear Old Testament statement about eternity: Some will arise to experience everlasting life, but others to



experience everlasting contempt. The contrast is not between existence and non-existence, or long and short existence since both are everlasting, but honor and shame. Now in verse 4 Daniel is told again to seal the prophecy, but in this case, “until the time of the end”. This is why Revelation, which means the opposite, is a book for the time of the end, not the past. But what does it mean that people will run around and increase knowledge? The two together suggest a desperate thirst for understanding, though it could also be a clue about modern life. All we know is that the reign of the Beast is for a mere 3-1/2 years.

We should take comfort in knowing that not even Daniel could figure this out, but we aren't to know the timing until the fulfillment begins. The angel repeats that there will be 3-1/2 years from the Abomination of Desolation and the end of the Tribulation, but adds that there's a special blessing for whoever waits patiently for another 45 days after that. I was unable to find any consistent explanations for the extra days, though some think it might be a time of purification or reconstruction between Jesus' defeat of the Beast and his entering Jerusalem.

Daniel's book is short, but that's a good thing, because it's jam-packed with prophecy.

# Hosea, Joel, and Amos

## Introduction

Hosea, one of the minor prophets active in the 8th century b.c., suffers more than any other book in the Bible from disputes over its wording due to differences among text families. Even so, it carries the familiar teachings of the Sinai Covenant concerning sin, judgment, salvation, the love of God, and the constant tension between steadfast love and the need to purge sin.

Joel focuses mostly on Judah and Jerusalem, and he was a significant prophet in spite of the shortness of the book. He writes more technically than poetically, and very boldly and to the point.

Amos was a shepherd and an expert on certain kinds of trees, who was given prophetic insight two years before “the earthquake”, though there’s disagreement over which one is meant. He was sent to warn the northern kingdom of Israel, whose appearance of prosperity was a thin veneer over corruption and inhumanity.

## Hosea

As noted in other lessons, the life of an Old Testament prophet was not a life of ease. Not only were the messengers typically shot in one way or another, they were also required to be living object lessons, which came with both physical and psychological hardship. For Hosea it starts right away; he is to marry a prostitute who will bear other men’s children, as an illustration of how Israel had been behaving with God, to whom she was “married” by covenant. But Hosea’s wife would also bear children by him, and they were named for different stages or aspects of the judgments to come upon

Israel. Judgment's purpose is cleansing, and a few always remain. Yet those few are always multiplied through God's blessings, only to become unfaithful again in time. As the saying goes, "Lather, rinse, repeat."

As part of that cycle, we see in ch. 2 the stage where God keeps pleading with Israel to come back to him and remain faithful, so he can bless them. It's no different with us today; God has to restrain himself from blessing us because we stray and don't listen. And by "blessing" I don't mean material and physical things, but spiritual, since in this age of grace the kingdom of God isn't physical.

Then we see the stage where God finally has to drop the hammer on them and take back all the blessings they had claimed were the gifts of false gods. But then comes the stage where God promises to one day convince Israel to return to him and be faithful. He will make a new covenant, this time with nature itself to prosper Israel's faithful remnant, and with other nations to leave them in peace.

Now in ch. 3 God tells Hosea to buy back his continually-cheating wife. She had lost her legal status as his wife, so to take her back was to re-marry her, and custom required a price be paid, either to the woman or to her parents. This was to illustrate how God would re-acquire Israel in spite of its cheating heart.

In ch. 4 that the pattern has gone full-circle back to the list of Israel's crimes, their breaking of the terms of the covenant to which they had originally sworn. And this included as always the priesthood, who were not exempt from the consequences of their actions. The Christian community has had a long habit of excusing the sins of its leaders in an un-Biblical chain of command, when leaders and mentors are to be held to higher standards.

Verse 11 details the secret practices of idolatry in Israel, their acts of spiritual unfaithfulness. And notice in verse 14 that God, unlike society, holds men to the same standards of faithfulness as women.

Culture for most of history has applauded men for the same behavior that has gotten women beaten or condemned to death.

Since we've seen the complete cycle, there's not much more to remark about for the rest of the book. Israel's people sin, get punished, repent, then see that God has shown mercy and go back to square one, over and over again... just like many Christians today, who seem completely unaware of teachings such as Rom. 6:2: "We died to sin; how can we keep living in it?" They take the grace and mercy of God as a legal loophole, and only do what they think is the minimum required to go to heaven. What kind of relationship is that? Can such an attitude come from a truly saved person?

But there is one noteworthy prophetic statement in 10:8 about people crying out to the rocks and mountains to fall on them and hide them from the wrath of God; it is quoted in Rev. 6:16.

## **Joel**

Joel begins by using a recent series of locust infestations to illustrate the waves of judgment to come upon Judah. God brings judgment in stages out of mercy, giving people at each stage the chance to repent and prevent further calamity. This is most clearly seen in Revelation with its sequence of three sets of seven judgments, each more intense and wide-ranging than the one before. In verse 5 God calls them to wake up and repent, not just wake up as is popular today. Judgment had already begun, but that was indeed only the beginning. The next step would be to wail and mourn, as we see in verse 8. Then in verse 15 we see the familiar phrase, "the Day of the Lord", a term referring to God's destruction of a present evil situation, followed by the restoration of the kingdom of Israel. Its ultimate fulfillment is commonly referred to as the Tribulation and Millennium.

In ch. 2 we see a description that has no historical fulfillment, though some commentaries put it in the past, in spite of the end of verse 2. The devastation of this army is extreme, and the description starting in verse 5 is much like the one we see in Rev. 9:1-10 at the sixth Trumpet judgment about the army of locust-like beings from the Abyss. That these are not literal locusts or horses or a mere human army is clear in verse 6: People writhe in fear at the sight of them, and they seem superhuman in their assault.

This passage continues with imagery used in Revelation, but then a huge wrench is thrown into our assumption of this army's identity in verse 11, where it's called the Lord's Army. There are two ways to take this: Either this army is of heavenly beings who take back the land of Israel at Jesus' return after the Tribulation, or it's called the Lord's Army because he ordered it to execute his wrath. I lean toward the second view, all things considered. And the end of the verse is another one quoted in Rev. 6:17.

Yet again, as seen beginning in verse 12, God always offers mercy to those who repent. The wording is clearly aimed at the people of Zion or Israel as a whole. Then God responds and promises relief when it's all over. Verse 25 is the familiar promise of God to repay with interest the years of loss and suffering, and the promise that Israel would "never again be put to shame" makes it clearly a yet-future fulfillment. It's only at that time, as we see in verse 28, that God will do what Peter quoted on Pentecost: pour out his Spirit on all people, though the commentaries all hold that this refers to the people of Israel. All of them, without discrimination by social class or gender, will be in tune with God to the point where having prophetic dreams and visions will be commonplace.

It's in this context that the cosmic signs starting in verse 30 will be seen: blood, fire, smoke, the sun turned dark and the moon turned to blood— before the terrible Day of the Lord. Yet in Mat. 24:29-31, Jesus said this would happen after the Tribulation, and Rev. 6:12-14 has them happening at the sixth Seal judgment, which is not the end

but more toward the beginning. If we pay attention to all that, we should humble ourselves when it comes to our views on prophecy, because it's more complex than most realize.

Look at ch. 3 for what we've seen in other lessons: God will bring back the remnant to the physical land of Israel. But it has two purposes, which are not only to bless Israel but also to punish and destroy its enemies. So we should, once again, expect to see Israel being attacked before we see them rescued, and they've been in position for that final attack since 1948. Like it or not, there is a nation of Israel in the land and in unbelief, though they had been scattered for almost 2,000 years— so that God can bring their enemies against them to purify them, and then deal with the enemies.

Verse 2 is the familiar reference to what many interpret as the Battle of Armageddon, described here as the Valley of Jehoshaphat, which some also say is the Valley of Jezreel. At the very least, it means the place of God's judgment, and the crime is for dividing the land that belongs to God. The nations have been obsessed with this since 1948. And the devaluing of human life as in verse 3 is going on in our day. Then God turns to demand from the enemy nations their reasons for attacking him. He takes it personally when his people are oppressed, whether they're Jews or Christians, and payback will certainly come in due time.

In verse 9 we see the Valley of Jehoshaphat named, but this passage is more known for verse 10, the reverse of Isaiah 2:4 which is disingenuously inscribed on the U.N. building. Here God mocks the nations by telling them they'll need every able body for their armies, but it will do them no good. In verse 13 we see another Revelation reference, from Rev. 14:19, about treading out the grapes of God's wrath. The cosmic disturbances are repeated after that, and it's all God's wrath against the nations who attack Israel. Then at last Israel will turn to God and their land will be blessed. You

may recall that the spring of water coming from the Millennial Temple in verse 18 was described in the later chapters of Isaiah.

## **Amos**

Amos begins with the crimes Damascus has committed. Though his people deserve what they get, God also judges those who come against them. Constable's Notes observes that the order of judgments is like a hawk circling its prey; the circles get smaller as the hawk descends. So Damascus, as representative of Syria, is in the outer ring of targets as God begins to home in on Israel.

As with Hosea, Amos will repeat a pattern for each group of people: List the crimes, justify the punishment, describe the punishment, and conclude the case. In other words, "This is what you did, this is why you must be punished, this is how you'll be punished, and this is the result of the punishment." But as you read along, you may notice in verse 15 a phrase often twisted to condemn those who pray for Jesus to return: "Woe to those who wish for the Day of the Lord!" What do such people do with passages like John 14:1-3, 2 Tim. 4:8, Heb. 9:28, and Rev. 1:7? If they actually kept things in context, they'd see that the Body of Christ looks forward to it because we'll be snatched up to heaven, while the wicked dread it because their time of judgment has come.

In particular, as we see in verse 21, God finds empty worship revolting, which is what Israel was doing—and many Christians also do. The wording here is that God is covering his ears and shouting "Shut up, make it stop!", because their wickedness in daily living couldn't be hidden by a few songs and rituals.

In ch. 6 God aims at the elite rulers of Israel, who were in denial of their wickedness and impending doom. Rather than being immune from the fate of the commoners, they would be the first taken into

exile, because they despised justice and showed no mercy to the poor.

In ch. 7 Amos pleads for mercy on Israel, and God relents from some of the judgments he had shown Amos. But God can't ignore their sins forever, since love protects victims against perpetrators, which Israel's ruling class and idolatrous population were. Then in verse 10 Amos is conspired against and accused of prophesying for — profit. But he had done nothing of the sort, so he boldly speaks doom to the king's face.

Ch. 8 goes back to general judgments on the nation, whose only thought during holy festivals was waiting for them to end so they could get back to profiteering and partying. The “sun going down at noon” in this context likely is an analogy of the kingdom falling when it thought it was at its zenith. The “famine” in verse 11 was, as stated there, a famine of divine revelation. God will eventually stop speaking to the wicked and to people who substitute religion for relationship. This happened to Israel in the time between Malachi and Matthew which lasted about 400 years.

Then it's back to judgments in ch. 9, where we see that trying to hid either from the love or the wrath of God is futile. But verse 11 is what James quoted in the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15: “In that day I will rebuild David's collapsed hut”. That day was still future to the early church, but the quotation there was to show that God had turned from Israel to the Gentiles for the time being. The book ends with the promise of the Millennial Kingdom.



# Obadiah through Haggai

## Introduction

Obadiah is the shortest book in the Old Testament, and the most difficult to pin down as to its date of writing. It focuses on Jerusalem and impending judgment on Edom, and is not referenced at all by the New Testament.

Jonah, a minor prophet mentioned in 2 Kings 14, is one of the more generally-known names in the Bible. But it isn't as much about prophecy as it is about Jonah himself, and the lesson we can learn from this incident concerning the thriving Assyrian city of Nineveh. He was the only prophet sent to a heathen nation with a message of hope if they turned from their sins.

Micah was another of the prophets to the southern kingdom of Judah, with emphasis on their violation of the covenant to which they had sworn. It comes in three separate messages and fits the familiar pattern of sin, warning, judgment, and mercy.

Nahum, like Jonah, was sent to Nineveh to pronounce judgment. But unlike Jonah, his message was of disaster without hope of mercy, because like Israel they had turned away from God.

Habakkuk, who lived before Israel's exile to Babylon, also wondered as Jonah had done why God wasn't yet dealing with wicked people, in this case those of Judah.

Zephaniah brought God's messages of judgment against Judah after the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel. The people had obeyed King Josiah's reforms, but their hearts remained the same, so they quickly reverted to their idolatrous ways.

Haggai was a prophet who brought a much more positive and pleasant message regarding the future Millennial Kingdom to the remnant returning from Babylonian captivity.

## **Obadiah**

This is a vision from God and written poetically as many prophecies are. It describes God's vengeance on nations because of the way they mistreated his people, even though, as we know the people deserved it. God points out that even robbers only take what they want, and harvesters leave some produce behind, but Edom had made sure that not a scrap was left of the people of Judah. They gloated over its demise and turned a blind eye to what others were doing to them as well. Because of this, God will not leave a scrap of their people, the descendants of Esau.

## **Jonah**

The book starts right off with a blunt, negative statement about Jonah's character. Instead of obeying God's command to inform the Ninevites of their impending doom, he runs the other way. So once he boards a ship to Tarshish, God sends a violent storm, and the sailors eventually figure out that it's Jonah's fault they were all about to die. So he confesses to what it says he had told them earlier anyway, and he finally offers to sacrifice himself so they won't die. They throw him into the sea, which immediately calms down, so they take the hint and worship Jonah's God.

Verse 17 is where the huge fish swallows him, which critics love to scoff at. But there are documented cases where others have survived similar circumstances, as noted in Constable's Notes, so this isn't any reason to reject the narrative here. He was there for three days and three nights, which Jesus cited in Mat. 12:39-41 as how long he'd be in "the heart of the earth". That passage makes it

clear that Jonah's account was not fiction, since the people of Nineveh will arise at the final judgment to condemn the generation that demanded Jesus' crucifixion.

We see in ch. 2 that while Jonah is still in the fish he prays to God and thanks him for saving him from drowning. I'm sure it wasn't a picnic in there, but he was grateful to be alive at all. Now some teach that he actually died and was resurrected because of verse 6, yet verse 7 negates that claim. Then at last he's spat out on dry land at God's command.

Jonah is finally ready to obey God in ch. 3, and he announces that God has given the people of Nineveh forty days to repent—which, unlike Israel, they did. But as we see in ch. 4, this seriously ticked off Jonah because he was hoping for the demise of these enemies of Israel, which is why he ran away in the first place. And that's the lesson for us; we often hope to see wicked people get what's coming to them, when we should be praying for them to repent and be saved, or we're really saying that Jesus didn't die for them. We need to leave the judgments and wrath to God.

So Jonah basically says "I told you so", and actually whines that he wants to die—because God is merciful! What follows is a rather comical account of aggravation for Jonah, because of this attitude of hoping to have a front-row seat to the show when God's wrath came down at last. But it was really a lesson for Israel and a foreshadowing of their fickle character as a nation. This little book ends abruptly with God reminding Jonah that compassion and mercy is what God longs to show to everyone, and judgment is his last resort.

## **Micah**

Micah begins with a poetic description of the day God returns to earth to deal once more with Israel's rebellion. But then in verse 12 it

includes other nations in the judgment, who had a hand in enticing them to commit idolatry.

In ch. 2 the focus returns to wayward Israel, who has been robbing the poor and oppressing the vulnerable. The modern world economy is actually designed to have that effect, since it's dependent upon ever-increasing debt. But the wicked still have the gall to be outraged that God would ever come back and sweep the world clean, because they see nothing wrong with what they do, and they're deluded enough to believe they're the only ones qualified to run the place. But again, as we see in verse 12, God will restore a remnant of his people, the few who actually heed warnings and acknowledge God's authority over them.

In the meantime, as we see in ch. 3, the arrogant leaders of Israel are warned not to think they're above suffering consequences for their corruption and their reversal of good and evil. Notice in verse 8 that Micah takes courage from God in spite of the message he's required to confront them with, as opposed to Jonah's attitude.

Ch. 4 turns to hope for the future Millennial Kingdom, and verse 3 is that famous statement about turning swords into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks. The Millennium will be free of war, pestilence, disease, and crime.

In ch. 5 it's back to the need to repent before disaster strikes, but immediately we see a very familiar passage quoted in Mat. 2:6, when the wise men from the east visited Herod to inquire about the sign of the one prophesied here in Micah. It's a clear Messianic prophecy, since it describes this One as having existed in the distant past, yet was still to come in the distant future. Rabbis over the years have claimed that since Jesus didn't fulfill this prophecy in the past, then he was not the Messiah. Yet they conveniently ignore or twist passages such as Isaiah 53 which speak also of the Messiah's mistreatment and death. The nation of Israel, as stated in verse 3, was to experience hardship until this 'birth' took place, but as we see

in hindsight, the restoration of Israel has been put on hold because they rejected him.

By the way, “the Assyrian” in verse 5 doesn’t mean the Antichrist will be of Syrian descent, as some prophecy teachers assert. By that point in the Millennium as the context indicates, there will be no Antichrist. Verse 10 goes on to say that “in that day” God will do away with the need for armies and weapons, but that requires that he first of all purge all the wicked people from Israel.

Ch. 6 begins a legal grievance God has against them, for how they’ve mistreated him in spite of how he’s blessed them. It’s in that context we see the familiar passage in verse 8 showing what God always wanted from them: justice, faithfulness, and loyalty. But he can’t ignore their rebellion or their victims forever.

Ch. 7 is a lament over all this, and in verse 6 we see what Jesus quoted in Mat. 10:35-36, only in that context he used it to show that truth is a divisive force between those who accept it and those who reject it, even in the closest of relationships. Then verse 8 points out the necessity of enduring punishment, but that when it achieves its purpose, those who repent will be vindicated and restored.

## **Nahum**

Nahum begins with the vengeance of God against the wicked, and his protection of those who trust in him. There is no hope for the people of Nineveh this time, and that’s pretty much the essence of the book.

## **Habakkuk**

God explains here that he’s raising up Babylon to execute punishment. But then Habakkuk asks how a more wicked nation can

be used to punish Israel. God's response begins in ch. 2, where he explains that they too would eventually be repaid for what they've done. In the mean time, he was to trust that God knows what he's doing, which he expected to be told at the end of this verse. Then in ch. 3 he describes God as beyond approach and thus worthy of our trust.

## **Zephaniah**

This book can be summed up as for Israel to sit still and wait for God to act. He will purge and purify his people so they can enter into his presence once again, this time with changed hearts rather than only changed habits. But again, God will also punish the wicked nations who give his people their well-deserved punishments. Then in 3:8 is a reminder to patiently wait for God to act.

## **Haggai**

Haggai first addresses the governor of Judah and the high priest, as a rebuke to the idea that it wasn't really time to rebuild Jerusalem after all. Things weren't going well, due to their shift of priorities from the Temple to their own houses, and we can all relate to the end of verse 6 about earning wages that are kept in bags with holes in them. The people's response begins in verse 12, after which God blesses them.

However, in ch. 2 God takes issue with the quality of materials they're using for the Temple, by asking if they think it comes close to the splendor of the original temple built by Solomon. Yet God will bless them anyway as long as their hearts are right. Even so, another more glorious temple would come someday, that being during the Millennium.

Verse 10 turns to a matter of ritual purity that the people were ignoring, which had resulted in sparse harvests. But now that they were improving, God would improve their harvests. The book ends with a section starting in verse 20 about Zerubbabel, who would be raised up as a type and shadow of the future Messiah.

# **Zechariah and Malachi**

## **Introduction**

Zechariah was a prophet/priest born in Babylonian captivity just before the return and restoration. So his message was for the remnant starting over in Israel, to motivate them to finish the job of rebuilding as a faithful nation.

Malachi seems to have been written after the Babylonian exile, but no one can say exactly how long after. He wrote to the returned exiles and warned them about their empty rituals and twisted logic.

## **Zechariah**

Zechariah begins by setting the backdrop to the prophetic messages, which is the history of Israel's unfaithfulness to God. They must repent before God can bless them, which we know he longs to do. God reminds them that his words have endured long past the people who kept rejecting them, and he had proved that he always did bless them whenever they repented. So the rest of the book will expound upon that basis.

The first vision is of four horses, which should immediately bring to mind the four horses of Revelation 6:1-8. But these aren't all the same colors. Rev. has white, red, black, and pale/green, while these are two red ones, one of mixed color, and a white one. The difference is due to their purpose here, which is stated in verse 10: to patrol the earth and report back to God. We can only speculate about the meanings of the colors, but red typically represented war, white meant peace, and the mixture probably stood for a transition between the two.



But why would God need patrols to inform him about the world? He wouldn't; but we, and even the angels, would. A good teacher sometimes gives assignments that make little sense to the student until the tasks are completed, and then the lesson is clear. So such things as this are for the benefit of angels and people. The horses had found the earth to be quiet and resting, so God responds that it was finally time for compassion and blessing, and for rebuilding Jerusalem and the Temple. In verse 18 is another vision, this time of four horns representing the nations who had been instruments of God's judgment against the people of Israel as a whole. Yet another set of four is given, this time of blacksmiths, who counter the horns and terrify them in defense of the land of Judah.

Another vision comes in ch. 2, of a man sent to measure Jerusalem as a surveyor would, which represents the first stage of restoration. He is told that the restored city would be much larger, and that God himself would be its walls. This of course pertains to the Millennial Kingdom, since it didn't come to pass in the late centuries b.c.

We see starting in verse 6 where God tells the people to run away from their captivity and toward the land of Judea. They're called "the apple (pupil) of God's eye" because they're the center of his attention, and anyone who touches them, even if Israel has deserved it, has touched God Himself. Again, this should serve as a warning for anyone, even Christians, who hate and wish to destroy the modern secular nation of Israel, thinking that God couldn't possibly have anything to do with them—as if anyone else can claim moral high ground.

Promises of blessing follow this, and then in ch. 3 is a vision of the current high priest standing next to Satan, who met with "the Angel of the Lord" to hurl accusations at the priest. Setting aside pointless speculation about whether this "angel" was an actual angel or the preincarnate Christ, he calls down God's rebuke on Satan. The priest's filthy appearance likely serves to symbolize the condition of Israel, whom Satan wanted to crush but God determined to

preserve. So his being cleaned up and dressed in fine clothing represents the forgiveness and restoration of the people and land. We see a clear Messianic prophecy in verse 8, with the familiar terms “servant” and “branch”. Likewise, the stone with seven eyes symbolizes the Messiah coming in his kingdom, and it is he who will cleanse the people from their sins.

Ch. 4 begins a vision of a menorah, flanked on either side by olive trees. So the scene presents a light that’s continually energized, since the oil of the olives is growing right beside the menorah. But before explaining, more symbols are given starting in verse 7. Zerubbabel, in the line of David, was the leader of the first group to return from exile. The “mountain” was the looming task of rebuilding, but this leader would conquer and level it. This “small beginning” was not to be taken lightly, because God was watching over it, as he does the whole world. So then Zechariah asks again about the two trees beside the menorah, and the answer comes in verse 14: They are “the two anointed ones who stand beside the Lord of the whole earth.”

Are these the “two witnesses” of Rev. 11:4, since they’re described identically in both passages? Constable’s Notes argues for them representing the high priest and governor at that time, but they certainly also have fulfillment in the future. There will be a temple during the tribulation as well, and the two witnesses will remain in Jerusalem. So if we look back to the first fulfillment we can know what to expect in the second, as was also the case concerning the Abomination of Desolation mentioned by the prophet Daniel.

Since at the time of this prophecy the trees represented priest and governor, we should expect the future “two witnesses” to do the same. Notice also that both here and in Revelation the grammar indicates a continuing state; that is, these two stand— not have stood or will stand— beside the Lord. But we don’t know if they had always stood there before the world was made, so we still can’t rule out Enoch, Elijah, or Moses.

Ch. 5 presents another vision, this time a negative one about a huge flying scroll (not to be confused with a flying squirrel!). Its size matched that of the Holy Place in the temple, and though the angel says it represents a curse flying over the whole *world*, it can also mean *the land*. This meaning fits the context, which indicates that it concerns the laws of Moses that Israel had broken.

The next vision starting in verse 15 is of a large basket for measuring grain that's going away. The angel adds that it's also "their eye throughout the earth", which refers back to the horses with that same task. But then a lead cover is lifted from the basket to reveal a woman symbolizing wickedness, which again has been used by many supposed Christian teachers over the centuries to paint all women as evil. Such teachers will not fare well at the judgment, and ironically, they're the ones who belong in that basket.

So the woman is pushed back down and the lead cover replaced. Then two other women appear, but these are representing servants of God who take evil away, which of course the misogynists ignore. They're portrayed as storks because their task is to carry the large, heavy basket. Zechariah is told that they're taking it to Babylon, where a temple was to be built for the wicked woman. Some say that since storks were unclean birds then they must represent evil. But as Constable's Notes points out, if they were evil they would have helped the woman escape the basket, and they were only "unclean" for the same reason any Israelite would be unclean if they had to "take out the trash". This is very much like the removal of the priest's filthy clothing in the earlier vision.

Ch. 6 begins yet another vision of another group of four, these being chariots coming from between two bronze mountains. Again, the four represent supernatural beings, and here they're called "the spirits of heaven". Notice also that each chariot is pulled by a particular color of horses, and this time the colors match those of Rev. 6. The ones pulled by black and then white horses were headed north, and the spotted or dappled ones south, but nothing is

said about the red ones. The point seems to be that they go out from Israel to the rest of the world. Then the report back from the ones that went north is that God's wrath had been completed and peace was achieved.

The text turns in verse 9 to instructions for Zechariah to put a golden crown on the head of the high priest. He is to be described in Messianic terms as a type and shadow, because he would rebuild and be honored as the future Messiah would ultimately do. He would co-rule with another priest, and everything would be fine— with the stipulation in verse 15 that they completely obey God. So this particular event will have conditional blessings, unlike the future fulfillment.

Ch. 7 turns to specific issues of the time, beginning with the problem of performing rituals only externally, and verse 8 is about their oppression of the poor and vulnerable. Ch. 8 turns to future blessings, followed by pleas from God for the people to live in justice and compassion.

Ch. 9 is given as an oracle against Damascus, but it's mostly about the blessings of the Millennial age for Israel. Yet verse 9 is where we also see a very familiar passage about the King who would come to Jerusalem riding on a donkey. Everyone agrees this is a Messianic prophecy, but of course the rabbis reject that Jesus fulfilled it. Riding into the city on a donkey indicated that a ruler came in peace, while riding on a horse indicated conquest. So we know that in Revelation at the end of the Tribulation, Jesus coming on a horse means he comes to conquer, to clean house.

Almost 2,000 years have passed so far between the first and second advents of the Messiah, which no one of any prophecy view can rightly deny. This is yet another instance where Bible prophecy in a sentence or two can span quite a lot of time, in spite of no indication in the text that such a gap would take place.

After more about future blessings that continue into ch. 10, we see in ch. 11 a shift to remind Israel and the peoples around them of the consequences of their sin. 11:7 seems to be Zechariah talking about things he did in service to God, but it also is held to refer to the future ultimate shepherding of the Messiah. Likewise, all who are evil were, and will be, rejected from the land. And it's in verse 12 that we see what was referenced in Mat. 27:3 about thirty pieces of silver, including the money being thrown into the temple. In both instances, God is incensed at how little he's valued by his people.

Starting in verse 16, Zechariah was to play the role of a wicked and worthless shepherd, which is the antitype of Christ, and the literal meaning of Antichrist. This indicates that the Jews will accept a cheap substitute who will abuse and betray them. But notice in verse 17 a curse on the worthless shepherd, wishing for his right eye and right arm to be made useless. The eye symbolized vision or intelligence, while the arm symbolized strength and power. Some take it to mean the Antichrist will be blind in his right eye and have a withered right arm, but we can't be dogmatic about that.

Ch. 12 explains why it is that Jerusalem has been the focus of the world since modern Israel was born, against all reason. This should tell us we're on the cusp of "that day" when all these things will be fulfilled. There is no other explanation for Israel's survival as a nation, especially when it was attacked almost immediately after it formed. They are there in unbelief and have seven years of purging awaiting them, but woe to the nations that try to take matters into their own hands!

As you read through this passage, remember to pay attention to when it shifts from the beginning of the process to the end, since "that day" isn't a literal solar day but a period of time, specifically prophesied by Daniel as seven years. Look especially at verse 10, which says Israel will lament when they see God, whom they pierced, which is a clear reference to Jesus' crucifixion. Though at least one translation deliberately twists it to say "the one they

pierced” in an effort to make Jesus less than God, it’s an undeniable statement of his divinity.

After that come the events of ch. 13, the cleansing of the land and people of Israel. What verse 3 refers to is that during the Millennium evildoers will have to stay in the closet, but should any dare to come out, they will be put to death even by their own parents. This is what scripture means when it says Jesus will “rule with an iron rod”— the same Jesus the critics think is the opposite of the God of the Old Testament. Verse 7 turns back to the true Shepherd, and this passage is cited in Mat. 26:31 as applying to when Jesus sacrificed himself on the cross. Verses 8-9 are where we’re told that only one-third of Israel will survive and enter the Millennial Kingdom.

The final chapter in Zechariah, 14, gives more detail about a final battle to destroy Jerusalem, in which the city will fall and the people will be molested and plundered. The exile spoken of here may refer to the faithful who see the Abomination of Desolation and flee to safety for the second half of the Tribulation, while those who stay will be the victims of this assault.

After that, Jesus will return and touch down on the Mount of Olives, which will split in two and create a valley running east and west. The people fleeing through this new path are Israelites, presumably the ones who had been kept safe to the end of the Tribulation. This is the point where Jesus brings all his people from heaven back to earth, and then the luminaries of the sky will apparently melt together in a single day, which takes all the light away until evening — a strange time for light to begin. There is no mention of any “rapture” at this point. And we’ve read about the waters from the temple in our study of Ezekiel’s later chapters.

So the Millennial Kingdom will finally arrive, and Jesus will be the only king. The earth will be healed and the people of Jerusalem will finally have peace. The events described in verses 12-15 really look back to verse 3 where Jesus goes into battle. It describes in graphic

detail what will happen to the army that foolishly tries to fight him. Then it's back to the Millennium in verse 16, when there will be swift punishment for any nation that fails to worship God in Jerusalem. Those who reject future, literal prophetic fulfillment would be challenged to explain this passage.

## Malachi

Malachi takes the form of questions and answers, where God mocks each question and gives a sharp retort. It absolutely drips with sarcasm from God, not only against the common people but especially against the priesthood—which should be yet another cautionary tale for Christian leaders today. But instead of just describing the text, it will be presented here as a rant the way we might do today toward someone living in denial. But before we get started, just a minor note on verse 2, which some take as that God hates people from eternity past. It's simply saying that Esau despised the things of God, and the point in this context is that God extends his hand even to people who slap it away. So here we go, and this is God speaking to Israel.

I've always loved you. But you say, "Oh yeah? How?" Well here's how: I blessed wicked Esau, didn't I? But look at what you do, you priests: You offer me your leftovers in sacrifice and show me no respect. And you have the gall to say, "So? What's wrong with that? It's a sacrifice isn't it?"

Well, try that on your governor or your parents! How would you like to get cheap plastic gifts from people who say they care about you? And you know what? I can't stand your worship services anymore! Other people treat me with more dignity than you do! And you whine and moan about all this, like it's too much to ask.

And another thing, you priests: I'm about to take the guts of the animals you sacrifice and spread them on your faces, and you'll be hauled off to the dump with all the other waste. Priests are supposed to be role models, but you're all backstabbers who lead people into idolatry.

And another thing you do: You flood the altar with tears, because I stopped talking to you. And you have the nerve to ask why! But you do things like cheating on your wives, even though your ancestor Abraham never did such a thing. I hate it when you abuse your wives and then throw them away, just so you can have new ones!

But you keep yapping at me, and then you ask what you've done to wear me out! You even say that I approve of evil and don't care about justice, just because I haven't been quick to punish you. But be careful what you ask for, because I'm about to send a messenger to clear the way, and when he comes you won't like it one bit! He'll refine you like fire and skim off the dross to be thrown away. Then only real priests will be left. But I'll be the prosecuting attorney against the astrologers, the adulterers, the oath breakers, the exploiters, and the cold-hearted.

The only reason there'll be any of you left is because I keep the promises I made to your ancestors. You've been nothing but trouble, the lot of you! You need to return to me, yet you ask with fake innocence, "What do you mean, return? How can we return?"

I'll tell you how: Remember what the law says about you bringing a tenth of your crops and herds to the temple to feed the poor and those without land? You don't, and it's me you're robbing! Bring in everything you owe, and see if I won't open the portals of heaven to rain down so much blessing you won't have room for it all!

That's pretty much the end of the rant, so let's address the issue of "tithing". It was only for Israel under contract via the laws of Moses. It was not on wages but profits from the increase of crops and herds. You'll never hear a tithing sermon from the New Testament because it can't be done; they always base it on Malachi, which is targeted at Israel and not anyone else.

Now we're up to 3:16, where it says that the few who heeded God's rant formed a sort of community of their own, and God took notice. He promised that this minority would be greatly honored in the end times, when at last there will be an obvious difference between those who are faithful and those who aren't.



Finally, ch. 4 urges Israel to remember Moses, and adds that Elijah (someone in that prophetic office as stated in Luke 1:17) would appear before the terrible Day of the Lord. Constable's Notes points out that John denied being Elijah in John 1:21-23, but Jesus explained in Mat. 11:14 that he would have been the fulfillment of this prophecy had Israel accepted him. He was indeed the forerunner to prepare the way, but his ministry was cut short just as for the Messiah Himself. Jesus also said in Mat. 17:11 that Elijah would appear again, which gives support to one of the Two Witnesses being that final Elijah.

# The Gospels

## Background

The account of the Gospels is the eyewitness testimony concerning the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. It is written as history and as legal evidence, not as allegory. There are those who dismiss some parts of it as allegory simply because they have decided that miracles are impossible. But consistency would demand that they dismiss the whole Bible then, since there is little point in arguing about the content if it is mixed with fables or entirely composed of them. Such an approach has no grounds by which to distinguish true from false.

Neither are the Gospels (really, the whole Bible) to be dismissed due to alleged bias on the part of the writers. This charge could easily be brought against every historian of all time. Yet it is in comparing them that we get closer to the truth, and such a comparison has always upheld the Gospel writings as quality historical accounts according to the standards of the era. And who else would have written about Jesus anyway? The Romans could not have cared less. If a biography is to be written, it should be done by those who knew the person, and Jesus' enemies never produced evidence that these accounts were in error. So it should go without saying that we would not know much about Jesus outside of the New Testament; no one else had any motive to write in such detail about him.

The Greek word translated *gospel* simply means any sort of good news; context is required to know the details. Not every instance of the word in the New Testament means specifically that Jesus rose from the dead. We also see the phrase "the gospel of the kingdom", which refers to the kingdom offered to Israel throughout the Old Testament and fulfilled in Jesus. It should go without saying that all

instances of the word *gospel* before Jesus arose must refer to something other than that. When in Luke 17:21 Jesus told the Pharisees that the kingdom of God was right there among them, he referred to the fact that he, the King, was there to present the promised kingdom to Israel. It did not mean, as some teach, that any present or future kingdom was strictly spiritual rather than God keeping his promises of a literal, physical kingdom to Israel. God and his kingdom did not reside in the Pharisees in any way.

This is a roughly chronological commentary on all four Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The chronology will be based upon events rather than time of writing, though it is helpful in other ways to know this as well. The proposed ranges of dates have varied over the years, but the current general consensus seems to be that Mark was written in the late 40s a.d. to mid 50s, Luke was written around 62, Matthew was written around the mid 60s, and John was written around the 90s.

Concerning the chronology of events, we should note that the so-called synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke) likely shared many sources (eyewitnesses) in collecting their information. But it is only John who begins with a statement about Jesus before his incarnation, plainly stating that Jesus is God. Mark is thought to have been written for a primarily Roman audience, Matthew for a Hebrew audience, and Luke for a general Gentile audience (and Luke is widely considered to be a first-rate historian). John wrote more of a biography and focused on the miracles Jesus performed, and is noted for his lengthy quotation of Jesus' prayer and monologue at the Last Supper. Even so, there are times when John gives more precise chronological information than the other Gospels.

The most important thing to consider when attempting such a chronology is that we can only go by expressed statements of timing, not by where a given event appears in the text. We should also consider the fact that Jesus did a lot of traveling around the

area, such that saying he went from this place to that place doesn't necessarily mean it was the only, first, or last time he went. And a statement such as "after this" by itself does not tell us how long after.

As noted in John 2:13, Jesus first drove the merchants out of the temple compound near the Passover. Another festival is mentioned but not named in John 5:1, but it's possible that it is the same as the Passover in John 6:4, since all that transpires between the two references is the healing at the Bethzatha pool and Jesus lecturing the Pharisees about it. A third Passover is mentioned in John 11:55–12:1. These references need to be considered in determining the duration of Jesus' public service, which some believe could have been as short as one year and as long as three, though it would seem that the great number of things Jesus did (John 21:25) would indicate more than one year. Then by aligning events in John with the other Gospel writers, we can have some idea of when they occurred during that time. Please also see the detailed chart at [The Synoptic Gospel Parallels with John's Gospel](#). (*Disclaimer: This is not an endorsement of other content at that site.*)

The teachings of Jesus are examined separately, as the timing of the teachings is not critical beyond their immediate contexts. However, care will be taken to note timing as it relates to whether a teaching was given more than once.

## Outline

### Genealogy of Jesus

- **Legal** Mt. 1:1–17
- **Biological** Lk. 3:23–38

### Conception to Adulthood

- **John the Immerser** Lk. 1:5–25, 57–66
- **Jesus** Mt. 1:18–2:12, Lk. 1:26–38, 2:1–40

## **Preparation for Service**

- **Immersed by John** Mt. 3:13–17, Mk. 1:9–11, Lk. 3:21–22, Jn. 1:32–34 [implied]
- **Tested by the Adversary** Mt. 4:1–11, Mk. 1:12–13, Lk. 4:1–13

## **Gathering Disciples as Service Begins**

- **First Passover** Jn. 2:13
- **John in prison** Mt. 4:12, Mk. 1:14, Lk. 7:18–21, Jn. 3:24
- **Disciples called** Mt. 4:18–22, Mk. 1:16–20, 2:13–14, Lk. 5:1–11, 27–28

## **Teachings Begin and The Twelve are Chosen**

- **The Sermon on the Mount** Mt. ch. 5–7
- **Naming the Twelve** Mt. 10:1–42, Mk. 3:13–19, Lk. 6:12–16

## **Actions and Lessons**

- **Another festival** (second Passover?) Jn. 5:1 (6:4)
- **A question of Godhood during the Feast of Dedication** Jn. 10:22–38
- **Roman officer with great faith** Mt. 8:5–13, Lk. 7:1–10
- **Raising the dead** Mk. 5:35–43, Lk. 7:11–17, Jn. 11:1–44
- **John the Immerser needs reassurance** Mt. 11:1–10, Lk. 7:18–28
- **A rant against three cities** Mt. 11:20–24, Lk. 10:13–16
- **Seeds, sowers, and harvests** Mt. 13:1–43, Mk. 4:1–20, Lk. 8:4–15
- **Disciples sent out in pairs** Mk. 6:7–13, Lk. 9:1–6 (see also 10:1–12)

- **John the Immerser killed** Mt. 14:1–12, Mk. 6:14–29, Lk. 9:7–9
- **Feeding five thousand** Mt. 14:15–21, Mk. 6:35–44, Lk. 9:12–17, Jn. 6:1–14
- **A woman wins an argument with Jesus** Mt. 15:21–28, Mk. 7:24–30
- **Feeding four thousand** Mt. 15:32–39, Mk. 8:1–9
- **Peter's confession and objection** Mt. 16:13–23, Mk. 8:27–30, Lk. 9:18–21
- **The transfiguration** Mt. 17:1–8, Mk. 9:1–8, Lk. 9:28–36
- **The greatest** Mt. 18:1–5, 20:20–28, Mk. 9:34–37, 10:35–45, Lk. 22:24–27
- **Divorce** Mt. 19:1–12, Mk. 10:1–12
- **Mary the disciple** Lk. 10:38–42
- **Festival of Tents** (Feast of Tabernacles) **but Jesus goes secretly** Jn. 7:1–11
- **Festival of Dedication/Lights** (Hanukkah) **in winter** Jn. 10:22

## The Future

- **The destruction of the temple in the 1st century** Mt. 24:1–2, Mk. 13:1–2, Lk. 21:5–6
- **The unknown duration** Mt. 24:32–25:30, Mk. 13:28–37, Lk. 21:29–36
- **Birth pangs** Mt. 24:3–8, Mk. 13:3–8, Lk. 21:7–19
- **Persecution** Mt. 10:16–28, 24:9–14, Mk. 13:9–13, Lk. 12:11–12, 21:12–19
- **The days of Noah** Mt. 24:36–41, Lk. 17:26–37
- **False Christs** Mt. 24:23–28, Mk. 13:21–23, Lk. 17:23–25
- **Abomination** Mt. 24:15–20, Mk. 13:14–18, Lk. 21:20–22
- **The Great Tribulation** Mt. 24:21–22, Mk. 13:19–23, Lk. 17:30–37, 21:20–24
- **Christ returns** Mt. 24:29–31, Mk. 13:24–27, Lk. 21:25–28
- **Sheep and goats** Mt. 7:21–23, 25:31–46, Lk. 13:24–30

## The Final Week

- **Third Passover** Jn. 11:55–12:1
- **The triumphal entry** Mt. 21:1–11, Mk. 11:1–10, Lk. 19:28–44, Jn. 12:12–19
- **Jesus is anointed for burial** Mt. 26:6–13, Mk. 14:3–9, Lk. 7:36–50 (a separate incident), Jn. 12:1–8
- **Preparing the upper room** Mt. 26:17–19, Mk. 14:12–16, Lk. 22:7–13
- **The last supper** Mt. 26:20–35, Mk. 14:17–31, Lk. 22:14–38, Jn. 13:1–17:26
- **Jesus' discourse and prayer** Jn. 13:31–17:26
- **Gethsemane** Mt. 26:36–56, Mk. 14:32–52, Lk. 22:39–53, Jn. 18:1–11
- **Arrest and illegal trials** Mt. 26:57–27:10, Mk. 14:53–72, Lk. 22:54–71, Jn. 18:12–27
- **Trials by Pilate and Herod** Mt. 27:11–25, Mk. 15:1–15, Lk. 23:1–23a, Jn. 18:28–19:15
- **Jesus' execution** Mt. 27:26–56, Mk. 15:16–41, Lk. 23:23b–49, Jn. 19:16–37
- **Jesus' burial** Mt. 27:57–66, Mk. 15:42–47, Lk. 23:50–56, Jn. 19:38–42

## **Post-resurrection to Ascension**

- **Jesus' first appearances** Mt. 28:1–15, Mk. 16:1–11, Lk. 24:1–12, Jn. 20:1–18
- **Jesus appears to the other disciples** Mt. 28:16–17, Mk. 16:12–14, Lk. 24:13–44, Jn. 20:19–21:14
- **Final instructions** Mt. 28:18–20, Mk. 16:15–18, Lk. 24:45–49, Jn. 21:15–25, Ac. 1:1–8
- **Ascension** Mk. 16:19–20, Lk. 24:50–53, Ac. 1:9–11

## **Genealogy of Jesus**

The genealogies found in Matthew 1:1–17 and Luke 3:23–38 are claimed by some to be contradictory, but they are simply from two different perspectives. The two genealogies work together to establish the right of Jesus to claim fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets. Matthew traces forward from Abraham to Mary's husband Joseph and shows that Jesus is from the royal/legal line of David to establish his qualification as the Messiah and Descendant. Luke traces backward from Mary to Adam and finally to God. He only actually uses the word "son" when he says "Jesus, the son, so it was thought, of Joseph"; the rest of them only have "of". Luke is more focused on Mary in the early chapters and shows the genetic/blood line to establish his qualification as the God-Man, the Divine in human flesh.

## **Conception to Adulthood**

The earliest details are provided in the first chapter of Luke. Like Abraham and Sarah, the parents of John the Baptist were elderly and childless. So we see a connection between "the child of promise" (Isaac) and John the forerunner of Jesus, who was to come "in the spirit and power of Elijah". One marvels that his father Zacharias would be skeptical of the Messenger Gabriel's promise of a very special child, especially since he knew very well the circumstances regarding Abraham and Sarah. So there is no surprise at Zacharias' punishment for disbelief. He was described as righteous all his life, yet he could not believe a direct message from God until he was struck with being deaf and mute.

It was not until six months later that this same Gabriel was sent to Mary. But though she questioned him, she did not doubt him; she simply did not understand how this would work, rather than disbelieving. As for her virginity, this is indisputable from the context. The Greek word is not limited to mean virginity, but Mary's question leaves no room for doubt that this was true in her case. So regardless of how anyone might render the word, it is clear that



Mary would conceive without the involvement of a man. It is this lack of a human father, not whether Mary was a virgin, that is of the utmost importance regarding Jesus, as shown in the discussion of his genealogy.

But who exactly was Jesus' father? Luke says the Messenger told Mary that "the Holy Spirit will come upon you" and also "the power of the Highest will envelope you". Since not only "the Father" was involved but also the Holy Spirit, all we can say for sure is that it was not Jesus himself. What we should deduce from this is that distinctions among the members of the Trinity are not as precise and definable as we might prefer. Instead, the terms Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are likely more of a convenience for human understanding than anything else, such that deriving theological teachings from them is probably unwise.

While we are not told the reason for John's name, we are told this for Jesus. Matthew 1:20–25 tells us that Jesus means "one who saves his people from their faults", but that he would also be called Emmanuel, meaning "God is with us". Notice that it says "they" would give him this name; it does not say this was his formal, legal name. As for Joseph, he too was visited by a Messenger, who confirmed not only the name Jesus but also that Mary had indeed been faithful. Referencing the genealogy again, note that the Messenger greets Joseph as "descendant of David".

Luke goes on to elaborate on the time from conception to birth, including lengthy quotes of the joyful expressions of Zacharias, Elizabeth, and Mary. All three, along with the reactions of others, paint a very clear picture of extraordinary circumstances, not the least of which is the strong confirmation of Jesus as much more than a prophet or human deliverer. John is described as the forerunner and prophet, while Jesus is the royal king, all before either of them had done anything.

Luke also tells us of the circumstances which led to Mary and Joseph being in Bethlehem for Jesus' birth. It was during "those days" when Augustus made everyone travel to their hometown to be registered. Whether or not this can be corroborated by secular history with certainty, we do know that census-taking was very common at the time, and that governors and other rulers often ruled more than once, or took the name of a prior ruler. Even so, the absence of such data hardly disproves the Bible, as it is a historical record in its own right, and there is no secular data to conflict with it.

Another fact given by Luke is that there was no room available for Mary and Joseph, which is understandable given the requirement for people to return to their hometowns. But they were not reduced to staying in a stable. It was common for houses of the time to take in some of their animals at night, so the presence of a feeding trough does not require the location to be a stable. Some also take the strips of cloth with which Jesus was wrapped as burial cloths, but the Greek word referred to typical baby clothing as well. So while conditions were certainly not ideal for giving birth, they were not as crude as tradition has had it. Luke also mentions shepherds, who only watched their flocks all night during breeding seasons. These were typically in the fall but might also occur in the spring, which helps to determine the time of year when Jesus was born.

We can also consider the fact that Zacharias, in the Abia priestly division, would only have served during Pentecost, which is seven weeks after First Fruits. So the time of year of the announcement about John was probably late spring. But the conception was an unknown time following this, though not likely a long time. So a reasonable estimate would be around the end of June. Nine months later (end of March) would mark the time of John's birth. And since Elizabeth was in her sixth month at the time Mary conceived, John was six months older than Jesus. Then we calculate six months after John's birth to find Jesus' birth, which would be the end of September. Thus Jesus was likely born in the fall, possibly in the spring, and certainly not in the winter or summer.

It is possible, then, that the sign of Jesus' birth was given during the Feast of Trumpets, and the birth itself was during the Feast of Tabernacles (John 1:14 says that the Word "tabernacled" [pitched a tent] among us.) As for the year, there are many theories but the majority of scholars believe it to have been between 4 and 1 B.C. And the sacrifice Mary and Joseph brought after Jesus was circumcised was that specified for the poor, yet they would not always be poor; the visitors from the east would bring very valuable gifts fit for a king.

Luke also provides for us the accounts of Simon and Anna, the latter of whom had been serving in the temple most of her life. While both had been given prophetic messages about the Christ, we should note that Anna had a position in the temple performing divine service. So here Luke considers it important to mention a woman, and a leading spiritual woman at that.

For most of the remaining information about this period of time, we turn back to Matthew. This is the infamous matter of Herod and his paranoia about a possible rival or threat to his power. The official advisors (trad. Magi), whose business it was to know the movements of the stars, had seen a specific sign in them that led them to Jerusalem. Though speculation on the nature of that sign or star is beyond the scope of this commentary, we might at least wonder how these people knew about it and what it meant. One theory is that Daniel, who had much influence and power in Babylon, had taught people the ways of God and informed them of this prophecy.

But of course the focus here is on Herod, who tried to use the official advisors in order to track Jesus down and kill him before he could grow up. This is why he flew into a rage and killed all children two years and younger when he found out the advisors had been warned not to report back to him. This also tells us that the advisors did not arrive immediately after Jesus was born, but as much as two years later. Further, we do not know how many advisors there were,

and the list of gifts they brought to Jesus is a sample, not a precise accounting. Also, we are told that they worshiped Jesus, which is yet another indication of his deity.

As for Joseph being warned to run away from there with his family, some may cite the quite ordinary circumstances of Herod's actions as proof that God had nothing to do with this. But they should consider the fact that the Christ was predicted very far in advance, and Herod of all people certainly did not want Jesus to fulfill the prophecy. Not all prophecy is something directly caused by God; in fact, most of it could be classified under this "ordinary circumstances" category. So as a general principle of prophecy, it seems that its purpose is to only be fully understood after it has been fulfilled and we can look back at the prediction. This makes fulfilled prophecy all the more impressive, since anybody could predict an event that they caused.

Now we return to Luke to fill in what little detail is recorded about the years Jesus grew up. Toward the end of chapter two we are told that the family was in the habit of attending the Passover each year, and that at the age of twelve Jesus unofficially began his career of befuddling the religious leaders. And though today we might tend to classify as rebellion his decision to leave his parents wondering where he was for three days, there was certainly no such rebellious intent on his part. As for speculation that Jesus had gone to India to learn from gurus, there is not one shred of evidence to support the claim. The people of his hometown knew that he had not been formally trained and rejected him for that reason. And as he said himself, he was sent to "the lost sheep of Israel", not the world at large, and he had no need of gurus.

## **Preparation for Service**

The account of the public service of Jesus, as with his birth, begins with his relative John. Luke gives the most detail about timing, citing

no less than five names of rulers and the year of one of them, plus the names of two priests. Details like these show the writer's invitation to scrutiny; that is, there is no intent to deceive, as some accuse the writers of the New Testament. Not much is said about John's growing up, beyond the requirements of not drinking wine, not cutting his hair, and that he would be filled with the Holy Spirit from the start. At the time he began immersing people, he is described as living alone in the desert, wearing the crudest clothing and living on a diet of wild honey and insects.

His message was simple: essentially, people were to confess their sins and turn from them, so they would be prepared for the coming of the Christ. The act of immersion ("baptism" is a transliteration of a word meaning to submerge or dip) was common at that time for a variety of reasons, not all of them religious or spiritual. It was a symbolic act, not a magical act, and a public declaration. And in the case of the Pharisees who came just for show, John knew this and sent them away to first do what the ritual symbolized: have a change of heart/mind. If anyone needed to change it was the Pharisees, yet John did not hesitate to offend them. Saying the words and playing the part were not to be tolerated out of a misguided sense of acceptance and love, or a fear of turning away potential converts.

We see in John's words (Mat. 3:10–12) a contrast between the immersion he performed with water, and the immersion to be performed by Jesus with fire. Of course the water was literal, but it is just as clear that the fire was figurative, though referring to the literal Holy Spirit. His point was that the latter would replace the former, but it would not happen suddenly or immediately. As shown in the book of Acts, there was a period of transition, a shift from an all-Hebrew community of believers to that of Gentiles as well. Customs and habits take time to change.

When Jesus finally came to be immersed himself, John's objection in light of the fact that his immersion was different surely contributed to his being puzzled by the request. And the answer Jesus gave was

basically, “Just do it, even though it makes no sense right now”. So in this we see that Jesus was hardly establishing a rite or ordinance for all who would follow him, since it was already common practice for many people. And it was at this point that the voice from heaven and the Holy Spirit confirmed Jesus as the Christ (John 1:33–34), which also shows all three members of the Trinity at once and as distinct entities. This is one of the clearest portrayals of God as a trinity rather than one God playing three roles.

Then it was Jesus’ turn to live in the desert for a while, but without the food and with the Adversary himself putting him through a test. John says nothing about this and Mark says very little, so the details of this testing are found in the accounts of Matthew (4:1–11) and Luke (4:1–13). The first test was an attempt to get Jesus to prove himself, though of course the Adversary already knew who Jesus was. But with Jesus in a state of weakness due to extreme hunger, he thought he had a chance by means of something we all fall prey to: a dare to prove how spiritual or godly we are (“If you were really a Christian, you would...”).

Another test (Mat. and Luke have this and the next one in opposite order) was an appeal to instant power, by offering Jesus the kingdoms of the world in exchange for worshiping him. The Adversary apparently thought that he could get Jesus to take a shortcut to what would eventually be his anyway. But Jesus did not challenge his right to offer this, and it would have been a ridiculous test unless the Adversary really did have dominion over all the great cities and powers of the world. Other passages (2 Cor. 4:4, Eph. 6:12) support this as well.

The other test mentioned was for Jesus to throw himself off the highest point of the temple, again to prove who he was, using scripture as always. But though Jesus did always respond with scripture, the lesson for us is that we must use it all, and not fall for partial or out-of-context arguments (see Prov. 18:17). This tactic is used continually as a trap for Christians, either by partial quotations

or just poor reasoning. Logic and discernment are not the enemies of spiritual growth and truth, though the Adversary keeps using this ploy against us with great success.

## **Gathering Disciples as Service Begins**

The gospel of John gives additional detail of what Jesus did after his testing. In fact, everything after John 1:14 probably took place after Jesus was immersed, since in vs. 32 John the Immerser speaks of that event in the past tense. The “next day” of vs. 35 is in reference to when John made that statement, not when the immersion took place. And given the following statement about “the third day”, it also must have been after Jesus was tested, since the other Gospels indicate that Jesus went “immediately” into the desert for 40 days before his testing. Notice also the use of translation by the apostle John, which indicates that he was explaining Hebrew terms to Greek readers.

On “the third day” Jesus was invited to the wedding in Cana, where his mother got him to perform a miracle before he had intended to do such things. As a side note about the wine itself, it seems obvious that the wine was alcoholic, since the master of ceremonies mentions drunkenness. This also relates to the requirement for his relative John not to drink wine. And after this, not only his disciples but also his mother and siblings were with him, just before the Passover (John 2:12). This tells us that this particular Passover was not the one when Jesus was to die, thus helping to establish the length of time of his public service.

It was during these few days that Jesus began to have disciples following him. But note that at this time they came to him first, rather than Jesus coming to them. The only one he actually called at this time was Philip (John 1:43); everyone else came by word of mouth. But there were two instances of Jesus acquiring disciples, and these help determine when John the Immerser was arrested for criticizing

Herod, who had illegally taken his brother Philip's wife (Mat. 14:1–5, Mark 6:17–18, Luke 3:18–20):

- Mat. 4:12–17 — John the Immerser arrested, then Jesus goes to Galilee, then from Nazareth to Capernaum, then the seaside where he calls Simon, Andrew, James, and John
- Mark 1:14–15 — John the Immerser arrested before Jesus calls those four by sea of Galilee
- Luke 7:18–21 — Implies that John may have already been arrested, and it was in Luke 5:9–11 that the four were called (the sea there is called Gennesaret, which is the same sea as Galilee)
- John 3:22–24 — John the Immerser had not yet been arrested after Jesus spoke with Nicodemus, and there is no mention of the calling by the sea

Note also that neither of the two instances of Jesus acquiring disciples was the same as the third, formal calling of the Twelve in Mat. 10:1–4, Mark 3:13–19, and Luke 6:12–16. And the ease with which the four left their fishing business is best explained by the fact that this was not their first encounter with Jesus. So we can be fairly confident that whatever happened before John the Immerser was arrested also happened before the four disciples were called away from their fishing business. With that chronological marker established, we can proceed to examine everything else that took place during the time between Jesus' testing and his calling the other disciples besides Philip to follow him.

Luke chapter 4 tells us that Jesus began to travel around to the synagogues to announce the Gospel of the kingdom of God (Mark uses the term "kingdom of the heavens"). Of course, this was not the Gospel of Jesus' resurrection, since that had not yet taken place. This passage agrees with Mat. 4:12–17 that Jesus started out in Galilee, and then went to his hometown of Nazareth. This is where he read from the writings of Isaiah about things being fulfilled at the time, and where the people he grew up with took offense at



him. As a result he moved away from there and settled instead in Capernaum, where unlike Nazareth, the people had enough faith to be healed of their illnesses and demonic oppressions.

John adds much more detail for this period of time. Picking up at the point where Jesus was in Capernaum with his mother and siblings (no mention of his father Joseph anymore, so we can assume he had died), John 2:13 begins the account of Jesus expelling the merchants from the temple. Though the other Gospels have such an incident occurring near the end of Jesus' public service, there is no reason it couldn't have happened twice. There is also no mention of the Pharisees vowing to kill Jesus afterwards, as is the case in the other Gospels, which would be explained by the fact that Jesus had not yet said and done much to provoke them. And only John mentions the use of a whip in the incident.

John also tells us in chapter 3 of the meeting with Nicodemus. This is the source of the phrase "born from above", which Nicodemus took to mean the need to be born a second time, hence the phrase "born again". Though some controversy has raged over what Jesus meant by being born of both water and Spirit, the context seems clear enough that he was simply contrasting natural, physical birth with supernatural, spiritual birth; there is no hint of the common rite of water immersion there. His reference to the Spirit being as unpredictable as the blowing of the wind is taken by some to mean salvation is purely by the Spirit's choice (so-called "Unconditional Election"), but again the context shows that Jesus simply used the wind to explain the invisibility of the spiritual realm. Jesus' famous words in John 3:14–18 also establish the fact that salvation is by freely-exercised personal faith, and that condemnation is for disbelief rather than not being chosen by the Spirit.

After the encounter with Nicodemus, we read that John was still immersing people, and that the disciples of both him and Jesus began to quarrel over who was immersing the most (as the apostle John points out, Jesus never immersed anyone himself but had his

disciples do it). This incident shows that even before there were “churches” as tradition has had it, people were “counting nickels and noses” in some kind of contest to prove who was following the greatest leader. And when Jesus found out about this, he left the area. Let the reader speculate on what this may imply.

Having left there, Jesus passed through Samaria on his way to Galilee, which would make the following incident likely to have taken place before the four disciples were called. The apostle John (referred to from here on out simply as John, since not much else transpires with John the Immerser until his death) gives us an account of a Samaritan woman that would make no sense to include, had he been fabricating any of this. For a Jew to speak so extensively about a woman, and without condemnation especially of a promiscuous Samaritan, is yet another indication that the writers of the Gospels were giving unbiased and faithful reports.

But perhaps even more surprising is what Jesus told her: that the time had come for people to worship God “in spirit and truth” rather than in a holy place. This, told to a Samaritan woman of all people, was nothing less than the blueprint for the coming Congregation. This was a radical departure from the temple and priesthood, the Law and the rituals, that all faithful Jews honored, as well as from all organized religions of all time. As he would say later on (Mat. 18:20), “where two or three have gathered on my account, there I am with them”. He would also later say that he came to fulfill the purpose of the Law and the Prophets (Mat. 5:17–19) and to serve as a priest of a new order (Heb. 5:6), and “when there is a change of priesthood, there must be a change of law” (Heb. 7:12). Yet he himself still had to fulfill them and practice the law perfectly, so his being a practicing Jew does not mean that his followers of all time would also have to practice Judaism.

We should not overlook the fact that this woman, despised even among her own people, was not ignored or told to be silent. Spreading the news about the Christ was a message not considered

defiled by the person who proclaimed it. She gave a fearless testimony among people who looked down on her, and they listened and investigated her report. At the very least, this should teach us that we must not judge by appearances, nor shun the truth depending on who speaks it. Surely God is more concerned with the message than the messenger.

As Jesus was traveling around during this time, his encounters with the Pharisees became more frequent. In one incident (Luke 5:36–39) he gave the illustration of the wineskins. The immediate context was in response to the Pharisees' demand to know why Jesus' disciples did not fast, but it also illustrates a general principle: that Jesus came to do much more than die for sins. As he told the Samaritan woman, something radically new was coming, and here he indicates that it could not be mixed or meshed with the old ways.

## **Teachings Begin and The Twelve are Chosen**

The calling of Simon/Peter, Andrew, James, and John was after the incident where Jesus told Peter and Andrew to put out their nets and they caught a very large amount of fish (Luke 5:4–11). The notable thing about these selections is that Jesus did not go to the synagogues, temple, or priesthood for them, but to the working world of ordinary people (and as later events would prove, not exactly the brightest people). So between this and the account of the Samaritan woman, we see that Jesus was in the habit of choosing those who, even today, would be overlooked by many Christian leaders.

After various accounts of miraculous healings, Matthew chapters 5 through 7 tells us that Jesus gave a long talk known as The Sermon on the Mount. But note that it was given to his disciples, rather than to the large crowd. And though they would form the basis for the coming Congregation, we must remember that Jesus is still speaking to Hebrews under the Law, before any concept of a new

Congregation. Certainly the principles apply universally, but we must be careful not to become legalistic. Key points would include the following:

- The Beatitudes (“happy/blessed are...”) should not be taken as a technical list of specific rewards for specific virtues or qualities, but as the general concept that whatever is suffered in this life for good reasons will be resolved and rewarded in the next.
- Some negative points omitted by Matthew are found in Luke 6:24–26. While blessings are promised to the righteous, curses are promised to the unrighteous. As with statements such as “the first will be last” (Mat. 20:16), Jesus teaches that the tables will be turned in the next life.
- The purpose of salt and light is to spread out everywhere, not be kept in a container or neutralized. But tradition has made Christianity more of a container than a dispenser, encouraging people to bring the lost to them instead of going out to the lost. Society was to be influenced, enlightened, and savored by Christians mingling among people and bringing the Gospel with them on a daily and individual basis. The Gospel of this particular time, however, was not the future resurrection of the Christ but the coming of the kingdom of God. This is the primary application of what Jesus says in this Sermon.
- Jesus’ famous statement in Matt. 5:17–19 about the Law and the Prophets refers to the Torah. Yet the end result of dismantling or fulfillment is the same; a fulfilled contract is no longer in force. This may be what Jesus meant when he would say on the cross that everything is accomplished, since his stated purpose here is to fulfill it all. We are told in Gal. 3:15–18 that the Law was like a “last will and testament”, and such a document is no longer in effect once its conditions are met. This does not mean that it was destroyed but that its purpose had been accomplished and it was no longer needed.
- Matt. 5:20–22 is where Jesus emphasizes the purpose of the commandment to not murder, which is to not even hate anyone

enough to murder them. Some take his statements as a strict law against name-calling, but it seems that the intent here is to simply clean up the heart and the actions will follow, a core principle of the Law.

- The thrust of Matt. 5:23–26 is that someone has a case against you, not that they simply are upset with you. We cannot control other people's feelings, nor are we liable for any and every charge they may make. It is only when we know we have done wrong and the other person has a valid complaint against us that we must resolve the issue before daring to approach God.
- The statement in Matt. 5:27–30 about lust and adultery, as well as cutting off a body part that causes us to sin, is related to the one about hate and murder in that the heart is the key. Clearly Jesus is not saying anyone should literally remove such parts, since they are not the problem; one would have to cut out their heart (mind) instead. But note especially the fact that Jesus blames sin on the sinner, not the temptation. Temptation is certainly a sin all its own, and the one who tempts will be held to account (Matt. 18:7). But the sinner is also guilty and cannot pass blame; if we sin, it is our own fault, and we must accept responsibility.
- Matt. 5:31–32 is Jesus' famous statement about divorce. But as with the one bringing a gift to God who has a valid charge against them, so also there must be a valid reason for divorce. Jesus is not saying that all divorce is wrong except for adultery, but that there must be some legitimate fault on the part of the one being divorced. It was all too easy for men to send their wives away for any or no reason, leaving them destitute and shamed. Jesus will elaborate on this further when the question is put to him by the Pharisees (Mat. ch. 19, Mark ch. 10).
- As for swearing oaths (Matt. 5:33–37), this is another topic on which Jesus would elaborate at a later time (Matt. 23:16–22). But in this case there seems to be no reason to limit or qualify his prohibition (see also James 5:12). Yet at the same time, an oath imposed on us by others (such as to tell the truth in a court of law) is something even Jesus would eventually do during the

trial before his crucifixion. Paul also took an unnamed vow (Acts 18:18), but we do not know what this involved. At the very least, we can say that oaths/vows should be avoided if at all possible, since what matters is our intent and honesty.

- The well-known teaching about “turning the other cheek” in Matt. 5:38–42 is not a command to become a doormat or punching bag. The Greek words refer to taking an adversarial stance, as in trying to settle the score. Under Roman law, such reactions would only invite further trouble and justice would never be seen anyway; today we might equate it with resisting arrest. Yet again, even Paul stood up for his legal rights (Acts 16:35–37). So essentially Jesus is teaching that people should be good citizens, even when the state is evil. However, Jesus is clearly not teaching us to be passive victims of any violence anyone might use against us.
- The section about loving enemies in Matt. 5:43–48 means exactly that: loving them, not affirming and enabling them. This is the other side of the earlier statement about not hating others. To take this in isolation and ignore other commands that tell us to be separate from the world is to turn love into treason or unfaithfulness. After all, not even God affirms and accepts his enemies but rebukes them and will punish any who refuse to repent, even though he loves them enough to give them a chance to change their minds (see Rev. 3:19).
- In chapter 6 of Matthew, Jesus warns against showing off in order to appear pious and holy. This includes prayer, which even today is often a chance for someone to display their eloquence and oratorical skill. And the model Jesus gave (“the Lord’s Prayer”), right after warning against endless repetition, is ironically repeated word-for-word in churches around the world. The idea is rather to pray as one would speak to a respected parent. As for God forgiving us, he forgives those who turn away from sin, and he will treat us the way we treated others. (See also Mat. 18:21, 31, Mark 11:24–26, and Luke 6:36–38.)
- Mat. 6:19–34 is about materialism and focusing on the eternal rather than the temporal. Jesus certainly is not advocating that

we never plan ahead, or live in houses, or work for our food. Rather, the point is not to make such things the focus of our life. Our priority is to be the eternal kingdom of God, such that the world and its worries and distractions will no longer rule our lives.

- But the controversy returns in chapter 7, beginning with the passage about judging (Mat. 7:1–5). As with other issues in this Sermon, one must not leap to absurd extremes as so many do with this matter. We certainly are to make many judgments, to discern and weigh and test. So we are not to turn “do not judge” into a free pass for sin and evil. By the context Jesus gives here, the intent is that we judge fairly and rationally; he did not say to ignore the splinter in the other person’s eye but first to make sure we are not using a double standard.
- As for not “throwing pearls to pigs” (Mat. 7:6), note that both these animals were known to “bite the hand that feeds them”, so the implication seems to be that we must not keep offering the Gospel to those who are hostile it. We should note that Jesus never spoke kindly to the Pharisees, and that John the Immerser refused those who came without a change of heart/mind.
- Mat. 7:7–12 is yet another commonly-misused scripture. Many people think that it means God will not and cannot refuse any request we make, but that isn’t what Jesus said at all. In context, he said that since we flawed human beings know how to give, then surely our Father in heaven knows how as well. What it all boils down to, as Jesus said, is that we treat others as we hope they will treat us, with God as our model for how to be kind and merciful.
- Was Jesus saying in Mat. 7:13–14 that only a few people would ever be saved? There is no direct word for “salvation” there, but “the road to life” could be taken to mean the same thing. Yet the countless multitudes of souls in heaven as reported in the Revelation should at least make us use caution in defining “few”.

- The last topics in the Sermon (Mat. 7:15–27) are all closely related: false prophets, fake believers, and those who fail to put words into action. As our more modern saying goes, “Actions speak louder than words”. But some take this to mean that words are irrelevant; they claim that doctrine is to be discarded in favor of deeds. Yet this can only be learned through doctrine, after all, so both are needed. Jesus did not say that we need no teachings, but that his teachings must be put into practice. But who are the ones Jesus will say he did not know, since they were doing all the right things? The key here is “what my Father wants”, which is all he’s been saying in this Sermon. More detail is given in the related passage of Mat. 25:41–46, where Jesus explains that the good deeds of the rejected were done selectively; that is, the lowly and truly needy were ignored.

In summary, the Sermon’s core message is that our motives are at least as important as our actions, and that our actions should be modeled after God’s actions.

Jesus then selected from among the disciples an inner circle who would be known as the Twelve (beginning Mat. 4:18, Mark 1:16, Luke 5:8). The word typically rendered “apostles” refers to people sent out or commissioned for a purpose. The most important factor is the one doing the sending, not the ones sent. So the reason the Twelve were significant is not that they were commissioned, but by whom they were commissioned. This is critical to our understanding of why only some apostles could write scripture and teach with authority on Jesus’ behalf. Everyone else is taught by other people, not directly by Jesus personally as were the Twelve. The lone exception was Paul of course, who was not part of the Twelve but was trained personally by Jesus (Gal. 1:11–12). (Some argue that it was supposed to be Paul rather than Matthias to replace Judas (see Acts 1:26). But the qualifications for replacing Judas included having been with Jesus during his entire earthly ministry (Acts 1:20–22) and being a witness of Jesus’ resurrection, which Paul was not.)



## **Actions and Lessons**

The charge that would eventually get Jesus arrested and condemned by the religious leaders was his claim to be God. In John 10:22–38 Jesus is about to be stoned for this claim, but he disarms them by using their own scripture-twisting on them: He quotes a scripture that legally gets him off the hook. Yet that quotation (“Have I not said you are ‘gods’?”) is often taken out of context to argue that Jesus said everyone was a god. But clearly the Pharisees were using the claim to be God as a crime worthy of death, so Jesus simply reminded them that such a claim by itself could not be enough for a conviction. This was actually a similar tactic to those used by the Adversary when he tempted Jesus in the desert. And one way to prevent such tactics being used on us is to know the context in every case. This one clearly does not show Jesus teaching that everyone is a god, but only that Jesus was quite capable of using the weapons and tactics of his enemies against them.

One familiar incident mentioned in Mat. 8:5–13 and Luke 7:1–10 (John 4:46–54 is very similar but probably a separate incident) is of the Roman officer whose servant was dying, yet he of all people had enough faith to know that Jesus could heal without having to go and touch the sick person. This emphasizes the importance of both faith and the object of faith. Yet it seems that only Jesus could heal at a distance, as there are no recorded cases where any of his disciples did so.

But of course the most impressive of Jesus’ miracles was raising the dead. There were at least three incidences: Luke 7:11–17 (a widow’s only son), Mark 5:35–43 (Talitha), and John 11:1–44 (Lazarus). Yet the question arises as to whether these people died again. Some would cite Heb. 9:27 to say that since people only die once then they could not die again. But the scriptures also state that Jesus would be the “firstfruits” among those who rise. It seems indisputable as well that Jesus was the first to have an immortal body after rising (1

Cor. 15:42–55). So without any evidence that these other dead were given immortal bodies, we must assume that they died again of natural causes. But this does not necessarily contradict Heb. 9:27, since not everyone will even die once (Enoch, Elijah, and the living mentioned by Paul in 1 Cor. 15:50–52). In context, the Hebrews statement is being used as an illustration for explaining why Jesus would only have to die once and not repeatedly.

It is after the raising of the widow's son where Luke tells us of the question sent to Jesus by John the Immerser (Mat. 11:1–10 and Luke 7:18–28). We can only speculate as to the motivation for this question, but note that Jesus seemed to do many healings just for the purpose of showing John's disciples what had been going on. Then he proceeded to confirm to the crowd that John was indeed the prophesied forerunner. So it may well be that John was having doubts, but it may also be that Jesus said and did all of this mostly for the benefit of John's disciples.

Jesus gave two parables using seeds and soil. One was where a farmer scattered seeds, which landed in various places. Though there is disagreement over the meaning of the story in spite of Jesus explaining it to his disciples, the clear focus is not on the seeds or the sower but on the soil. The disagreement comes over whether Jesus is saying that salvation can be lost, but remember the context: there was as yet no Congregation since Jesus had not yet died and arisen. Jesus defines the seed as “the message of the kingdom”, which was the message he was bringing to the Hebrews; it was the kingdom they would ultimately reject. So he refers to those who were already accepting him as the Christ. It can certainly be applied to the post-resurrection Congregation as well. But since that was not the primary purpose of the illustration, we should not argue over whether it applies to salvation by faith in the risen Jesus.

The other lesson was about wheat and fake wheat (trad. wheat and tares). This one is a long-range illustration, since Jesus ended it with a reference to the harvest at the end of the age (Mat. 13:39).

Though the same “kingdom” terminology is used, the eventual inclusion of the Gentiles in that kingdom is clearly taught in both Testaments. There is one kingdom of God, but it includes “provinces” such as the righteous before the Flood, from the Flood to Abraham, from Abraham to Jesus, from Jesus to the post-grace time of the final phase of Daniel’s prophecy, and during the Millennium.

The purpose of any analogy or object lesson is not to make every detail meaningful but to teach a central lesson. In both cases, the point is that there will be a separation between true and false, faithful and unfaithful, saved and lost. This depends not on the message but on the recipient; each of us decides whether we are good or poor soil, genuine or fake wheat. Giving undue attention to minor details in order to support a theological position misses the point entirely.

This principle of looking for the intended point can be applied as well when we derive lessons from what Jesus did or had his disciples do. When he sent out many of them into the various towns, giving explicit instructions about what they must do and what they must not take with them, we err if we try to apply this to all Christian living. Jesus was not teaching that every Christian would need to give up all possessions, demand free food and lodging for preaching the Gospel, and literally shake the dust from their feet if a town rejected them. As he said himself in Mat. 15:24, he was sent to “the lost sheep of Israel”. This hardly means that he would not also be the savior of the Gentiles (1 Tim 4:10), but that most of what he did was primarily for the Hebrews and not the world at large. So to apply the sending out of the seventy(two) to Christianity would be to ignore this important aspect of context.

John the Immerser may have technically been a wild man living in the desert, but he also stood up to confront public officials on matters of morality. This is something Jesus never did and never taught anyone to do, yet there is no rebuke for this action; rather,

Jesus only cautioned him, when he was imprisoned over this, to not lose faith due to the consequences of standing up to the authorities. So Jesus neither endorsed nor condemned John's involvement with political issues.

Yet when John was beheaded due to the petty hatred of Herod's wife, Jesus held him up as being greater than anyone yet born— yet nothing to be compared with even “the least in the kingdom of heaven”. But we must not jump to the conclusion that John was somehow belittled; rather, Jesus was emphasizing the great privilege and honor of being included in the kingdom of heaven.

One of the more famous miracles of Jesus was the feeding of the five (and also later four) thousand with just a few small fish and loaves of bread. It is pointless to argue over whether the Gospel writers should have counted the women and children; it is irrelevant to the central point of the incident. The point was to show that Jesus had miraculous power, and also that he had compassion for the crowds.

But there certainly is a point in noting how Jesus treated women and children. He never dismissed or belittled either group. One case in point was the foreign woman who touched the hem of his clothing to be healed. Though he objected to giving his attention to Gentiles at that time, she gave an argument in favor of an exception— and won. Just as Jesus commended the Roman officer for his great faith, so also he commended this foreign woman for her clever argument, as well as for her faith.

We have seen how he treated another foreign woman at the well in Samaria, and we will see more of how he treated women in the account of his eventual death and resurrection. But another notable woman is of course Mary, sister of Martha. Mary was doing what any student of a rabbi would do, and for a lone woman to do this was quite scandalous. It's possible that Martha was really more upset with this than with needing help in the kitchen. Even so, Jesus

only rebuked Martha gently. But the fact remains that Mary was treated as any male disciple, and disciples were expected to become teachers. Some ignore the obvious lesson Jesus is giving here in order to preserve cultural norms and roles.

As for children, Jesus held them up as the epitome of pure faith in God. He also used them as an object lesson in humility for his power-tripping disciples. This is critical for our understanding of how things are to be in the kingdom of heaven: the exact opposite of earthly kingdoms. Though of course God remains King, the subjects are not to seek levels of hierarchy. By Jesus' own example he would give at the Last Supper, the mark of the spiritual leader is to be as humble as a child, as serving as a waiter or domestic, as lowly as a slave. Great ones in this kingdom are not found in positions of power, regardless of how benevolently that power may be wielded. Jesus taught by word and deed that it is the giving up of power and privilege, not the cleaning and polishing of them, that characterizes the true leader in the kingdom of heaven. So it follows that whoever seeks rank and privilege, regardless of any benevolent and altruistic intentions, is least in the kingdom of heaven.

Given this teaching about the nature of the kingdom of heaven, one marvels at the ingenuity required to turn the confession of Peter into a position of authority, power, and control over millions of Christians. Some may argue that such authority is necessary to protect people, but this is a mere excuse to nullify what Jesus clearly taught about his kingdom. And history has shown that such power is no protection at all, but frequently worse than any outside dangers. It also ignores the Holy Spirit in each believer.

Specifically, Jesus did not say that Peter himself was the foundation of the coming Congregation, but his profession of faith. And this same Peter was quickly called Adversary (Satan) for objecting to Jesus' statement about his impending death, yet those who make him the "rock" of a hierarchical "church" curiously ignore this rebuke.

It is inconsistent at best to make Peter the foundation of the kingdom of heaven on earth, but not the kingdom of hell on earth.

It was during the Feast of Tents (trad. tabernacles or booths) that this same Peter blurted out that he would make booths for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah at the Transfiguration. But we are not told why the disciples were forbidden to report this incident until after Jesus would arise from the dead, just as we are not told why Jesus forbade the demons he exorcised to say who he was. And this is when Jesus identified John the Immerser as Elijah. However, this is not literally a reincarnation of Elijah; in Luke 1:17 the Messenger tells Zacharias that he came “in the spirit and power of Elijah”.

Another important teaching deserving attention before we examine those concerning prophecy is about divorce. This question put to Jesus by the Pharisees was very specific regarding the “any cause” debate among the rabbis. Some interpreted the scriptures to allow a man to divorce his wife even if she did nothing to deserve it, while others believed the man had to prove that she had been unfaithful. So what they wanted Jesus to do was to take sides in their debate. And his answer was, essentially, that God did not recognize any invalid divorces, which is why such people would then be guilty of adultery: they were still joined before God.

This context is vital to our interpretation of what Jesus said. Many have taken it as a blanket law without limit or exception, forcing those who are already divorced in spirit to remain “unequally yoked”. As Paul would later explain in 1 Cor. 7:15, what God wants is for people to live in peace. In contrast, the legalistic “plain reading” approach has caused incalculable strife, harm, and anguish over the centuries, especially to women and children.

## **The Future**

When asked about things to come, Jesus never gave a specific number of years as in the prophecy of Daniel, especially 9:24–27. Just as Jesus said it would be, the temple was destroyed (in 70 a.d. by Titus, a Roman who eventually became Emperor.) This fulfilled Dan. 9:26 but was not the final 'seven'. Since all of the preceding 'sevens' were groups of years, so also must be the last, and 70 years is ten times too long. Also, the existing temple was not destroyed right away when Jesus was "cut off". So while Jesus had earlier used the temple figuratively to refer to his own death and resurrection, his response to the disciples' admiration of the literal temple was that it would be utterly ruined. And it is this statement which prompted them to inquire about the timing of that event, and signs preceding the end.

Jesus gave a list of signs to look for, beginning with the danger of deception. But we cannot say for sure how much of what he said applied to the time from then until the destruction of the physical temple, as opposed to the duration of the "church age", or during the coming wrath of God. In hindsight we know that his followers began to suffer persecution within a short time after his ascension, and that many would stand before ruling authorities to give an account of the gospel (e.g. Paul before Festus and Agrippa). And there have certainly been plenty of false Christs, as well as wars all over and the dividing of families due to the Gospel.

But the one thing that cannot be mistaken for any time in history so far is what Daniel called "the abomination that causes desolation", which according to him marks the midpoint of a seven-year treaty made and then broken by "the prince that shall come". The consensus of scholars seems to be that the 3-1/2 years following this event is known as "the time of Jacob's trouble" (Jer. 30:7) and "the Great Tribulation" (Mat. 24:21).

There is a common claim today that those who believe that Jesus will come for us before this terrible time will be fooled by the Antichrist if they are wrong. Yet Jesus tells us that there will be no

mistaking one for the other, because “the official arrival of the Human will be as the lightning that flashes across the whole sky” (Mat. 24:28). As Jesus would later reveal to the apostle John, this arrival will involve Jesus bringing us from heaven and him setting foot on the earth, splitting the mountain in two, and this happens after all the wrath of God is finished. No fake will do these things.

But why would he tell this warning to his disciples, if they will not be on earth to be deceived? Remember the context; Jesus is speaking to Hebrews who had no concept of the coming age of grace. Even after Jesus ascended, there is good reason to believe they all expected this time of trouble to begin shortly, since the prophecy about him being “cut off” had been fulfilled. So Jesus was referring to future Hebrew believers, who will only come to faith after they see the Abomination.

Jesus gives many details about this, but of course not to the extent he would later reveal to John. Yet we can match up some of it, but we must be careful to note whether he seems to be giving detail and then going back to add more, rather than a strict sequence (much the way Creation Week was recorded twice, first as a sequence and then going back to add detail). We should also remember that the context is still not about the yet-unknown Congregation (“church”), so we would not expect Jesus to discuss the Rapture. Instead, he would tell his disciples about signs that precede the wrath of God—which may overlap those of the Rapture.

In the most extensive quotation of Jesus on this topic, Matthew 24, Jesus talks about deception, then the Abomination and Great Tribulation, then he jumps back to what he had said earlier about being on guard against deception. This resembles a typical rhetorical device known as a *chiasm*, where a main point is sandwiched between two other points, with any number of steps between them on either side of the main point. The pattern is a-b-c-X-c-b-a. Recognizing this pattern tells us that the pivot point is the main thrust of the argument. Though Jesus is not arguing a case here, we



cannot presume that he is saying there is another time of false Christs after the Great Tribulation ends, especially since we know that the real Christ will return at that time and Jesus told how to identify him.

But Jesus ends this topic with a curious statement: “Where the eagles gather, there is the corpse”. In this passage, Jesus does not say it in response to the disciples’ question about where some people will be taken. So this context would connect the statement to the topic of false Christs, who will attract many followers the way a dead body attracts scavengers. The other parallel passages also have the warning about false Christs before the Abomination/Great Tribulation, but not after, so it seems clear that this deception is only during the time when it’s most likely to work on people.

Matthew and Luke add more detail of the time preceding the Great Tribulation, describing it as “like the days of Noah”. And though there may be other implications to this, all Jesus is recorded as having said about it is that people will be unaware of impending doom. And when it hits, Jesus repeats the phrase about eagles gathering, but adds that some are taken and some left. However, the context is not about false Christs. The familiar “taken/left” pairing is expressed in Greek as “accepted/abandoned”, which seems more consistent with the prior examples of Noah and Lot, where the righteous are taken away and the unrighteous are left to die. But while the disciples’ question “where?” does not specify which group they are asking about, Jesus’ response seems to indicate the righteous, the ones taken.

And again, though Jesus was speaking to Hebrews who had no concept of a coming “church”, the disappearance of Christians is a sign for them to look for. It is associated with people being taken by surprise, where the righteous (Noah and family) are taken away and the unrighteous are left behind. One might challenge the notion that there is any element of surprise today, since the Rapture is a well-known teaching even among unbelievers. Yet with all the false

predictions by date-setters (“crying wolf”), people are beginning to ignore them and dismiss prophecy as a load of nonsense— very likely the situation with Noah and those who paid no attention to his warnings of doom.

Another statement Jesus associated with the days of Noah is that “No one knows the day or hour”. There is much debate over what he meant: was it that no one would ever know, or they just couldn’t know at that time before the “church age”? Did it refer to the common phrase the Judeans used for the beginning of the Feast of Trumpets, since it depended on the first sighting of the new moon? Or did it only refer to non-Christians, since Paul would later say that “this day will not take you by surprise” (1 Thes. 5:1–11)? Yet even here, Jesus gave the illustration of the tree sprouting to indicate that summer was near. And he added the key phrase, “When you see all these things”, which seems to refer to only the days of Noah. We should also note that this “Day” of his coming seems to refer to the whole Great Tribulation, such that all the signs which precede this day refer to the beginning of that time rather than its middle or end.

Then Jesus told of extreme cosmic events after the Great Tribulation which will make it clear that it is indeed the end:

- sun and moon go dark
- stars fall from sky
- powers of heavens (skies and/or space) shaken
- extreme turbulence on earth, with oceans roaring and splashing
- the appearance of the sign of the Human in the sky
- he descends in the clouds in great power and majesty
- trumpet blast to send out Messengers to collect “the chosen” from all over “the heavens”

On the surface, the first four signs appear to match up with the 6th Seal of Revelation (Rev. 6:12–14), which is clearly not the end of the Great Tribulation:

- the moon is red instead of black
- the stars fall to earth
- the sky itself “rolls up like a scroll”
- every mountain is shifted from its place.

There is at least one Old Testament reference to such things as well (Joel 2:31), and it too places them “before that great and terrible day of the Master”. So we see that very similar signs both precede and follow the 70th week of the prophecy of Daniel.

Another controversy surrounds the statement, “this generation will not pass away until all these things take place”: exactly which generation is Jesus referring to? Mat. 24:32–35, Mark 13:28–31, and Luke 21:29–33 record this statement as being said immediately after the signs indicating that the time is near, not that it is over. So it appears that Jesus is saying, “The generation that sees these signs preceding the judgments will live to seem them all”. That is, the duration of the “birth pangs” or “beginning of sorrows” will not extend past the length of the generation that sees them begin.

Yet “generation” is a controversy of its own: is it the lifespan of people born at a particular time, or is it the people of Israel, whom Jesus elsewhere called “an adulterous generation”? The immediate context would seem to favor the former, and since it relates to the end times, it would be reasonable to consider it the average lifespan of people then, not people in the first century, and certainly not a time cited in poetry such as the Psalms. Ignorance of context and a desire for more precision than Jesus gives have led to many tragic failures by date-setters.

Jesus gives one more event to take place at his return: the separation of the “sheep and goats” He was not recorded as having said much at all about the time following the Great Tribulation beyond this, but it is clear from the context (“when he comes in his majesty”) that this happens just before the Millennium begins. The Christians had been taken to heaven and received their immortal

bodies, so they are not the ones being judged. Rather, the judged group is identified as consisting of “the nations”, used in the Bible to refer almost exclusively to non-Hebrews. This leaves the Hebrews as “the least of these”. So after all the wrath is over and Jesus returns, he will immediately conduct a judgment of the mortals who survived the Great Tribulation, based upon how they treated the people of Israel. Those judged righteous will repopulate the earth over the next thousand years, while the unrighteous are sent directly to “the eternal fire prepared for the False Accuser and his Messengers”.

Notice that the objections of both the sheep and goats are identical, as is Jesus’ response: whatever treatment they gave or failed to give the people of Israel, they did the same to him. Yet in spite of having exhibited what most people would consider the epitome of Christian behavior— giving aid to the hungry, thirsty, naked, and imprisoned— the goats are rejected for their prejudice and selectiveness in how they performed these acts of charity. Their hatred for the people of Israel during the Great Tribulation would turn out to be their undoing.

This passage also makes an important statement about whether this “eternal fire” actually means that souls will be continually tormented forever. Jesus assigns the same duration (*aionion*, an unknown length of time) to both “life” and “punishment”. That is, whatever length of time applies to life must also apply to its opposite. So since everyone agrees that life is endless, then we have no choice but to say that punishment is also endless. And though it is indeed the fire that is so described, it is also the punishment. The other references Jesus made to Gehenna cannot override (and do not contradict) the very clear meaning he gave in this passage.

Regarding the origin of the word [Gehenna](#) (see also [this article](#)), the word was originally used to describe the valley where followers of Molech sacrificed their children in fire. It became the refuse pit for Jerusalem and was kept burning in order to control the stench.

Some also speculate that before the Flood it was the land of the Nephilim. So while Gehenna in Jesus' day certainly was the local refuse dump, it had long been symbolic of the fate of the unrighteous in a place of eternal fire.

## **The Final Week**

The final week of Jesus' life as a mortal was filled with symbolism and prophetic significance. As stipulated in Ex. 12:1–19, the most flawless male lamb was to be selected on the 10th day of the first month, and observed until the 14th day. In addition, Zech. 9:9 says that their King would ride into Jerusalem on a donkey. His entrance into Jerusalem on a donkey, and his being hailed by the people as their rescuer, exactly coincided with the time the people were selecting their best lambs for the Passover, and he would spend the next four days under public scrutiny in Jerusalem.

All four Gospels give the account of the woman who anointed Jesus for burial as he reclined for a meal, although the one in Luke is of a separate incident (his account is at the home of a Pharisee, while the others are at the home of Simon the Leper). John tells us that this was none other than Mary, sister of Martha. Though his own disciples tried to scold her, Jesus defended her, and even honored her by declaring that her act would be told alongside the Gospel. Here again we see that Jesus did not treat women as social inferiors but as equals in every way.

The next main event was the preparation of the upper room, which was on the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Again referencing Ex. 12:1–19, we see that this was the 14th day of the first month. But the days began at sundown, and the lambs would not be sacrificed till the following daylight hours, in mid-afternoon. The Feast itself began and ended with a Sabbath, and this particular evening was the start of Preparation Day for the first one (Mat. 27:62, Mark 15:42, Luke 23:54, John 19:31). So though it was not

the actual main Passover meal, it was a very important part of the whole Feast. And no mention is made of them having selected and sacrificed a lamb earlier in the day, had it been the actual Passover. The disciples fully expected to eat the Passover the following evening and had to have all leaven (yeast) removed from the room the day before. (See [Last Supper: Was it the Passover Meal?](#) for a detailed analysis proving that Jesus and the disciples could not have been eating the properly-sacrificed Passover lamb. *Disclaimer: this is not an endorsement of other material at that website.*)

As what tradition has come to call the Last Supper began that evening, Jesus was facing the full weight of what he had come to earth to accomplish. But what tradition has called “communion” or “eucharist” was, like “the Lord’s Prayer”, never meant to be a slavishly-followed rite or ordinance. Jesus stated that it was simply a remembrance; he even left the frequency of its practice up to his disciples and gave no explicit instructions on how to conduct it. Blessing the bread and drink was a very common practice whereby the blessings of God and the fellowship of brothers and sisters was celebrated. Of course, Jesus gave new symbolic meaning to the bread and wine, but it was still a remembrance and not a ritual.

He also made a very significant statement about the wine: it represented the signing, in his own blood, of a new “Will and Testament”— which is where we get the terms Old and New Testament. It is a formal contract, and in this case, a unilateral one since there was only one signer. This brings new meaning to his earlier object lesson about the wine and wineskins; the old and new were not to be mixed, and the connection here with his shed blood is undeniable.

But his washing of the disciples’ feet was no less significant. This was the duty of the household servant, the lowliest domestic. But though he had told the disciples about what makes a leader in the coming kingdom, he now acted it out in a powerful demonstration: if the Master Himself could stoop to this level and take the most

humble role in society, then anyone who would claim to follow him must do the same. This is why he told Peter that failing to allow this would mean he would not be a fit disciple. Obviously Peter was being the one served there, but to have his own Master serve him was a lesson that would cut through all social norms. Tragically, it seems that the majority of disciples of all following generations would turn this lesson upside down by erecting hierarchies of rank and power among brothers and sisters, causing division. Regardless of how piously and sincerely a Christian leader may rule, it is still rule rather than the kind of service Jesus modeled.

The Gospel of John records much more of what Jesus said at that meal. One particularly meaningful passage is his promise to return using the analogy of a typical Jewish wedding. Once the couple were betrothed, the groom would go to his father's house to prepare a place for them to live. No one would know when this place would be finished, since final approval had to come from the groom's father. Meanwhile, the bride was to prepare herself and her wedding garments, always being ready to leave on very short notice. The groom would typically leave for her home at midnight, accompanied by his friends who held torches as they shouted and blew trumpets so the bride would know the time had come. He would wait for her outside of her home, and then they would all return to the newly-constructed living quarters for seven days of intimate union. Then a great feast would begin.

Though it is not expressly stated, the analogy to Jesus' future return would be well-understood by the disciples that night. And the seven days surely represent the seven years of the prophecy of Daniel yet to be fulfilled, a time whose beginning would only be known by the Father. That time will also begin, as Paul would later explain, with a shout, a trumpet blast, the arrival of the Groom in the air, our coming out of our earthly home to meet him, and our happy procession to the place he has prepared for us, where we will be with him for seven years before returning to earth.

The long speech and prayer recorded by John also shows that Jesus clearly equated himself with the Father. But when he spoke of the Father giving him people, did he mean the people had no choice in the matter, as some allege? This does not logically follow; there is no necessary cause/effect correlation between the two. And Jesus did clearly state that he would “draw all people” to himself.

Another statement, about protecting people in this life rather than taking them out of it, is used by some to refute the concept of the Rapture. Yet the immediate context of that statement is specifically about the disciples he had chosen to train, since he states that he had lost none of them but his betrayer. Only after this does he extend his prayer to all who would become believers from their testimony, the vast majority of which would not be alive at the time of the Rapture anyway. But again, it does not logically follow that no exceptions would ever be made for these statements about being protected in this life rather than taken out of it. And clearly, as persecution proved, not everyone would be protected, at least physically.

When it comes to chronology, nothing has been more controversial than that of the day and time of Jesus’ trials and crucifixion. But there are some important clues in the text which help to clear up much of the confusion. Attention to detail is often the key to unlocking mysteries, so these will be sought out and examined closely. For another detailed study, see [From Triumphal Entry to Resurrection](#).

By the time Jesus was arrested in the garden of Gethsemane, it was already late at night and possibly the very early hours after midnight. The Last Supper was not a quick snack and Jesus spoke at length, and then he spent hours in prayer in the garden. This is also why the mob that came to arrest him carried torches; it was dark. No trial was to be held at night, so for this and other reasons the trials by the ruling priests were illegal. Ironically, the most notorious rule-followers were quite willing to break them when it suited their



purposes. They did this also with the money Judas would throw at their feet; their concern was that “blood money” could not be put back into the treasury.

The illegal trials were held by Annas and Caiaphas (John 18:13,24), who brought forth false witness after false witness to try and find something they could pin on Jesus, but this failed due to conflicting testimonies. It was not until Jesus affirmed their demand (under oath) for an answer to the question of whether he was the Christ, which they deemed blasphemy, (another proof that Jesus did indeed claim to be God), that they had what they wanted. So finally they brought him to a meeting of the Sanhedrin, and by this time it was **dawn** (Mat. 27:1, Mark 15:1, Luke 22:66), which was the “zero” hour of daylight (more details under Final Week Timeline below). The well-known denials of Peter also ended at dawn as the rooster crowed, which was just before Jesus was taken to Pilate.

But they would need a secular charge in order to get the Romans to execute him, so off they went to Pilate, the governor, who determined that there was no legitimate grounds for such a charge. Then he was sent to Herod, who questioned him at length in the hope of seeing him perform some miracle. Then it was back to Pilate, who told the accusers that neither he nor Herod found any reason for charges to be filed. We should note that at this point John states it was “still the Preparation for the Passover, **about noon**”. So the Passover itself had not yet begun, and the time was “about the sixth hour”. By our reckoning, then, it was **perhaps around 11 a.m.**

In desperation to have Jesus executed, his accusers came up with a devious strategy: they would threaten Pilate with losing his status as “a Friend of Caesar”, a designation which granted certain privileges with Rome. Pilate was then faced with either acting according to law, or acting according to self-preservation, and clearly he chose the latter. Though he absolved himself of the guilt of this act (and the people tragically accepted that guilt “on us and our children”), his choice was solely his own.

Finally Pilate gave the order and Jesus was taken away, and by this time it was **noon** (Mat. 27:45). There are many articles that detail the horrible torture, not only of the crucifixion but the scourging, which left the victim's skin and muscles shredded to ribbons. But this suffering is not what saved us; it was his death and resurrection alone. Many righteous people have suffered greatly, so if this could pay for sins, Jesus would not have had to come. Many have also been martyred, but if sinful human blood could pay for sins, Jesus would not have had to come.

The Greek word traditionally rendered "cross" referred to an upright stake or pole. But there is a separate word for the actual cross-piece, the board upon which the outstretched arms of the victim were nailed at the wrists. So the net result is the familiar "cross" shape. In any case, the distinction of each piece really has no great impact on understanding the text.

As for why the religious leaders wanted Jesus crucified by Rome rather than simply stoning him themselves as they almost did on at least one occasion (and did to Stephen later), there are a number of theories. One is that the night trials were illegal, so they used his claim to be a king as grounds for sedition against Rome, which would require an official Roman execution. Another is that they feared the people would riot if they killed him themselves, though the next day the people would all join in demanding his crucifixion. A third is that they could not execute anyone at all (John 18:31), and that the stoning of Stephen was simply mob violence.

The darkness mentioned in Mat. 27:45 lasted until **3 p.m.**, and near the beginning of that span is when the two thieves crucified with Jesus had their conversation (Luke 23:32–44). Then, as the darkness lifted, the curtain in the temple was ripped in half from top to bottom— and that curtain was about four inches (10 cm) thick. Though the significance of this is not stated explicitly, the most likely reason for it is to show that, because of what Jesus was doing, there was no longer any need for a temple and priesthood on earth

(see Heb. 7). Then Jesus shouted “It is finished/paid in full!” at the same time of day as the ruling priest, who was to say those same words as the lambs were sacrificed.

Regarding the wish of the Pharisees to have the victims killed quickly since the Passover would start at sundown (yet another instance of legalistic hypocrisy), it is helpful to know the reason for breaking the legs. It is believed that the victims breathing muscles were numb after having their arms stretched out for hours, so for each exhale they would have to push themselves up with their legs, an extremely painful action since their feet were nailed to a small platform on the upright portion of the cross. By breaking the victims’ legs they would bring quick death through suffocation. But Jesus had stopped his own heart, as evidenced by the report in John 19:34–37: blood and water came out separately when the soldier pierced his heart to make absolutely sure he was dead. This separation indicates that the piercing is not what killed him, as it takes some time for this to occur.

The law concerning the Passover in Ex. 12:10, 34–35 was that no lamb be left by morning; it had to be consumed that night. So in yet another instance where ritual pointed to reality, Jesus’ body was taken down and buried, placed as it were “in the belly of the earth” as the other lambs were in the bellies of the people. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus prepared the body “according to custom” (John 19:38). This was not the hasty laying of a single sheet over the body, but layers of wrapping and aromatic spices the way people wrapped mummies. The head was covered in a separate piece of cloth, which would be pointed out later when Peter and John examined the empty tomb (John 20:6–7). The only thing done due to the shortness of time was to place the body in a borrowed tomb.

Matthew tells us that it was during the daylight hours of the **Passover** (the following day by modern reckoning) that the Pharisees had the tomb sealed (Mat. 27:62–66). Meanwhile, the women observed the burial, and we must carefully examine the

details concerning whether it was before or after the Passover Sabbath that they bought and prepared spices of their own (Luke 23:56 and Mark 16:1). But Luke does not say exactly when the spices were purchased and prepared, neither activity of which could be done on either the Passover Sabbath or the weekly Sabbath. It is clear in Luke that the women observed the burial on the Preparation Day, but highly doubtful that they would have had time to purchase and prepare the spices in the very short time from then to the start of the Passover Sabbath. So since Mark's account has the women buying and preparing spices after the Sabbath, it appears that this happened on a day between the Passover Sabbath (Wednesday evening to Thursday evening) and the weekly Sabbath (Friday evening to Saturday evening).

## **Final Week Timeline**

As background for this section, we need to understand the basics of timekeeping in first-century Israel. A 24-hour day began at sundown and was divided into segments called "hours" or "watches" (as relates to guard duty). Each "hour" was really a three-hour span, but it was known by its beginning; that is, the "third hour" lasted from 9 o'clock to 12 o'clock, counting from either 6 a.m. or 6 p.m. Going by the position of the sun or moon in the sky made greater precision impractical. But more importantly, the expressions "the third hour" and "almost/about the sixth hour" refer to the same three-hour span, with the latter meaning it was close to the end of that span:

The whole time from the third hour to the sixth, that is, from nine to twelve, was called the third hour; and the whole intervening time from the sixth to the ninth, that is, from twelve to three, is called the sixth hour. John does not say it was the sixth hour, but about or near the sixth hour. So when he says about the sixth hour, and Mark the third hour, we are to understand that Mark takes the whole time of the third hour, from nine to twelve, and that John puts it near twelve. So in either case our Lord was sentenced between the hours of nine and twelve.

David Lipscomb (1831-1917), *A Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, p. 295-296.

The following is a list of events according to Jewish days (sundown to sundown) in the first month of their year. This was called Nisan or Abib/Aviv, when the crescent moon was first sighted at the time the barley harvest was ripe in the spring, as specified in Exodus 12.

- Nisan 9: Jesus visits Bethany (John 12:1)
- Nisan 10
  - Morning: The Triumphal Entry (Mark 11:1–10, John 12:12–19)
  - Evening: Jesus visits the temple, then returns to Bethany (Mark 11:11)
- Nisan 11: Jesus drives the merchants from the temple (Mat. 21:12, Mark 11:12–18, Luke 19:45)
- Nisan 12: Two days till Passover, which begins with Preparation Day when Jesus would be handed over to be killed (Mat. 26:1, Mark 14:1)
- Nisan 13: nothing specific for this day
- Nisan 14 (Preparation Day)
  - Sundown: the Last Supper (Mat. 26:17–35, Mark 14:12–31, Luke 22:7–38, John 13:1ff)
  - Night: Gethsemane (Mat. 26:36–56, Mark, 14:32–52, Luke 22:39–53, John 18:1–12)
  - Night: to Annas and then Caiaphas (Mat. 26:57–68, Mark 14:53–65, Luke 22:54,63–65, John 18:13,24)
  - Sunrise: to the Sanhedrin (Mat. 27:1, Mark 15:1, Luke 22:66–71)
  - Morning: to Pilate, then Herod, then Pilate again (Mat. 27:2,11–14, Mark 15:1–5, Luke 23:1–23, John 18:28–19:4)
  - Late Morning: Jesus presented to the crowd (Mat. 27:15–25, Mark 15:6–14, Luke 23:24, John 19:5–15)
  - Noon: Jesus crucified (Mat. 27:26–44, Mark 15:15–32, Luke 23:25–43, John 19:16–29)

- Noon till three: darkness (Mat. 27:45, Mark 15:33, Luke 23:44–45)
- Three p.m.: Jesus dies, temple curtain ripped (Mat. 27:50–51, Mark 15:37–38, Luke 23:45–46, John 19:30) while lambs are being killed
- Between three and six p.m.: Jesus buried (Mat. 27:57–61, Mark 15:42–47, Luke 23:50–54, John 19:31–42)
- Nisan 15 (Passover, a “special Sabbath”, night/day one): tomb is sealed (Mat. 27:62–66)
- Nisan 16 (night/day two): women buy spices for burial (Mark 16:1, Luke 23:56)
- Nisan 17 (weekly Sabbath, night/day three)
- Nisan 18 (First Fruits, third day from tomb being sealed)
  - Between three and six a.m.: Jesus arises (Mark 16:9)
  - Dawn: women go to tomb (Mat. 28:1–8, Mark 16:2–8, Luke 24:1–8, John 20:1)
  - Afternoon: the two walking to Emmaus (Mark 16:12–13, Luke 24:13–35)
  - Near sunset: Jesus appears in the locked upper room (Mat. 28:9, Mark 16:14, Luke 24:36–49, John 20:19)

## Post-resurrection to Ascension

Referencing the timeline in the previous section, we need to calculate the total span of time from when Jesus was buried to when he arose. Remember that when the Pharisees asked Jesus for a sign, the only one he gave was “the sign of Jonah” (Mat. 12:38–40, 16:1–4, Luke 11:29–32). But exactly how many days was he to be in the grave? Mat. 12:40 has “three days and three nights”, Mat. 27:62–64 has “after three days”, and Luke 24:19–21 has “the third day”. It should be obvious that “three days and three nights” is very specific and leaves no room for doubt: it clearly indicates three periods of 24 hours (one wonders how this could be stated more precisely). The other statements are less precise: both “after three days” and “the third day” depend on the starting point as a

reference. In addition, when the two walking to Emmaus say “it is the third day since all these things happened”, we are left to wonder what “all these things” include. The last thing having to do with Jesus was the sealing of the tomb on the Passover (Mat. 27:62), which would not conflict with the amount of time Jesus was in the grave.

Though most translations obscure the detail about what day it was when Jesus had arisen, the Greek of Mat. 28:1 has a curious phrase: “After the Sabbaths, when it was nearing dawn on the First of Sabbaths”. The First of Sabbaths was an expression for the first of the seven weeks leading up to Pentecost (a.k.a. the Feast of Weeks). That particular day, always the first day of the week after Passover, was when the offering of “firstfruits” was made (Lev. 23:9–21). And it was very, very early on that morning when the women went to the tomb, just as light was barely beginning to appear. But Jesus was already out before then, so his resurrection had to have taken place sometime during the dark on that day, which we must remember began at sundown on what we consider the day before. Mark 16:9 says that Jesus arose early (the Greek word indicates the last watch of the night, about 3–6 a.m.).

The first people to whom Jesus appeared after his resurrection were the women who had come to the tomb bringing the spices they had prepared. It’s interesting to note that though the earlier arrival of the Messenger terrified the guards to the point that they passed out, the women did not faint at all. Then Jesus gave them the very first commission to spread the Gospel of his resurrection. But being women, the men did not believe them, and Jesus eventually rebuked them for this.

Jesus also appeared to the two walking to Emmaus. But another detail is given, whose point is often missed: Jesus was able to use the scriptures (only what we call the Old Testament at the time) to show how the Christ had to suffer all those things, die, and then rise again. This is not so easy for us today, since our translations use the Masoretic text for the Hebrew, and this text, done several hundred

years after the resurrection, obscured all such references in a deliberate attempt by the scribes and rabbis to thwart the claims of early Christians that Jesus was indeed the promised Christ. This, plus the fact that at Jesus' birth we are told that some were indeed expecting the Christ at that time (Luke 2:26, 38), combine to refute the claims of some that nobody then was expecting a Savior.

Between his resurrection and ascension, Jesus appeared not only to the women and the Eleven, but to over 500 people (1 Cor. 15:6) over a period of 40 days (Acts 1:3). He also gave what is known as the Great Commission (Mat. 28:17–20, Mark 16:15, Luke 24:46–48, Acts 1:8). Technically, this was only given directly to the Eleven, but everyone agrees that this was meant for all believers. Yet if it was meant for all of us, then it isn't just certain credentialed people who are to preach and teach. And as already discussed regarding "baptism", this is the immersion of the Holy Spirit, not water, and it happens at the moment of faith (Acts 1:4–5, 2 Cor. 1:22, 5:5, Eph. 1:13–14).

Jesus' ascension is recorded in Mark 16:19–20, Luke 24:50–53, and Acts 1:9–11. This was witnessed by at least the Eleven but possibly more, as Luke and Acts are not specific, and Mark does not necessarily rule out the presence of others. But all accounts have Jesus rising up into the air and then being hidden in a cloud, after which a Messenger appears to tell the disciples that Jesus would return the same way he left. Again regarding the use of this as proof that there will be no Rapture, we should note that the Rapture is not his formal second coming. However, Paul states in 1 Thes.4:13–18 that we will meet Jesus in the clouds.



# The Acts of the Apostles

## Background

The Acts of the Apostles (a title not given in the text) is a continuation of the Gospel of Luke and covers the years spanning 33 to 63 a.d. It begins with a brief discussion of the final events of Jesus' time on earth, but that will not be covered here since it was done in the combined commentary on the Gospels. As was expected for a qualified writer or historian of the time, Luke does not merely record data (accurate though it was) but also draws the reader into the accounts with great literary skill. He includes himself when applicable, showing his first-hand knowledge of many events. But while some may classify Acts as more biography than history, it nonetheless has all the required elements for historical record, including many references to verifiable people, places, and times.

Approximately the first 1/3 to 1/2 of the book covers the birth, establishment, and early growth of the Congregation. The rest revolves largely around the three missionary journeys of Paul, which helps to give more context to his letters.

## Outline

1. **1:12–26** Awaiting the Holy Spirit
2. **2:1–47** The Congregation is born
3. **3:1–5:11** The Congregation is settled
4. **5:12–42** Persecution begins
5. **6:1–7** Growing pains
6. **6:8–7:60** The first martyr
7. **8:1–40** Scattering the seed enlarges the crop
8. **9:1–31** The hunter becomes the hunted

9. **9:32–10:48** Peter and Cornelius
10. **11:19–30** The scattered seeds take root and grow
11. **11:31–14:28** Mistaken for gods– but not for long
12. **15:1–35** The Jerusalem Council
13. **15:36–16:15** Paul meets Timothy and Lydia
14. **16:16–40** A python and a prison break
15. **17:1–15** Hounded from city to city
16. **17:16–34** Paul in Athens
17. **18:1–23** Priscilla and Aquila
18. **18:24–28** Apollos
19. **19:1–20** True and false
20. **19:21–41** Artemis of the Ephesians
21. **20:1–38** A farewell to the elders in Ephesus
22. **21:1–14** Philip and prophets
23. **21:15–23:11** Paul is falsely accused
24. **23:12–30** A failed ambush
25. **23:31–24:27** To Governor Felix
26. **25:1–26:32** Before Festus and Agrippa
27. **27:1–28:16** Adventures on the way to Caesar
28. **28:17–31** Final words from Paul

## **1:12–26 Awaiting the Holy Spirit**

While the disciples waited for the Comforter promised by Jesus, Peter determined that the traitor Judas had to be replaced. Acts 1:18–19 does not conflict with the account in Mat. 27:5 concerning the death of Judas. The two accounts paint a picture of the priests buying the field after Judas apparently did a poor job of hanging himself. The key in the current passage is “in fact/indeed”, which in conjunction with the other account can be taken as “in reality” or “indirectly”. It was the priests who called it “blood money” and then used it to buy the land as a place to bury strangers.

The criterion for Judas’ replacement was that the person had to have been with them the whole time Jesus was there, from his

immersion by John to his ascension. Some say Peter acted presumptuously because Paul would be the eventual replacement, but Paul did not meet this requirement. Not all Ambassadors (apostles) were of the Twelve; we know from the Gospels that there were at least seventy. And no one, not even Paul, took issue with this decision.

## **2:1–47 The Congregation is born**

The promised Comforter came on the day of Pentecost in a very obvious and unmistakable way: what looked like tongues of fire landed on the disciples, who then began to declare the Gospel in foreign languages they had not learned. Such signs and miracles are the divine stamp of approval on a major change of ages or conditions. They are not, however, the norm for all believers of all time; this book of Acts is the time of establishment and transition, not the norm. We must keep this in mind when we encounter later instances of such things, as they did not happen in one day.

Some actually take the accusation by part of the crowd that day, that the disciples were drunk, as justification for the modern phenomenon of being “drunk in the Spirit”. But the disciples were not stumbling around, acting like fools, or slurring their speech. The only reason they were accused of drunkenness is because they were speaking various languages, and whatever wasn’t a person’s particular language would sound like gibberish. And not only were the disciples not acting drunk, they were also not acting like animals or shaking uncontrollably, as is common among demonic phenomena in other religions and fringe groups claiming to be Christian.

This is when Peter gave his famous speech. But an often-overlooked point is that he was speaking exclusively to a crowd of people who already believed in the one, true God, but who had crucified their own Messiah. They did not need to be told who God

was, yet they still needed to be saved; they needed to “repent” (to turn around and go the other way). This was not for the usual personal sins as most presume today, but for the particular sin of rejecting their Messiah. As for Peter telling them to be immersed, this was the custom of the time for anyone making a public declaration, religious or political; even Pilate washed his hands to signify his public declaration of innocence.

But what of Peter quoting the prophet Joel? Clearly not all of the prophecy was fulfilled that day, as there were no cosmic signs “before the day of the majestic appearing of the Master”. This is another indication that the disciples expected the prophecies of the end to come immediately, but which they would later conclude was not the case. Yet it is also another partial fulfillment of prophecy, as was also the case with the Messiah having fulfilled only some of them. But the rest of it was being fulfilled: the Spirit was being poured out— and not just on males. The inclusion of the “daughters” prophesying cannot simply be brushed aside.

The new Congregation was formed from those who changed their minds about Jesus and accepted him. Though still practicing Judaism during this time of transition, they formed a unique community of people joyfully helping each other. But this was not communism, where everyone is forced by a regulating body to “share” everything. Rather, participation was strictly voluntary and motivated from within each person. All were equal spiritual infants in the kingdom of heaven, so they all heeded “the teachings of the Ambassadors”.

Some say that the reference to prayers and breaking bread necessarily means what became known as a Communion service or Eucharist. But the context seems to refer to what people did every day: share meals, as they shared everything else. Paul would later advise people on how meals of remembrance were to be conducted— not to give a liturgy or ritualistic instructions, but to keep to the general principle, “Whatever you do, honor Jesus in it”.

## **3:1–5:11 The Congregation is settled**

As mentioned concerning ways in which God designates a change of ages or conditions, miracles were common at first, especially as performed by the Ambassadors. And just as they did with Jesus, the religious leaders opposed them, and they ordered them to stop teaching people that Jesus was the Christ. This led to the well-known situation where Peter and John were commanded by the Sanhedrin to stop speaking about Jesus, and Peter told them they were not to be obeyed since they were opposed to God. This not only showed the fearlessness of the once-cowardly disciples, but also established the principle that societal authorities are not to be obeyed in cases where human law clashes with divine law. Nothing Paul ever said contradicted this.

And as mentioned concerning the way people took care of each other, the famous incident with Ananias and Sapphira confirms voluntary wealth distribution. They tried to pass themselves off as having given the total proceeds from the sale of land to be given to the poor, but they kept some of it for themselves. As Peter explained, they were under no obligation to give the whole amount anyway. But the punishment for “lying to the Holy Spirit” (evidence of the Spirit as a Person of the Trinity) was instant death. This seems overly harsh to us today, of course. But just as miracles accompany such changes of ages, so also do punishments. The rules God had made for the nation of Israel had the purpose of purifying and separating a people from whom the Savior would come, and now also the Congregation needed to be established in purity. And that result was achieved: people feared and respected the name of Jesus.

## **5:12–42 Persecution begins**

In another parallel with the life of Jesus, the disciples were arrested by the religious leaders, but “gently” so as to keep the crowds from rioting. Yet after the disciples were miraculously released from jail, they were re-arrested and told yet again to stop talking about Jesus. One marvels at the capacity of the religious leaders to ignore the clear hand of God and focus entirely on keeping their positions of power and privilege. And again the disciples declared their higher allegiance to God than to people. In this we also see a partial fulfillment of what Jesus predicted about being made to stand before authorities and being given the words to say by the Holy Spirit.

## 6:1–7 Growing pains

The earliest believers did indeed share everything, but as Israelis they were taught from their earliest youth to be separate from Gentiles. But this was not to be the case for long. In the first test showing them what Paul would later say in Gal. 3:28 about the absence of divisions in the Body of Christ, the Greek widows were being discriminated against and complained to the Ambassadors. So they set up a group of people to ensure that the sharing of food was fair and non-discriminatory. These are typically cited as the first “deacons”, but this is never referred to in any subsequent scriptures on the selection of such people. This was a specific response to a specific problem at a specific time and in a specific location. Otherwise, we would have to have a rule that “deacons” must be seven in number, and that their job is to give food to Greek widows; one cannot choose only part of this incident as binding.

The reason the word *diaconos* was chosen at all was to compare it to what the Ambassadors were doing, which was spiritual service. Just as a literal *diaconos* waited tables, so also the Ambassadors were “waiting tables” in a spiritual and figurative sense. But people like to inject hierarchy into every appointment, so tradition quickly turned these “domestics” into bosses with spiritual authority over others. And this is not excused by the stated requirements for the

job; one must have the heart and attitude of a servant of Jesus before presuming to serve his followers. We should expect to find the most spiritually-filled people at the lowest places, just as Jesus taught. In fact, one of them would be the first of Jesus' followers to make the ultimate sacrifice.

## **6:8–7:60 The first martyr**

Stephen was respected by the people, not only for performing signs and miracles, but also for his skill in debating critics of the faith. We need to keep this in mind when reading other scriptures which some take to mean believers (especially leaders) must not argue (see also the letter of Jude re. "contending for the faith"). We remember that Jesus did a fair amount of debate as well.

As for Stephen's long speech when he was arrested and stood before the Sanhedrin, somehow his having the appearance of a Messenger made no difference to the religious leaders when he reached the surprise ending. In a fit of rage, they killed him by stoning, while Saul (the future Paul) watched and approved. It was this execution that gave him a taste for more and sent him on his fateful quest to rid the earth of these pesky Jesus followers.

## **8:1–40 Scattering the seed enlarges the crop**

If the command of Jesus to "go into all the world" wasn't enough, persecution would be. People tend to not shift places until forced to, and the young Congregation was no exception. They were still in an all-Israeli mindset of separation and needed a push to take another step away from it. This persecution was also another way in which the women in the Congregation were treated no differently than the men, as Saul hauled off all of them to jail and death. This is corroborated by extra-Biblical writings as well; many forgotten martyrs and victims of torture were women. Surely those who suffer

and die for the Christ are qualified to lead and serve for him as well. But this plan of the enemies of the faith backfired; the scattering of the disciples caused the Gospel to be spread farther and faster than it might have otherwise.

A well-known incident involved the disciple Philip, one of whose apparent converts was a practitioner of magic arts named Simon. But when Peter arrived, he found out that people were only immersed in the name of Jesus and not the Holy Spirit. This can be puzzling in light of the fact that nowhere in scripture is it taught that a believer is not truly saved until an Ambassador places hands on them and immerses them in the Holy Spirit. One explanation is that the Ambassadors expected a dramatic sign every time, as on Pentecost. Another is that this was necessary to validate the salvation of non-Israelis such as the despised Samaritans. Still another is that this is a special immersion which must precede the other sign gifts.

That last explanation is perhaps the most likely. When Simon saw this spectacular spiritual manifestation, he wanted to purchase this apparent magical power, for which Peter sternly rebuked him. Yet the wording there is not that people were being *filled* with the Spirit in a special way, but that they *received* the Spirit. But this may fit the other explanation about the early believers thinking that these spectacular signs were required of everyone. Yet again, this was not consistent; not all are recorded as having had visible tongues of fire descend upon them, or that they spoke in unlearned languages. In this case we are not told the details. It may very well be an exclusive requirement for Israelis or proselytes to Judaism, who already believed in the one true God.

These questions and examples are why we look to “the teachings of the Ambassadors” and not just anecdotal evidence, when it comes to essentials of the faith. Of all the teachings that should be the clearest, it would be salvation itself. And in those teachings (the



Letters) we see nothing at all about salvation requiring the laying on of hands, or the manifestation of sign gifts.

When Philip later met up with an Ethiopian official, he immersed him in water to signify his acceptance of the faith, though that has to be implied from the text. Yet there was no laying on of hands or mention of a sign gift being manifest by the Ethiopian. This person was likely already a proselyte since he was reading the prophecy of Isaiah, so we might have expected such things. It is possible they happened and were simply not mentioned, but this seems unlikely since they were recorded in so many other cases. So here again there is inconsistency, which should tell us not to derive doctrine from these incidences. We can note as well that in this case the immerser was “snatched away”, teleported to another city– a very uncommon event to say the least.

## **9:1–31 The hunter becomes the hunted**

There are several reports of the conversion of Saul. One of them, Acts 9:7, states that the others traveling with Paul heard a voice but saw no one, while Acts 22:9 states that they saw a light but did not understand the sound (there is scholarly debate on whether they did not hear any sound at all, or simply did not understand it, based on the Greek grammar). Yet none of this is contradictory; seeing a light is not the same as seeing Jesus himself, and there is no irrefutable proof that the voice was understood. The same is true for one account having more detail than the other. And had all instances been identical, one would rightly suspect a made-up story; people often add or omit detail upon later tellings of an experience.

Curiously, there is no account of Saul actually making a statement of faith, though no one doubts his salvation. Ananias, who came to place hands on Saul to restore his sight, is also not recorded as having said anything else but that Saul would receive the Holy Spirit. And it is after all this that he was immersed– without any

manifestation or other sign gift. While we may be able to dismiss the lack of such information for the Ethiopian, we are hard-pressed to do the same for Saul/Paul.

No sooner had Paul been saved than he began to proclaim the Gospel, followed almost immediately by persecution. Even so, other believers had a difficult time believing that their former enemy had become one of them. This is one bit of evidence out of many which refutes the claim that Paul remained a Jesus-hating Pharisee and was a false teacher, as modern-day Judaizers claim. Though he did refer to himself as still a Pharisee on some occasions, he was clearly a radically changed man who suffered much for the name of Jesus.

## **9:32–10:48 Peter and Cornelius**

Peter, like all the others, still saw the faith as primarily Hebrew. This is understandable since, as far as they knew, the prophecies would continue unhindered, and there was no hint in their scriptures about any other Congregation besides Israel. But then he had a vision wherein God used unclean animals as an object lesson to prepare him for a visit from Cornelius, a godly Gentile. It was not until he arrived at Cornelius' home that he finally understood that this new Congregation was inclusive of all people.

But he was interrupted in his speech by the familiar sign gift of speaking in unlearned languages, evidence of the Gentiles being immersed in the Holy Spirit. And we must note that this preceded their being immersed in water, with no mention of Peter laying hands on any of them. As Peter then explained to those who were upset with him for entering a Gentile home and sharing a meal with them, this manifestation proved beyond doubt that Gentiles were not to be excluded or kept separate.

## **11:19–30 The scattered seeds take root and grow**

Though this section requires little comment beyond the title, there is a statement made about a collection for famine relief that many take out of context. The people were warned of an impending famine, so they set aside funds for the believers in Judea “in proportion to how each had prospered”. This is interpreted by some as an endorsement of tithing. Yet as was the case with the “deacons” of chapter six, this was a particular situation and time, and a one-off collection. As for “prospered”, this refers to profit/increase or having excess, not income from wages or salaries. The poor are not to support other poor people; this is the responsibility of the well-off. Anyone can give according to their conscience of course, and some, as Paul would later remark, do give beyond their means. But this is *giving*, a voluntary act, not a legalistic tithe.

## **11:31–14:28 Mistaken for gods– but not for long**

It seems that Herod had the same problem as the religious leaders when it came to imprisoning disciples of Jesus. But being a despot, someone else had to pay for Peter’s miraculous escape, so he had innocent guards put to death. But God finally had enough of Herod and put him to a gruesome death himself.

Once again Paul speaks boldly about the Jesus he had formerly persecuted, and once again the Judeans are envious and oppose him, so once again the seeds are scattered even more. When Paul miraculously healed someone in Lystra, the people decided that Paul was the god Hermes and Barnabas was Zeus. But not long after they tried to offer them sacrifices, agitators came and turned them quickly into a murderous mob. They had left Paul for dead, but he got up as if nothing had happened. Then before leaving the area,

they appointed elders for the local Congregations. Elders were guardians and teachers, not bosses.

## **15:1–35 The Jerusalem Council**

The belief of some who had been Pharisees, that even Gentile converts to Christianity must follow the laws of Moses, led to a meeting in Jerusalem. Paul and Barnabas reported all that God had been doing among the Gentiles, and there was a long debate. Finally Peter and James came to a decision, and what each of them said raises some important points.

Peter described the laws of Moses as “a burden neither we nor our ancestors could bear”. Some claim he meant the corrupt traditions of the Pharisees, yet Peter refers to the ancestors. While technically this could apply to the time those traditions were developed during the Babylonian captivity, it is a stretch to think Peter would refer to those ancestors and that corrupt law. Who would even think about putting Gentiles under mere traditions? And remember that the passage began with a reference to Moses, not to the Talmud. The specific law the Pharisees wanted kept was that of circumcision, which is clearly part of the laws of Moses.

Then James added a reference to prophecy and the first clear identification of the Congregation in the Old Testament: Amos 9:11–12, which refers to a time when God would include the Gentiles and then “turn back and rebuild David’s fallen sanctuary”. Now the Congregation understands that God is turning his attention to the Gentiles, though not forever. This is also a good rebuttal to the claim of Replacement Theology, that God is finished with Israel (or that the Gentile believers must come under the laws of Moses). All James asks is that the Gentiles show some sensitivity to those who are going through a difficult time of transition. It is likely that he had penned his Letter before this meeting.

## **15:36–16:15 Paul meets Timothy and Lydia**

After the decision of the Council, one may be surprised to read that Paul had Timothy circumcised. But the reason is given: “on account of the Judeans in the area”. As Paul would later say, “circumcision doesn’t matter” (Gal. 5:6), and he wanted no more trouble than necessary. As for Lydia, she was a prominent businesswoman, and Paul did not hesitate to meet with the women for prayer. She was receptive to the Gospel, and “she and her household” were saved. This phrase, and the one following where she invites them into her (rather than her husband’s) home, clearly portray Lydia as the head of her household.

## **16:16–40 A python and a prison break**

Apollo was the twin of Artemis (we will encounter this pagan goddess again later in the book), and his earthly oracle was to be a maiden (later, a woman over 50) called the Pythia (python). After pestering Paul and Silas for too long, Paul exorcised the demon that had been giving her prophetic powers. But her handlers realized that this meant the end of their lucrative business. So they made up false charges against Paul and Silas, which resulted in a severe whipping and jail. Once again there was a miraculous escape, but not a quiet one as had been the case for Peter. As they were singing (!) there was a violent earthquake which opened all the prison doors. This is where we meet the famous jailer who asked how to be saved, and the simple reply was for him to put his trust in Master Jesus. Some stumble over the addition of “and your household”, but this hardly means that the family did not have to have faith but were forced to believe as the head of the house (see related comments on Lydia). The text states that the Word of the Master was spoken to all of them.

The next day, the officials tried to get Paul and Silas released quietly, but Paul would have none of it. He demanded justice, which some believers today would think is wrong for a Christian. And he used his Roman citizenship to his advantage, though no one doubts the evil of the Roman government.

## **17:1–15 Hounded from city to city**

The most notable incident in this section is the contrast between the people of Thessalonica and Berea. Rather than reacting with emotion upon hearing new ideas, they turned to the scriptures to cross-examine what Paul was saying, which Luke cites as an example of “noble character”. This is an important lesson for us today: not only must we restrain our reactions and know the scriptures, we must also not blindly swallow what we may hear from preachers and teachers but put them under scrutiny. This is how discernment is practiced, and it supports the use of “old books” to determine spiritual truth.

## **17:16–34 Paul in Athens**

In the account of Paul in Athens, we are given an example of how to present the Gospel to people without knowledge of the one true God. Unlike the message of Peter to Israel on Pentecost, the message Paul brought to the Athenians was simply to appeal to the evidence of the resurrection of Jesus. He did not dangle sinners over the flames of hell, or demand personal confessions and repentance, but only presented this evidence as proving which God was the true one. Some mistakenly interpret this approach as Paul accepting and affirming their pantheism. But clearly he was using it as a “hook” or lead-in to present a new idea to them. Their shrine to The Unknown God was the perfect opportunity to introduce them to him.

## **18:1–23 Priscilla and Aquila**

Paul met these two due to them all being in the tent-making trade, and they formed a business partnership. This is one example of Paul earning his own wages, and it was not until others arrived that he was able to go back to proclaiming the Gospel full-time. He was run out of town as usual, but later met up with Priscilla and Aquila, who traveled with him.

## **18:24–28 Apollos**

In Ephesus, Priscilla and Aquila found the eloquent and educated Apollos proclaiming the immersion of John, so they took him aside and told him “the rest of the story”. Note that it was not just the man doing the teaching, and he is in no way portrayed as either leading or supervising the teaching of his wife. This only needs to be said due to the efforts of some today to shoehorn male oversight into every corner of scripture.

## **19:1–20 True and false**

In Corinth there was another instance of the sign gift of speaking in unlearned languages, after which Paul spent two years debating in a public hall. Debate, like demanding justice, is another activity in which, according to some today, Christians should not engage. Yet it was these debates which caused the Gospel to spread all around that region.

But it is always the spectacular gifts that draw in the fakes and impostors. Some local exorcists took it upon themselves to mimic the words of Paul and try them out on a demon-possessed man. But the demon said something very interesting before beating the impostors to a pulp: “I know Jesus and Paul, but who are you?” For the Christian, miracles are not performed by magic words and

incantations, but by the power of the Holy Spirit, and evil spirits know this. And this incident put such fear of God into the people that they publicly burned their magic books worth millions of today's dollars.

## **19:21–41 Artemis of the Ephesians**

Where there is a good reputation there is also often a bad one, and this was to surround Paul wherever he went. In Ephesus he drew the negative attention of an influential silversmith named Demetrius, head of a trade guild making shrines for their goddess. They stirred up a mob which then spent two hours chanting mindlessly to her. But an official finally got them to calm down, and he used the threat of the Roman government charging them with rioting to convince them to disband.

## **20:1–38 A farewell to the elders in Ephesus**

Paul gave one last long speech before leaving the area, and this is where we read the account of the young man he lulled to sleep with all that speaking. The youth fell out of the window he had fallen asleep next to and was killed, but Paul raised him back to life. Then he met with the elders of the local Congregation, and as noted before, there were several of them and not one “head elder” with “associate elders” as tradition has had it.

In his advice to the elders, Paul indicated that they were shepherds and guardians with serious responsibilities. And the danger they were to guard against was the eventual arising of “wolves” from among them, who would ravage the flock. This was bound to happen practically as soon as Paul turned his back, and history shows the tragic accuracy of that prediction. According to noted historian Philip Schaff in *History of the Christian Church*, § 42, *Clergy and Laity*, this process of transforming the Congregation from organism to organization began in the second century a.d. Control-



seeking people formed a hierarchy, turning Jesus' command for the greatest to be the least on its head.

## **21:1–14 Philip and prophets**

One largely ignored fact about Philip is that his four unmarried daughters were prophets. This defies two popular claims: that the highest calling of all women is marriage and motherhood, and that women cannot be prophets as men are. It also fulfills what Peter quoted from Joel on Pentecost. There is no qualifying or excusing or exception-granting here, either expressed or implied. Had they been sons instead, no one would question their gifting or sphere of service.

## **21:15–23:11 Paul is falsely accused**

People have an uncanny ability to jump to wild conclusions, and then use those conclusions to hate and murder. They took Paul's sincere effort to keep from causing offense and turned it into a crime worthy of death. But yet again, Paul uses his Roman citizenship to demand justice for being hauled off to jail and punishment without having been given a fair trial. And when he was stood before the Sanhedrin, he used his being a Pharisee to divide the council. But this whole charade would turn out to spread the Gospel even farther, and to allow Paul to testify before kings.

## **23:12–30 A failed ambush**

Paul's enemies, not content with law or justice, conspired to ambush Paul on his way to Governor Felix, a trip they had convinced the legion commander to arrange. But due to the bravery of a young boy who found out about the plot, all the conspirators accomplished was further trouble for themselves. They may have thought they

could pull the same move as they had done to Jesus, but they did not have the same amount of leverage on Felix and the rest as they had with Pilate.

## **23:31–24:27 To Governor Felix**

The prosecution spoke first, and then Paul spoke in his own defense. Felix, though well-versed in Judean affairs, exhibited little interest in the case beyond hoping Paul would offer him a bribe— as if this tentmaker was carrying around a lot of spare cash. This hope of bribery would also help explain why Festus allowed the case to remain open for two years, though as stated he mainly wanted to please the Judeans.

## **25:1–26:32 Before Festus and Agrippa**

When Felix was succeeded by Festus, the Judeans tried the ambush ploy again, but Festus did not immediately grant their request to have Paul transferred. When the trial resumed, Festus asked Paul if he would be willing to face trial in Jerusalem, but Paul once again appealed to his rights under established Roman law. So he made a formal appeal to Caesar, which Festus granted. Then it was King Agrippa's turn to hear the case, because Festus needed to specify the precise charge to justify sending the case to Caesar. And though Agrippa agreed that Paul was not guilty and should be released, the appeal to Caesar could not be withdrawn. Paul had been told in an earlier vision that he must go to Rome, and his accusers were the unwitting tools by which God brought that to pass.

## **27:1–28:16 Adventures on the way to Caesar**

Reading the account of Paul's trip to Rome, one might speculate that malevolent spiritual forces did not want him to testify before Caesar. The most familiar part of the trip was the shipwreck at the island of Melita. The residents saw Paul shake off a deadly snake bite and suffer no ill effects, which some try to dismiss as ignorance. But this is presumptuous and merely argued from a disbelief in miracles— even by people who accept that Jesus rose from the dead. Yet Paul went on to heal the people of the island, which resulted in the ability to continue the trip in spite of the loss of everything but the passengers.

## **28:17–31 Final words from Paul**

Considering the odds against their reaching Rome at all, we should not be surprised that Paul was given comfortable living quarters there. He expected to encounter the same opposition from the local Judeans as always, but they had heard nothing about him. He stayed there for two years, continuing to proclaim the Gospel. And at that point his story ends, without any comment about his trial before Caesar or his death. Tradition has it that Paul was beheaded in Rome while Nero was Caesar, sometime in the mid-60s a.d.

# Romans

## Background

The letter to the Romans was written around 57 a.d. by Paul while he was on his way from Ephesus to Corinth. He gave the letter to Phoebe to take to Rome on his behalf. It is the most systematic and doctrinal of his letters, touching on a wide range of issues yet centered around salvation by faith for all people, regardless of heritage.

## Outline

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2. **–B 1:7b–16** Prayers and blessings
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6. **— X 9:1–11:36** Unity in God
  1. **X1a 9:1–5** Anguish over Israel
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5. **X1a' 10:1–4** Anguish over Israel
6. **X2 10:5–17** How all can believe
7.
  1. **X3a 10:18–21** Provoking to jealousy
  2. —**X3x 11:1–12** Rejection and blindness
  3. **X3a' 11:13–15** Provoking to jealousy
  4. **X4 11:16–36** Analogies and timing
8. —**E' 12:1–2** Obedience to God
9. —**D' 12:3–15:7** Practice of theme
10. —**C' 15:8–12** Theme summary
11. —**B' 15:13–16** Prayers and Blessings
12. **A' 15:17–16:27** Greetings

## **A 1:1–7a Greetings**

Paul begins with his usual greeting, but goes a step farther in calling himself a slave of Jesus— not just a servant, but one who completely and permanently belongs to another. He includes the fact that the Gospel he is preaching was promised through the Old Testament prophets. They pointed to Jesus the Christ, who was proven to be God by his resurrection from the dead. Paul, though a Jew, had been given the task of bringing this Gospel to the Gentiles.

## **B 1:7b–16 Prayers and Blessings**

After thanking God for the believers at Rome, Paul expresses his great desire to see them in person, since he had been prevented from doing so several times. This Gospel came first to the Jews and then to everyone else (Gentiles or “Greeks”).

## **C 1:17 Theme: Salvation by faith**

The overarching theme of the letter is that “the just will live by faith.” It began with faith, both on the part of Eve when she expressed

belief in the coming Savior (Gen. 4: “I acquired a man with YHWH”, and YHWH literally means “the Coming One”), and on the part of Abraham (Gen. 15:6). And with the coming of the Christ Jesus, it ends with faith. As Paul will develop in detail, the important thing in God’s eyes is not ancestry, social standing, or any other division, but only faith.

## **D 1:18–8:11 Theology of theme**

This long section is where Paul meticulously constructs the theology to back up his theme. It begins with a very familiar passage about sin and judgment. We have to be careful here because there is much theological baggage applied to this passage, which is not necessarily warranted by the context.

## **Da 1:18–32 Non-Jews**

First Paul talks about those who deliberately suppress the truth. They know there is a creator God just by looking around at nature. Someone had to make it all, since it’s impossible for anything to make itself. Who has the power to create the “heavens and the earth” but God? We never observe animals arising from plants, or people from animals, but that all things reproduce “after their kind”. But especially in the last century, people start with the assumption that God cannot exist, then find alternative stories to explain what we see. People are without excuse for this, since they know the truth but try to bury it and also keep others from seeing it. Because of this deliberate rejection of God, they became stupid! They traded the almighty Creator for idols of mere animals or people.

Throughout the rest of the chapter, we see the repeated phrase “Because of this, God gave them over...”. Note carefully the order of events here: First people reject the God they know exists, and then God “gives them over” to the evil and darkness they love. Some will

ignore the cause of the effect, saying God gave them over to evil without their first having known the truth.

## **Db 2:1–3:8 Jews**

But Paul suddenly turns on the self-righteous, who all this time were undoubtedly patting themselves on the back as he listed the deeds of the irreverent. Many people ignore the context and stop at the fragment “in judging others you condemn yourself”, arguing that there is never to be any judging. But Paul gives the reason: “because you practice the same things”. He is condemning a double standard, not teaching that Christians should never judge.

The Jews especially had relied upon their being the Chosen People to think themselves automatically righteous. But Paul shows them that they who know better are actually worse off than the non-Jews who naturally do what the law requires. He explains that God’s goodness is intended to lead them to a change of heart, not a license to sin. Just because God is patient and withholds judgment for a time shouldn’t be an excuse to indulge the flesh, because God’s patience will not hold out forever. And this is not any kind of anti-Semitism; Paul and Jesus were both Jews after all. But in this age of grace, we’re all treated the same. God is not finished with his Chosen People yet, but for the time being, there is no favoritism.

Note that Paul is not teaching salvation by works here, but simply stating that those who seek righteousness will find it, and those who reject God will not. Actions are the result of what’s in the heart. When we see words like “actions” or “deeds” and “rewards”, this is “works” language; it refers to what we earn or deserve. Salvation on the other hand, as is very clear from other scriptures, is strictly by faith. So we can tell what the subject is by looking for those words. Deeds are the result of salvation, not the cause. And scripture makes it clear that the two are mutually exclusive: it’s either faith or works, not both at the same time.

In 3:1 Paul turns to the logical question in the reader's mind by this point: has he been saying that being a Jew is now worthless? Not at all. God had given his written laws exclusively to them, and through them the Savior of the World had come. Their unfaithfulness could not nullify the promises of God, even if most of them rejected him. There has always been a "remnant", a small group of the faithful, and God certainly will never forget them.

## **Dc 3:9–26 Both Groups**

But this does not negate God's justice, and in that sense there is no privileged class; the Jews have no legal loophole when it comes to personal sin. God is gracious, but this does not negate his holiness. Jews are no less sinful than Gentiles, and Paul quotes their own Psalms to emphasize the point; the psalm was not written only about Gentiles!

Now Paul discusses the purpose of law (3:20): to expose sin and make us conscious of it. It was never meant to save anyone, but to make them aware of their need to be saved. Salvation is "apart from the law" and is for everyone, Jew and Gentile alike. All have sinned, and all who are saved were saved by faith in Jesus' "ransom payment". Note that this happened "at the right time". We must remember that timing is an important factor in God's view, such that we should be careful not to take what God prescribes for one period of history and try to make it fit another, without clear reasons to do so. Also note that there is no need to use law to expose any alleged "original sin"; this is all about those personal sins we commit.

## **Dd 3:27–5:5 Faith and law**

Paul points out, after all that about the lack of favoritism toward the Jews in regard to sin, that God is God over all, not just them. So the basis for his judgment will be the same for all: faith. The law has one



purpose, but faith has another. Per the example of Abraham (4:1), Paul shows that he was declared righteous long before the Mosaic law had been given. Had Abraham worked for this declaration he would have earned a wage owed to him. But instead, having done nothing but believe God, we can see that this declaration was not a payment of wages owed but a gift. And not only did this happen before the Law, it happened even before the rite of circumcision. So that rite was not the cause or guarantee of righteousness, but only a sign that such righteousness had already existed. So while the physical descendants of the Promise were marked by circumcision, the spiritual descendants would be known by their faith. And just as Abraham's faith was in the promise of God, our faith must be in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead (4:23).

## **De 5:6–6:2 Sin and Redemption**

Now we will take a careful look at how sin entered the world and the implications of that. This will further enhance our understanding of exactly what Jesus did. Paul begins by pointing out that God did not wait for us to turn to him, but that he took the initiative at the time he deemed optimal. His love for all people is proved by his payment for our sins while we (the world) still wallowed in them. This was God's offer of reconciliation. One party cannot force another to reconcile, but only make the offer. So when Paul says that we were reconciled through the death of Jesus, he also points out that we were still the enemies of God. So he then added that we will be saved "through his life", meaning we must put our faith in his resurrection.

Sin entered the world through one person, and death entered the world through sin. There was no death before sin, an important point to remember on the subject of origins and Genesis. What kind of death is this referring to? We look at Genesis 3 and see that it's clearly about mortality– which means being able to die physically. If it meant any other kind of death, then we have to say that plants, who were cursed because of Adam, have spirits. We could also look at it

as the broken relationship that it was; Adam became “dead” to God in the sense of being no longer in fellowship with him.

Notice the order and wording: since we observe that everyone sins, we know that death passed to all people. That is, sin is the evidence of death; we sin because we are in mortal bodies that crave and decay. And “death was in charge from Adam to Moses, even over those whose failure was not like that of Adam.” How did Adam sin, as opposed to how Eve sinned? He rebelled against God to his face, blaming him for giving him Eve. That’s why sin is attributed to him alone; both Adam and Eve ate the fruit and died as a result, but only Adam blamed God and added a second sin. God never said there would be any additional penalties besides “death” for eating the fruit, so the cursing of the ground and Adam’s being driven out of the garden were for his unique second sin of open rebellion. We see this same blatant rebellion in Cain. So physical mortality is what we all inherit from Adam, but rebellion is what Jesus came to die for, along with the promise of a new immortal body. Innocent babies sometimes die, and it’s obvious they never had the capacity to rebel against God. Animals die as well, and are incapable of such rebellion. We all suffer the consequences of Adam’s rebellion, which is physical decay and death and suffering.

## **Df 6:3–11 A Death and Resurrection Like Jesus’**

It is important to emphasize what Paul is saying in this passage. Our death is compared to Jesus’ death, so it must be physical, or else we have to say Jesus died spiritually. And what kind of resurrection did Jesus have, physical or spiritual? Then our resurrection will be physical, like Jesus’. And Paul expressly states that it is the **body** of sin that we put to death; we are dead to sin. Jesus died to sin “once for all” so that we could be alive to God with him. And being dead to sin means we cannot keep going on as though we are still alive to it.

## **Dg 6:12–23 Living Accordingly**

In 6:18 Paul summarizes his point: Adam's sin gave us spiritual separation and physical death, but Jesus' death and resurrection gives us spiritual union and physical immortality. Once again he points out that the law he was talking about earlier only highlighted our rebellion, making the need for God's grace even more obvious. And in case anyone would conclude that sinning is ultimately going to make God look better, Paul strongly retorts that this grace of God is not a license to sin. Instead, we are immersed into the same kind of death and life as Jesus, who knew no sin.

## **Dh 7:1–8:7 The Purpose and Limitation of Law**

Here Paul takes another angle regarding law: Death puts an end to a person's obligation to law, so since we died to sin we are no longer under its laws. But those believers who were under the Mosaic law also died to that law, as Paul said, "in order to belong to Another". This is a strong rebuttal to the idea that believers in Jesus are somehow under that old law, "married" to it and obligated under it. But that is impossible; we died to law and now belong to Jesus, to the new Law that gives life as opposed to the old one that brought only condemnation.

So does this mean the old law was evil? Not at all; it was the "glass" through which we could see what sin is. It illuminated sin, making us aware of it. And you know how people are: if we are told not to do something, we feel compelled to do it. Without being told that, we would have had no desire to do it. This is what the Law does: it brings sin to our attention. But it is really our own sin that draws us to do that which the Law forbids.

## **Di 8:8–11 Duality**

We cannot blame the Law for our own weakness. Yet we still live in our mortal bodies; we have not yet received our full inheritance. And it is this “flesh” that continually battles with our spirit. In fact, Paul expressly states that “the body is a rotting corpse because of failure, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness.” We died to the law and will get a new body that is not under the influence of sin, but for the time being we must struggle with it.

## **E 8:12–39 Obedience to God**

Because of what Jesus accomplished for us, and if we put our faith in him, we can confidently approach God— no longer as slaves to a master but as children to a father. Yet if we are truly children, we will seek to please our Father and not disobey him. We must keep in mind that we have a new life, a new relationship, a new law, and we must keep in step with that instead of the old ways. But we are not in this struggle alone; we have the Spirit not only as a Deposit but also as a “helper”. The Spirit is our link, the bridge between our spirits and God. He continually intercedes for us, even when we just don’t know what to pray.

In what Paul says about God’s foreknowledge (8:29), remember the context. He is discussing our adoption as children and our help from the Holy Spirit. The people God foreknew (not fore-chose) are the ones he then predestined— not to be saved but to “be conformed to the image of his Son”. In other words, God decided that whoever would be saved would then be like Jesus, and be God’s own children. It is these who are also “called”, “justified”, and “glorified”. Notice also the past tense here: these things are guaranteed and considered finished in all who are saved. We don’t have to work for them, so we cannot lose them.

Using legal terminology again, Paul speaks of Jesus as our Advocate in the courtroom, defending us against all charges. And in spite of our present trials, we are conquerors in the eyes of God. Even though we have not yet won all the battles, we are guaranteed the victory; we will certainly receive our promised eternal life with God in heaven.

## **X 9:1–11:36 Unity in God**

Here we arrive at the centerpiece of Paul's dissertation: the unity of all people groups in faith.

### **X1a 9:1–5 Anguish over Israel**

Paul begins by expressing his anguish over his own people, the Jews. He points out that the blindness they suffer in regards to their own Christ is not a failure on God's part. Instead he reminds us that God's promises were to the faithful, not just to the physical descendants of Abraham. Many people take this to mean God has no more purpose for Israel, but this is not the case at all. This idea is formally known as Replacement Theology, where the Congregation (or possibly some other group) takes Israel's place. Yet these people only accept Israel's blessings and not her curses. What Paul is comparing is two types of Jews, and the descendants of Isaac rather than those of Ishmael; he is not talking about Gentiles here.

### **X1b 9:6–9 Faith and promise**

Some take the account of God's choosing Isaac over Ishmael as proof of his forcing people to be saved, but look at the context. God is simply choosing a physical race; this is not about individual salvation at all. As also with Jacob over Esau and many other examples, God has the right to choose whoever he wills to be the

ancestors of the Christ. It has nothing at all to do with individual salvation.

## **X1x 9:10–26 Choice and calling**

But is God unjust to choose people for an ethnic group? Hardly. But again, the statement that God says “I’ll have mercy on whom I’ll have mercy” is twisted to mean the predestination of individuals for salvation. Yet the theme is still about God choosing a race of people through whom the Christ would come. God didn’t choose Israel for its good qualities or numbers, but just the opposite, so his Name would be glorified instead of the people (Deut. 7:7–8).

Objects designed for either destruction or honor (9:22–26) refer to God’s responses to hearts that are either dead-set against him or made righteous by faith. And this is in the middle of a context about nations, as well as individuals who are chosen for various kinds of service based upon the condition of their hearts. That nations are in view is further supported by the following statements about Hosea and Isaiah. We learn of those God calls “his people”, and of the remnant, the few who have faith in God.

We can also take the objection of 9:19 as the Jews being indignant that God would include Gentiles in the plan of salvation. They were actually angry with God for doing this, but Paul responds with an equal degree of indignation at their conceit. And if predestination were true then we could rebut that as well: if we were mere puppets that God operates, we couldn’t be blamed for our sin. The concept of God blaming people he predestines to hell for their sin actually makes God the author of sin. So God’s choices are not for who will be saved and who will not, but for who is used to perform his will in this life (9:22–26). Those “designed for destruction” are the ones who were “given over” to their choices (see section D). And since the people he chose rejected him, God included Gentiles in order to

make the Jews jealous— which is exactly what we see here in the Jews' objection to God's including them in salvation.

## **X1b' 9:27–33 Faith and promise**

God's promise will stand, regardless of the number. Though only a small number of physical Jews will be saved, because salvation is by faith, it is only by God's grace that there would be any saved at all. Faith inherits the promise, whether held by Jew or Gentile.

## **X1a' 10:1–4 Anguish over Israel**

As with what began in 9:1, Paul ends this small section by expressing his heartfelt desire for the salvation of his people, the Jews. But they still try to make their own righteousness by works, in ignorance of the fact that Jesus already fulfilled all the obligations of the law.

## **X2 10:5–17 How all can believe**

Paul now focuses on Moses, to whom the Jews look. But instead of supporting them, Moses condemns them: "The one who does all these things will live by them". The Jews had to know that they were not perfectly obeying Moses, yet the law demands perfection. Only Jesus achieved that.

In vs. 9 and 10 we see the Gospel message in its most concise form: Jesus is Master and God raised him from the dead. With your heart/mind you believe that Jesus reconciled the world to God, and with your mouth you confess that he is God. This is not at all a requirement to speak the magical words "Jesus is Master", but simply an explanation of how we relate to both God and man. Man cannot know the heart/mind as God does, so we have to speak up.

What exactly does it mean to call Jesus “Master”? It does not mean you prove by works that you are perfectly obeying him. Instead, it means that you believe him to be The Master, The I Am. In other words, it’s not “Jesus is **my** Master” but “Jesus is **The** Master”. Of course you will be expected to treat him like your Master after being saved, but not in order to get saved. So you confess that Jesus is God, and you have a conviction that God raised him from the dead. His death reconciled us; his life saves us. So these verses give the two most basic elements of saving faith: the right Savior and his resurrection.

Another important point is the order of events: you believe, and then you speak. It’s very much like the order of events in Peter’s address to the crowd on Pentecost: repent and be baptized. You repent (change your mind to belief), and so you are baptized. Confession, like water baptism, is a result and acknowledgment of a change of heart (the meaning of ‘repent’). It clearly isn’t the speaking or the dunking that gets you saved, it’s the heart’s conviction. As with the circumcision of Abraham, the faith comes first and the outward signs second.

And above all, this all applies equally to both Jew and Gentile (10:12). All need to hear the Gospel in order to know where their faith is to be placed. And if anyone is assured of having heard, it is the Jews (10:18). But again, God used the salvation of Gentiles to provoke the Jews to jealousy, since they heard the Gospel but rejected it.

## **X3a 10:18–21 Provoking to jealousy**

Another blow against predetermined salvation of individuals is found in the remaining verses of chapter 10. God woos Israel, he longs for them, he waits for them. This is not the forced dragging against our will of predestination but the pleading of a rejected Father who loves even his enemies. Surely God does not hold out his arms to people



whose fate he decreed in eternity past, and surely this does not make him weak and helpless. Allowing people to have free will is not a weakness at all; it is the weak who deny it out of fear.

## **X3x 11:1–12 Rejection and blindness**

In chapter 11 Paul soundly defeats the idea of Replacement Theology. He appeals not only to his own heritage but the fact that God always preserves a remnant. And if it is by God's choosing, then it can't depend upon Israel being faithful. Many claim that since Israel disobeyed God that they must be rejected. But here again we see that this is not so. It's all about God, about his unilateral promises, about bringing him glory. That God is faithful in spite of Israel's unfaithfulness is a tribute to his trustworthiness, rather than a rejection of Israel as his chosen people. Because of their continual rejection of him, God (as we've seen repeatedly in this letter), "gave them over" to blindness and deafness to the Gospel. Yet individuals can still be saved. And how much more clearly can Paul put it than he does in verse 11? Israel did not fall beyond recovery.

## **X3a' 11:13–15 Provoking to jealousy**

It is their very hardness towards God that allowed the Christ to be sacrificed for us all. It was to bring them to jealousy that God allowed this. Yet Paul cautions the Gentiles to not become proud. After all, if God would punish his chosen race, and if the Jews cannot escape responsibility for sin by their privileged position, then the Gentiles have even less reason to be overconfident.

## **X4 11:16–36 Analogies and timing**

Paul uses the analogy of a vine and its branches to illustrate the relationship of all, Jew and Gentile alike, to the Vine. All draw their

life from the Vine. The broken-off branches represent the unfaithful of a chosen group. This is in keeping with Paul's discussion of the remnant. Just as with the Jews, the Gentiles have been "grafted in" as a group, but individuals stand or fall on the basis of faith.

The analogy of the olive tree serves the same purpose, but be careful not to attach unwarranted meaning to it. Some say that the olive tree must always represent Israel, but that cannot be the case here. Otherwise we'd have the nonsensical situation of the branches being made equal to the trunk. Put another way, if Israel is the trunk then it cannot also be the natural branches. But in context, the trunk must represent the same thing as the vine: Jesus. The Jews are "natural" branches and the Gentiles "wild", but they're all branches nonetheless.

An important implication of this is that it shows that the Congregation has not been absorbed into Israel, nor Israel into the Congregation. the Congregation is composed of both wild and natural branches. The context here tells us that the wild branches must therefore represent **Gentiles**, not Christians. Another implication is that Jews and Gentiles are still separate entities, branches of two types, but they all are grafted into the Trunk. So the natural cannot look down on the wild, and the wild cannot look down on the natural. The two groups are equal and distinct.

All that being the case, then, there is no support for Conditional Security (opposite of Eternal Security). To be grafted into either the Vine or the Trunk illustrates not individual salvation but God's inclusion of Gentiles alongside Jews in the plan of salvation. Individuals can be cut off on the basis of lacking saving faith. Notice that these branches are first given a chance, and only after they produce no fruit are they removed. God is patient, and reluctant to cut anyone off. But if they persist, God will finally "give them over" to the flames.

In 11:25–32 Paul continues to warn people about not getting overconfident, and gives us a hint about prophecy: there is a certain number of Gentiles that are to be grafted in, not necessarily a certain point in time. But somehow he manages yet again to create another controversy: “All Israel will be saved”. What can this mean? Let’s remember all we’ve been reading in this letter. The theme is faith, not ethnic privilege or works. Who are true Israel? Who are the children of Abraham? The ones with faith. So here Paul is referring to the saved Jews, the faithful ones. The time will come when all the fruitless branches are cut off, and all that is left are the saved. To put it another way, someday Israel will be composed of only the saved. It does not mean that all the physical children of Abraham will be saved. Although Israel’s “hardening” was necessary to enable the Gospel to be brought to the Gentiles, they are still God’s chosen race, and he has not forgotten his promises to their ancestors. These were irrevocable promises.

Wrapping up this pivotal point in his letter, Paul breaks out in praise to God in 11:33-36.

## **E’ 12:1–2 Obedience to God**

Now there is a distinct shift in Paul’s letter and he begins to work back in reverse order, with his focus here on obedience. In light of all that’s been said, he appeals to how reasonable it is to live in accordance with what pleases God. This is all about living like Christians, not how to be saved. We are to please God, and worship him out of understanding instead of ignorance. Otherwise there would have been no point to Paul’s long dissertation. If Christianity is just another blind, experience-oriented religion, then what’s the point of arguing over doctrine?

In contrast to the empty, powerless experience religions, Christians are to be “transformed by renewing your minds” instead of being pressed into the world’s mold. This is the exact opposite of the

meditation of the world, which seeks to empty the mind and push it aside. Instead, we are to renew and fill our minds, for the purpose of knowing the will of God, a will that is pleasing and perfect. Even our bodies are to be presented to God as a kind of sacrifice. They are meant for neither self-indulgence nor self-destruction, but to please God.

## **D' 12:3–15:7 Practice of theme**

Moving back to the topic of the family of God, Paul puts added emphasis on ethics. A warning against self-centeredness is found in 12:3–8. We are to neither over- nor under-value ourselves, but be realistic. Sometimes we mistake extreme self-depreciation as humility, but it is just as bad as the other extreme. To say of oneself either “I am better than you” or “I am nothing” are both wrong. One presumes what God has not given, and the other insults his empowerment, so both are self-centered. To illustrate this point, Paul gives the analogy of the human body, as a figure of the Congregation being the Anointed’s “body”. All parts are necessary and all are equally important. Some are more prominent while others are kept hidden. Yet they all compose one body; with any part missing, the body would not exist. So one part cannot be considered either superior or inferior to another. This principle has important implications on the topics of a clergy/laity class distinction and discrimination on the basis of race, social class, or gender.

Now to some general exhortations to all believers (12:9–13:14). Clearly we are to be more than bench-warmers, more than spectators. Instead of lifeless appendages, we are to be busy with the work God has given us to do. Evil is overcome by active resistance to it, not by running away from it. And we must be model citizens wherever we are. After urging people to give what they owe and not be in debt, Paul again mentions law, but that it is fulfilled by love for others; this one command encompasses all the rest.

In chapter 14 Paul turns from how believers relate to society, to how believers relate to each other. The immediate context is about “to eat, or not to eat” in regards to meat, but the general principle is to keep everything in perspective relative to the Gospel and the Body of the Anointed. Someone whose faith is “strong” and has no qualms about this or that food must not despise someone whose faith is “weak” and whose conscience is bothered over certain controversial things. But it goes the other way too; the “weak” must not despise the “strong”. So instead of rubbing our personal convictions in each other’s faces, we are to keep to ourselves those things we know will bother others, in the name of peace. But don’t make the mistake of treating important doctrines as something we should keep to ourselves. This passage is about the disputable, the controversial, the matters of personal conviction over things God has not commanded us about.

We are all parts of one Body, but those parts are not identical. We each have different functions and levels of faith. Many today think we should all be interchangeable parts and demand that others see every detail exactly as we do. But we all answer to God, not to each other (14:10–13). And who is any of us to boss the others? We each will have to answer for how we treated other believers. Does this equate to no judging at all? Hardly. We are commanded to judge, to discern, to seek out the truth. But in this context, the judging we’re not supposed to do is to make ourselves authorities over others. The eye cannot demand that the foot answer to it instead of to the Head, nor can the right hand control the left.

In 14:21–15:7 Paul gives his personal opinion on meat eating, but leaves the whole matter to individual conscience. He tells us to be sensitive to others, whether they have more or less faith than we have. Food should never be a reason to part fellowship; it’s a trivial matter in the kingdom of God. But this is not to be taken as forcing people to violate their own consciences. The idea here is not to make everyone think the same over these secondary issues, but to keep peace by voluntary restriction, keeping things to ourselves if

necessary. Our example is Jesus, who set aside his divine privileges to become one of us. In fact, all of what was written in the OT was recorded for our benefit. We can look at the heroes of old for inspiration. He again speaks of the Gentiles' inclusion with the Jews in God's plans, and that all of us who believe are to praise God because of this.

## **C' 15:8–12 Theme summary**

Paul is now back to his focus on faith. Jesus came not only to die for sin, but also to fulfill the promises, resulting in salvation also to the Gentiles. The promise began by faith, and it ended when fulfilled by Jesus.

## **B' 15:13–16 Prayers and Blessings**

As he approaches the end of his letter, Paul expresses his usual prayers and blessings. Though he credits the people with what they already know, he still feels the need to remind them of many things.

## **A' 15:17–16:27 Greetings**

Final greetings are given now. Paul has been living the example they should follow and spreading the Gospel everywhere. His driving ambition has been to take it to places it had never yet been, and his work has been accompanied by demonstrations of God's power. This, he explains, is why he has been unable to visit them in person, but he hopes to do so soon, since he has completed his mission in that part of the world. But first he has business to attend to in Jerusalem and he appeals to them for prayer support in this.

In his final list of names (beginning in 16:1), Paul starts off with a woman named Phoebe. She is called a "servant" just as any man in

the Letters; the Greek word is the masculine form typically transliterated “deacon” or translated “minister”. She was, as the Greek states clearly, “a presiding officer over many, including me”. This was no mere assistant or courier, but an important official to the believers in a large city. She was deemed worthy to take Paul’s letter to Rome, and the people there were to treat her as they would Paul.

Next is the married couple Priska and Aquila. Note that the female is listed first, which is outrageous by the standards of the time, and especially so since Paul had formerly been a Pharisee. He praises them both equally for risking their lives for him.

Another female noted is Mary. She was a co-worker, not simply a likeable person; she was on the same level as any male Paul named a co-worker.

Now to Junia. In an effort to explain away the obvious, those who believe in male preeminence have three ways to interpret this:

1. Junia is really a man, Junias (no textual attestation exists for this before the Middle Ages)
2. She is not an apostle herself but known to them
3. She is not an “authoritative” apostle

Junia is in fact a woman, numbered among the apostles and counted as outstanding, and has the same authority as any male apostle; see [Junia: The First Woman Apostle](#). And there is no hint in scripture of a non-authoritative apostle. Only with a prior commitment to male preeminence can any of the three objections above be supported, and it is quite disturbing to know that those entrusted with the accuracy of the Greek text were willing to deliberately alter it. But Paul matter-of-factly lists these prominent women as co-workers, as equals. Added to the list are women such as Tryphena and Tryphosa, and several unnamed others.

In contrast to the people he listed as being commended, Paul follows with a warning to note the other extreme, the ones causing

disputes and tripping people up in the faith (16:17–19). Such people are to be shut out. We are to be wise about the good, and innocent about evil. God will soon crush Satan under our feet.

More greetings, and then a final blessing. Paul has been given “the secret” to reveal, the Gospel itself and the relationship and security we have as believers. Through Jesus the Christ we can all be saved, Jew and Gentile alike, by faith alone.



# 1 Corinthians

## Background

The first letter to the Corinthians was written around 55 a.d. by Paul while he was in Ephesus on his third missionary trip. There were possibly four letters: the “previous” letter (1 Cor. 5:9), 1 Corinthians, the “severe” letter (2 Cor. 2:4 and 7:8–9), and 2 Corinthians. But it is also possible that the two we have include the other two.

## Outline

1. 1:1–9 Greetings
2. Divisions
  1. **1:10–13a** Misconceptions about leaders
  2. **1:13b–2:16** Misconceptions about salvation
  3. **3:1–4** Immaturity and worldliness
  4. **3:5–23** The temple of God
  5. **4:1–21** The servants of God
3. Christian Living
  1. **5:1–13** Purity and discipline
  2. **6:1–8** Legal disputes among believers
  3. **6:9–20** No license to sin
4. Domestic Issues
  1. **7:1–9** Marriage decisions and rights
  2. **7:10–16** Divorce
  3. **7:17–24** The relative unimportance of social constructs
  4. **7:25–40** The unmarried
5. Freedom, rights, and consideration
  1. **A 8:1–3** Love vs. knowledge and rights
  2. **–B 8:4–8** Food and sacrifices
  3. **— C 8:9–13** Stumbling blocks

4. — **X 9:1–27** Deferring rights out of love
  1. **Xa 9:1–18** Paul's self-defense as an apostle
  2. **Xb 9:19–27** Evangelistic strategies
5. — **C' 10:1–14** Stumbling blocks
6. — **B' 10:15–22** Food and sacrifices
7. **A' 10:23–11:1** Love vs. knowledge and rights
6. Symbolism and propriety in the Congregation
  1. **A 11:2** Keeping the right traditions
  2. — **B 11:3** Origins
  3. — **X 11:4–10** Head coverings
  4. — **B' 11:11–15** Origins
  5. **A' 11:16** Not keeping the wrong traditions
7. The Community of Believers
  1. **11:17–34** Meeting and eating
  2. **12:1–31** The Holy Spirit and the Body
  3. **13:1–13** The greatest quality
  4. **14:1–25** The greatest gift
  5. **14:26–40** Order in the meetings
8. The Gospel
  1. **15:1–10** Evidence for the Gospel
  2. **15:11–49** Implications of the Gospel
    1. **15:11–19** Resurrection
    2. **15:20–28** Death and life
    3. **15:29–34** Immersion (baptism)
    4. **15:35–49** Old and new bodies
  3. **15:50–58** Our ultimate hope
9. **16:1–9** Believers helping each other
10. **16:10–18** Personal recommendations
11. **16:19–24** Greetings

## 1:1–9 Greetings

In spite of the criticisms to follow, Paul begins with the positive. This letter is to the saved, which is an important thing to keep in mind. In spite of their faults, the Corinthian believers were considered holy by

simple virtue of their belonging to Christ. Our holiness does not depend on us at all, but on the finished work of Jesus. Once we are saved, there is no argument to be made about dividing believers into “holy” and “not holy”. Mature and immature perhaps, but not sanctified and unsanctified.

Notice also that these people eagerly wait for Jesus to be revealed. A person who has been made holy by faith in Jesus will look forward to seeing him face to face. Yet some today seem indifferent, or even doubt that Jesus will actually return at all. Sidetracked and backslidden as the Corinthians may have been, they at least believed that Jesus would someday return for them. And our guarantee of salvation is found in Jesus, not in us.

## **1:10–4:21 Divisions**

The community of believers in Corinth was splintered into many factions. Paul is apparently responding to a report from the followers of Chloe, who is listed as a leader just as Paul, Apollos, and Peter (Cephas) are. There is nothing expressed or implied about any “household”. It seems that many translators presume a woman could only be in charge of her own family, so “household” is added arbitrarily. But this would mean that Paul was accepting a report from her under-age children or that she was merely the hostess. See [this search result](#) for how various translations render the verse. Neither do any of the listed commentaries justify this presumption or explain how the Greek for “of Chloe” is different from the Greek for the listed male leaders. And if the messengers were her adult male slaves, this begs the question of how a woman could have authority over a man. And had she been a man, no one would question whether she was a leader of the church meeting there. Paul will now deal with the causes of these divisions and explain why they are wrong.

## **1:10–13a Misconceptions about leaders**

Just as the ancient Israelis demanded a human king to follow, the people here were lining up behind various leaders. They were treating leaders like the world does and forming cliques, apparently around the ritual of water immersion. But Paul will now remind them of what the Gospel is and how each person relates to others.

## **1:13b–2:16 Misconceptions about salvation**

Immersion in water is downplayed and separated from the Gospel. Paul says that Christ did not send him to immerse, while in the Great Commission Jesus commanded his disciples to do exactly that. But the Great Commission, although after the Cross, was before Pentecost, and thus before the church age, and also before the revealing of “the secret” to Paul (Colossians 1:26). So it is technically possible that Jesus’ command is for the Jews only. Paul did immerse the Philippian jailer (Acts 16), who was not a Jew. But water immersion was a common practice in many parts of the world at that time, and signified a person’s complete reversal of belief or affiliation with a particular group. So it would seem that Paul neither ordered nor condemned it; though Paul was himself a Jew, he was not sent to immerse. It does not appear to have been a central or primary issue.

Next Paul states that the worldly “wisdom” that rejects the simple Gospel is made to look foolish. The Greek says “the foolishness of the proclamation”, not “the foolishness of proclaiming”. Paul is saying that it’s the Gospel itself, not the method of spreading it, that’s foolish to the world. It’s this ridiculous proclamation that God used to save us, not high philosophy. Such emphasis on what makes sense to carnal minds takes away the power of the cross and gives glory to people instead of to God. Yet this problem has always plagued the community of believers. Paul further develops this point in appealing to what the Corinthians had formerly been. They were not saved by high-sounding arguments but by the power of the

simple Gospel. Educated as Paul was, he did not use his human credentials to win people over. Yet wisdom is used for those who have already been saved and who have shown a desire to grow spiritually.

Paul defines the wisdom he's been talking about as not philosophy but the "secret" of the Gospel revealed. He explains that God hid the plan of salvation from everyone so that Jesus would be crucified for our sins, to fulfill prophecy and seal our redemption. This is the secret, the wisdom of God, which Paul was given to reveal. He then points out that it is God's Spirit that reveals mysteries and wisdom. This is most definitely not, as some teach, saying that lost people cannot understand the Gospel message. They teach that God has to "regenerate" them first and use this passage as a proof text. But the context supports no such thing. It only says that the "soulish" (Gk. *psukikos*) cannot accept the things that come from the Spirit of God. There is no justification for interpreting "soulish" as necessarily "unsaved", especially given the context. Instead, Paul is referring to maturity in the faith, per verse 6. This will be further supported in the following section.

### **3:1–4 Immaturity and worldliness**

After defining spiritual maturity, Paul points out the Corinthians' lack of it. They, although definitely saved, have not grown to maturity but remain as infants. They are the ones who cannot accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are worldly, acting like the unsaved. The same wording (soulish and spiritual) is used for them as was used for the preceding discussion of the mature and immature in general.

### **3:5–23 The temple of God**

Then Paul dismantles the pedestals the people had erected for various leaders. The people were trying to do what the vast majority

of “churchians” have done since the apostles died: construct a hierarchy, a class distinction between clergy and laity. Yes, these leaders were their foundation and source, but that is all. They were simply doing their jobs. Though Paul laid the foundation, he himself was not that foundation, but Jesus. In other words, he presented the Gospel to them. Now, the people were to build on that foundational truth.

But Paul cautions them on the care with which they must build. Using the illustration of a building set on fire, he tells them that what they do with this Gospel will be tested for its worth and strength and quality. These, Paul explains in vs. 13, are people’s works or deeds. Vs. 14 tells us of the “pay” the builders will receive as a result of the testing. Clearly, this all is indicative of earned wages, not received gifts. A sharp distinction must be made between the two. Notice again that Paul is talking to and about saved people, as shown in vs. 15. To experience loss is not the loss of salvation, but the loss of wages or rewards.

Referring back to his earlier discussion of worldly wisdom, Paul relates it to the Corinthians’ worldliness and rebukes them again for their immaturity. They, like us, needed to keep things in proper order between God and people, and not to put people between others and God. Having exposed the root of the problems the Corinthian church was experiencing, Paul is now ready to deal with specific “branches”.

#### **4:1–21 The servants of God**

After reminding the Corinthians not to put people on pedestals, Paul gets to the matter of judgmentalism and the presumptuous false apostles. He begins by addressing the problem of their jumping to conclusions before knowing both sides of the dispute.

But then Paul goes into a sarcastic rant about their self-sufficiency and superiority to him. He then holds up as proof of his authority and sincerity the price he and Apollos have paid for being true apostles,

and how they have stood up in the face of persecution and hardship. Yet Paul's motive is not to embarrass them, but to warn them. He appeals to them as a father to his wayward children, and urges them to follow in his footsteps.

The Corinthians had become arrogant, and Paul challenges them to back up their words with actions. He would soon come to them personally and face his accusers, to see if they can repeat their charges to his face. But he wants to do more than talk; he will see whether these people have any real spiritual power. He gives them a choice in the meantime: clean up your act or prepare for the consequences.

## **5:1–6:20 Christian Living**

Now Paul turns to deal with specific moral lapses, some of which were even worse than what the lost would tolerate.

### **5:1–13 Purity and discipline**

In their worldliness and arrogance, the Corinthians had sunk lower than the surrounding heathen. There was incest in the Congregation, and the people were proud. Paul instructs them to hand the man over to Satan, “for the destruction of the flesh so that his spirit may be saved”. Notice that this was apparently a monogamous, heterosexual, loving couple. The modern argument that love, commitment, and faithfulness can excuse sin is thus refuted (e.g., no one can argue that a homosexual couple should not be expelled if they are loving and faithful). And the backslidden, immature character of the ones throwing out such a person refutes the modern argument that no one can ever be disfellowshipped since we are all sinners.

But what does it mean to expel someone for the purpose of “punishing the flesh”? Many translations render the Greek word

*sarkos* (flesh) as “the sinful nature”, but this presumes that “flesh” is a metaphor for an old, dead, spiritual nature believers still retain. Yet the immediate context is clear that the sin being dealt with is very much about the physical body. Elsewhere Paul speaks of sexual sin as “against your own body” (6:18) and many passages relate other sins to the body as well (Rom. 6:6,12, 8:10,13). No one disputes the fact that the saved are continually battling sin; Paul lamented extensively about this very thing in Romans 7, describing it as a battle against “this **body** of death”. Yet none of this proves that “flesh” means we have two spirits within us, not counting the Holy Spirit. Instead, it simply refers to the cravings of our mortal bodies, and as sentient beings we choose daily whether or not to indulge those cravings.

But this is certainly not Gnosticism, such that the body should be treated with either extreme physical deprivation or extreme indulgence, depending on the sect. Some of them say that because the flesh is inherently evil, we should punish it and treat it harshly, while others of them say we should not care what we do with it. Either way, they seem to agree that Jesus could not have come “in the flesh” because of it, which is heresy. Yet mortal though the flesh is, with its continual cravings and pull toward sin, Jesus never gave in to it. He was tempted in every way just as we are, yet was without sin (Heb. 4:15). Satan appealed to Jesus’ physical hunger among other things, a need of the flesh. So while physical bodies pull us toward sin, we are not obligated to let them rule over us (Rom. 6:12).

So what Paul intends is for this separation to motivate the sinner to take control of his flesh and stop allowing it to rule. This will “save” his spirit. Is this to be understood as salvation in the sense of the man being “born again” – again? No, and the context tells us why. Not all instances of saving have to do with being saved from hell. Didn’t Paul just finish illustrating how our deeds will be judged? And this sinner was to be put out of the fellowship, not put out of the Body. Sin among believers can be contagious, so Paul has the man



quarantined to protect the other believers. We'll see in his next letter further evidence that the man was not lost but separated, and eventually restored to fellowship.

So the key difference between the Gnostic view of the flesh and the Biblical view is what we do about it. The Gnostics erroneously thought to try either harsh treatment of the body (Col. 2:23) or indulgence in evil, but we are commanded to resist sin and not let our flesh have its way with us. Only Jesus ever succeeded, but we are obligated to try. This struggle gives us strength and is one way in which we are forged and purified by God.

Paul also distinguishes between how we deal with believers and unbelievers. Avoiding sin is simply not possible in the world; how else would we permeate the culture as “salt and light”? Instead, Paul clarifies that to not associate with immoral people only refers to within the fellowship of believers. The key here is if they claim to be fellow believers yet indulge in sin. We are not to associate with them in any way. It is inside the fellowship that we must judge, even to the point of throwing people out.

## **6:1–8 Legal disputes among believers**

Now Paul turns to the matter of internal disputes. The Corinthians were suing each other. Paul reminds them that as people who in the coming age would judge the world and also judge angels, they should surely be able to settle trivial matters among themselves. Instead, they were going to secular courts and thereby bringing shame on the fellowship. And the root of the problem was the same as the one behind their bickering about leaders: they were worldly and immature. It would be better to just take being wronged than to go to unbelievers for judgments.

## **6:9–20 No license to sin**

Speaking of doing wrong, Paul reminds them that people who practice such things as a way of life will not inherit the kingdom of God. But does this refer to salvation of the soul or to loss of rewards? The immediate context is not decisive, but we can get some help from Colossians 2:20 which says “Since you died with Christ to the elemental spiritual forces of this world, why, as though you still belonged to the world, do you submit to its rules...?” In other words, the Corinthians were saved but were acting like they weren’t, like they did before being saved.

So Paul is not warning them they could lose their salvation, but reprimanding them for acting like unbelievers. Notice he points out that “that is what some of you were”. They were backsliding into their former lifestyles. But Paul reminds them that they had been “washed... sanctified... justified in the name of Master Jesus the Christ”. And notice that homosexuality is listed as being something “some of you were, but... .” Here we have Biblical proof that it is not an inherited trait but a sinful lifestyle, and one that the blood of Jesus can make clean. People can no more justify homosexuality for Christians than they can justify greed or drunkenness or slander or swindling. By the same token, the swindlers and greedy cannot look down their noses at homosexuals.

Evidently the Corinthians were flaunting their rights and freedoms, not just backsliding. They were proud of their sin and wanted everyone to know. The wording in vs. 13 hints at the Gnostic indulgence idea discussed earlier, but Paul counters with how God views the body as opposed to the Gnostic view. He goes further to reveal that our bodies are “members of Christ himself”, and that “you are not your own; you were bought at a steep price”.

We see in this section the word “flesh” again, and this time in reference to Genesis. Many today have the distorted notion that marriage unites people’s spirits, but it doesn’t say that. It says “the two become one **flesh**”. And it is this principle that Paul appeals to as the reason for sexual purity and faithfulness to one’s spouse. Our

spirits unite with God, but our bodies unite with each one we are intimate with. This effectively throws the Corinthians' indulgence theory into the trash.

Notice also that our bodies are "temples of the Holy Spirit". We have no need of external constructed buildings or shrines or holy places. Jesus said that "where two or three come together on my account, there I am with them" (Mt. 18:20). This means meeting with other believers just because we are believers, for spiritual purposes. Paul has more to say about such meetings elsewhere.

## **7:1–40 Domestic Issues**

Marriage and divorce have always been controversial topics, but we must be careful to understand the context. For example, when Jesus was asked about divorce (Mt. 19:3), there was much more to the question than meets the eye. About the time of Jesus' birth, a new type of divorce called the Any Cause divorce was invented (see [D. Instone-Brewer, \*Divorce and Remarriage in the Church\*](#)). The phrase in Deuteronomy originally only meant unfaithfulness, but a legal loophole was created by dividing it up into two separate grounds for divorce: unfaithfulness and "a cause".

A rabbi called Hillel argued: why did God use the phrase "cause of sexual immorality" when he could merely have said "sexual immorality"? The word "cause" must refer to another separate ground for divorce he decided meant "Any Cause". But the disciples of Shammai disagreed with this reasoning and said the whole phrase "a cause of sexual immorality" meant exactly what it said: "Sexual Immorality". (And of course, if God had meant "any cause", then the other stipulations were redundant too.)

So what Jesus was being asked was very specific: was the Any Cause divorce interpretation legitimate? His answer was clearly No. But at the same time, neither was Jesus making a statement that

meant divorce had no legitimate grounds except for marital unfaithfulness. If we study the entirety of the Law, we see that it also included various forms of neglect as well. But remember that this all pertains to Israel; Paul will give more details about this for Christians.

## **7:1–9 Marriage decisions and rights**

Paul now tries to clarify statements he had made earlier which the Corinthians had apparently misunderstood. They had the notion that Paul considered all sex bad. So he explains that what he meant was that marriage puts extra burdens on people that distract them from spiritual things. Yet at the same time, most people cannot accept singleness as Paul could, a condition he called a “gift”. He explains that both husbands and wives must be considerate of each other’s needs and not force abstinence on each other.

## **7:10–16 Divorce**

Paul is not using the singular here as we might today, such as in saying, “A child is not an adult until the age of 21.” Remember that he prefaced this section with the statement that he is addressing questions the Corinthians had asked (7:1), and there are other instances in Paul’s writings where he suddenly switches from the plural to the singular which indicates specific individuals. Here, Paul’s instructions seem too specific to be taken generically; they include no general statements or cover any of the possible situations that can cause marital discord. Note the statements in the preceding sentence about those who “cannot control themselves”, and the preceding paragraph, which talks about “each man” and “each woman”; there is no such grammar for this married couple. And the next paragraph is directed “to the rest”, giving additional weight to his not having addressed all married couples here.

The statement “and this is not from me but from the Master” does not indicate whether what Paul is about to say is divinely inspired or not; it simply means he had a direct command from Jesus about it. No one would insist that all the rest of the Bible was dictated verbatim by God, but would agree that the Holy Spirit prompted His words to be written through the writer’s own personality. So when Paul says he is giving a command from the Master, he was given that command expressly. Otherwise, he simply wrote as he was inspired.

Look closely at vs. 15: there is an important principle given here, which Paul offers as a kind of catch-all for the gray areas. The most important thing in marriage is to live in peace. People tend to take Paul’s meaning here backwards. He’s not saying “Stick with it in the hope you will save your spouse”; but “Don’t keep beating a dead horse”. In other words, the emphasis is on the fact that we *don’t* know whether the spouse will ever be saved; we can’t make it happen. He wants people to show mercy to unbelievers who want to leave, and not live in discord just in case the spouse might someday be saved.

### **7:17–24 The relative unimportance of social constructs**

Believers shouldn’t be overly concerned about their past or present situation in life, unless it clearly violates the Christian principles listed earlier (“that is what some of you were”). God never commanded Christians to live in deprivation or isolation from the world. How else would we be “salt and light”?

### **7:25–40 The unmarried**

Some take Paul’s statements in vs. 25–35 as being about specific and strict rules on marriage— in spite of what he just finished saying. They also try to use it to justify the custom of parents choosing spouses for their children, as if it were an eternal

command. Remember that these letters weren't written in a vacuum. Paul is writing to a particular group of people in a particular cultural setting, a fact that will be even more significant later on the topic of women in the church. This section is simply an elaboration on the earlier statements about the pressures married people face and is really very simple. Paul repeats that people should carefully consider whether to get married, and if they decide to do so, they should follow his guidelines, as he says in vs. 35.

In vs. 36–40 Paul appears to be addressing specific situations there in Corinth, the first being a man who isn't sure whether he should marry, and the second being a woman whose husband is apparently near death. She needed to know what she should do in that case, especially if she were Jewish and would otherwise be obligated to marry a brother of her husband in order to produce heirs. Paul says that Christian women are not obligated to honor this law, especially if it would mean having to marry an unbeliever.

## **8:1–11:1 Freedom, rights, and consideration**

At this point Paul presents his defense concerning his rights as an apostle. He will build up from a question about food offered to idols to the broader question of how and when Christians should exercise their rights, then back to the original question in light of his argument.

### **A 8:1–3 Love vs. knowledge and rights**

To preface what he is about to say, Paul gives the overarching principle that the humility of love is superior to the conceit of knowledge. What he tells them about meat offered to idols is to be understood in that light.

### **B 8:4–8 Food and sacrifices**

Although everything really comes from God, and what we eat is irrelevant to our spirits, many people said to have a “weak conscience” still think of certain foods being off limits. In spite of our right as believers to eat anything we choose, we need to be considerate of those with a weak conscience when it comes to matters like this that have no bearing on spiritual things. This same principle on how to handle “disputable matters” is covered in more detail in Romans 14.

### **C 8:9–13 Stumbling blocks**

The principle of love will prevent us from hurting others in exercising our rights. Though the “strong” may know that there is nothing wrong with eating such meat, it becomes wrong when flaunted in front of those who might be emboldened to violate their consciences. So the strong must defer to the weak in these cases. Paul has established this principle not only to answer a question put to him, but also in support of the defense he is about to make concerning his being an apostle.

### **X 9:1–27 Deferring rights out of love**

#### **Xa 9:1–18 Paul’s self-defense as an apostle**

Now arriving at the crux of his presentation, Paul expresses his indignation against the false apostles who are criticizing him and his authority. He demands to know why he and Apollos are not allowed the same rights as other believers, such as bringing their spouses along or being financially supported in their journeys. Regarding pay, he appeals to the Law and to his being the Corinthians’ spiritual “father”. Yet although he proves his right to support and respect, he has laid those aside just to keep the people from being burdened.

#### **Xb 9:19–27 Evangelistic strategies**

Paul's point is all about lack of obligation. He is not constrained by any situation, leaving him free to take any needed angle for the purpose of convincing people to accept the Gospel of salvation. It is important to point this out because many take his words to be an acceptance of all religions, known as ecumenism. But nothing could be farther from the truth; Paul was very clear on the need to be intolerant of any compromise of the Gospel. It is Paul who is winning them over to salvation, not them winning him over to their religions.

But even in this, we must not forget basic principles of salvation. This "prize" Paul is referring to is not salvation but reward, as indicated by his reference to qualification. Since salvation is a gift it cannot be earned and we cannot qualify for it. So since Paul is talking about something to qualify for, it must be something other than salvation. Paul is encouraging the Corinthians to do more than sit on their salvation, but to strain for the goal by deferring when possible, by being considerate, and by looking for the good of others.

### **C' 10:1–14 Stumbling blocks**

The first five verses are a backdrop to the point Paul will make next. He just finished discussing the need to "run to win" and the problem of false apostles. Now he is about to issue a warning from history. But note that while it is said that "all of them were immersed into Moses", they were never literally dunked in water. In fact, God made a point of not allowing it! They were kept dry crossing the Red Sea and the Jordan River. So any attempt to tie this passage into some requirement for being immersed in water (baptized) is erroneous. The Israelis were fully immersed into all this because they experienced it, and it also had spiritual symbolic meaning.

Now Paul plainly states that what happened to Israel in the past was to serve as a warning, and then he lists specific sins including testing Christ or even grumbling against him. We must be careful not to get overconfident in our spirituality or standing among other believers.



We are always being tempted, but if we just keep our eyes open for the way of escape God provides, we can avoid making the same mistakes as the Israelis.

## **B' 10:15–22 Food and sacrifices**

Back in chapter 8 Paul brought up the matter of food offered to idols, and he pointed out the need for being considerate of those with a weaker conscience. But now he approaches the same subject from another angle: that it is not only individuals we need to consider, but also society. For the sake of their reputation among the lost, Paul recommends that all the believers stay clear of anything that might give society the impression that they have anything to do with idols. He contrasts the food offered to them with the bread and wine used to remember the Master.

It's important to note that this is not an establishing of the ritual known as "communion" either, or calling this ritual a "sacrifice" per the Roman Catholic definition. Paul is simply wanting to make a distinction between idol worship and the Christian gatherings, and he's saying it to the Corinthian believers. He already made it clear that this is all a matter of conscience, and he will go over it again in the following verses.

Some say Paul is contradicting himself here. Before, he said that idols are nothing (repeated here also), such that eating food that had been offered to them in sacrifice is not wrong in itself. But now he says "You cannot eat at the table of the Master and of demons". Note first of all that Paul just finished talking about "partnership" (the accurate meaning of *koinonia*, typically translated "communion"), that is, immersion. So if the eating of food offered to idols is done as part of a ceremony or ritual, that would make it wrong. In other words, to eat such meat along with those who are considering it a sacrifice is wrong, but to eat it when simply sold to anyone in the marketplace is not.

## **A' 10:23–11:1 Love vs. knowledge and rights**

We see it all tied together in 10:31: whatever you do, do it to glorify God. The goal is to get people saved and spiritually matured, not to flaunt our freedom or wave our strong faith in the faces of the weak. This is the point we need to keep in mind as we read all of this. Those who scour these verses for black-and-white rules search in vain. Those who would use these verses as clubs with which to beat down other believers completely miss the intent of the writings.

Just as it would be wrong for an individual to eat meat sacrificed to idols if the person serving it warned them, it would also be wrong for the Christian community to appear to participate in the worship of idols in the eyes of society. We must be considerate of their weak consciences and remember the greater goal of winning them to the Gospel. So in both cases (chapters 8 and 10), Paul is saying that we should not go out of our way to find out where the meat came from, but if anyone has a problem with our eating it, we must abstain. This principle would be the same no matter what the topic or time of history, but we can use this as a guideline. Glorify God instead of self. This has been Paul's example, and the the Christian community would do well to follow it.

## **11:2–16 Symbolism and propriety in the Congregation**

This was an important issue to discuss because of what a head covering symbolized at the time. A Jewish man was to cover his head as a sign of guilt before God, but Jesus took that guilt away for his followers. So for a Christian man to cover his head in worship would be insulting to the sacrifice of Jesus. But for a Christian woman to uncover her head would be a sign of loose morals. What should she do then, especially if her husband were an unbeliever? If

she covers she shames Jesus but if she doesn't she shames her husband. This is the backdrop to what Paul will advise.

## **A 11:2 Keeping the right traditions**

Paul begins with the positive: the Corinthians had been following traditions he had given them. But they had a question about head coverings that needed to be clarified.

## **B 11:3 Origins**

The Greek word for “head”, *kephale*, is translated as “head” if it clearly refers to a literal physical head, but as “source” or “head” in quotation marks if the context seems to indicate metaphorical use. In the culture of Paul’s day, it was believed that the body grew out of the head, and thus that the head was the source or origin of the body. They never used “head” as a representation of rule or authority; see [this study on the meaning of \*kephale\* in the Pauline Epistles](#). Notice also the order: source of man, source of woman, source of Christ. Adam was created first, then Eve, and then the Savior came through her “seed”. More weight is given to this interpretation when Paul writes, “Yet at the same time, the woman represents the dignity of man, because she came from man and was made for his benefit”. If hierarchy had been intended, then certainly the order would be God, then the Christ, then people.

Paul is known for using plays on words, and we have a prime example here which really doesn’t translate well. If we use “head” people read into it the meaning “boss” but we can get the play on words; if we use “source” people get the proper meaning of “head” but we lose the play on words. The play on words is shown by Paul’s use of head to preface the discussion of head coverings for the Christian women.

## **X 11:4–10 Head coverings**

Although it is uncertain, I believe Paul quotes the Corinthians in vs. 4–6. They are presenting the problem the Christian women were facing, concerning the impossible position this put them in, as already mentioned. To uncover was to indicate loose morals, so they needed to know how to handle this.

Paul responds first by agreeing that men should not cover, which of course would not cause any social problem. But then he reminds them of the reason men should not cover: they represent the dignity (glory) of God. And if one who represents the dignity of another must not cover, then as the dignity of man, women must not cover either. Paul also points out the reason that woman represents man's dignity: she came from him and was made for his benefit. Note that he makes the statement in the context of dignity— *not* of authority or hierarchy. She was not made for him to be an inferior assistant, but as the Hebrew indicates in Gen. 2:18, a “strong one facing him” (Heb. *ezer kenegdo*, an equal coming to one's aid). Neither is she somehow not made in God's image as men are; representing the dignity of man does not negate her being in the image of God.

So as the equal of man, being of the same flesh, woman is not to cover her head. For that reason she has the authority (Gk. *exousion*) to decide for herself what to do. This is the first time Paul mentions authority or power or rank, and the woman has it for herself. Neither a man nor the community of believers is to tell her what to do, especially since she is the one who may suffer reprisal over this. Yet Paul also gives a second reason: “for the benefit of the Messengers” (the Greek word *angelos* means messenger). What does this mean?

Various theories have been proposed, such as that the angels would be moved to lust at the sight of a woman without a head covering. This is preposterous; such angels would only be moved to lust in a worship setting? There are no indications of fallen angels or lust in this passage, and since both men and women can grow hair (next section), why would this lead to lust? Would the good angels

attending such a worship service be moved to lust at all? Clearly this proposal makes no sense at all. Instead, there are other, better possibilities.

One is that Paul mentioned believers judging angels in 1 Cor. 6:3, so he is saying that since women are not excluded from this, then surely they can be trusted to judge on the matter of whether or not to cover their own heads. Another is that it could refer to the practice at the time whereby Rome would send spies or “messengers” into various gatherings in order to report whether rebellion was being taught. Women uncovering their heads in worship would have been seen as subversive. So Paul could be saying, “The women should cover their heads anyway, just for the sake of not getting us accused of sedition.” Yet if this were the reason for covering, then surely Paul would have commanded it instead of leaving it up to the women.

There is a third possibility we see by noticing in vss. 9-10 the repetition of “for the sake/benefit of”. The woman is made for the benefit of the man, so she decides what to put on her head for the benefit of angels. What exactly is this benefit? Remembering that Eve was to benefit Adam by providing the eventual Savior, the woman having the authority to decide what to do with her own head reminds the angels of her real “role”. This is about benefit rather than shame, and equality of being rather than social or spiritual hierarchy.

## **B’ 11:11-15 Origins**

Now back to origins or sources. After talking about dignity and chronological order, Paul reminds the people that everyone comes from God. We are not independent as believers; we are one Body with one Head. If origins or chronology were important, Paul would not have had to point out that ever since Eve, all men have come from women. He is strongly putting the notion of chronology-based hierarchy to rest.

Paul again reprimands the Corinthians for their inability to judge trivial matters, and what he says here about it is almost always translated backwards. It does **not** say that nature tells us fancy hair is bad for men but good for women. It says, “Look at nature; both men and women are given hair as clothing. Nature teaches only that they are the same when it comes to head coverings.”

### **A’ 11:16 Not keeping the wrong traditions**

Finally, Paul tells them that none of the Assemblies has any such custom about the significance of head coverings. It is clearly not one of Paul’s traditions.

## **11:17–14:40 The Community of Believers**

Now Paul turns to matters of concern only among believers, especially questions about spiritual gifts.

### **11:17–34 Meeting and eating**

In contrast to his positive statement about their following his traditions, here Paul reprimands them for something they’re doing very badly: meeting together. He begins by addressing their common meals.

Apparently “the Master’s supper” was a full meal which included using the wine and bread as a simple way to remember Jesus’ sacrifice for them. But the people were turning it into an act of gluttony, ignoring the poor and getting drunk. (Note that this wine was indeed alcoholic.) Instead of honoring the Master, they were shaming him. Paul reminds them of the point of sharing bread and wine. This is not, as the churches have always practiced it, a prescription for ritualistic repeating of Paul’s words. There is no command for us to repeat these verses when remembering Jesus.

The whole point is all about the heart, about remembrance, about honoring Jesus. Its purpose is to “proclaim the Master’s death until he comes”.

This is the meaning behind vs. 27 where it talks about people eating and drinking disrespectfully. Note that people are to examine themselves, not face an inquisition from church leaders. God dealt with those who made a mockery of the sacrifice of his Son. Some were sick and others were killed because of this flippant attitude toward God and mistreatment of the poor among them. Remember that Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5) were killed for lying to the Holy Spirit. Instead, the people were to avoid God’s judgment by judging themselves, and they were to all eat together to make sure nobody went home hungry.

## **12:1–31 The Holy Spirit and the Body**

Paul begins by stating that at the very least we can discern the spirit behind a teaching by how it views Jesus. No one who would curse Jesus could possibly be of God, and no one can honestly call Jesus The Master without having the Holy Spirit. This is more than just saying the words “Jesus is Master”, but instead indicates one’s personal conviction.

It seems most unlikely that Paul intended for these lists of spiritual gifts to be all-encompassing or technical. He seems to be picking out random, off-the-cuff ministries that can be active in the body of believers. This is indicated by his opening statement that it all comes from one Spirit, one source. More importantly, Paul gives the purpose of these spiritual gifts: to build up other believers and serve them. And we are not to say that the Spirit can only give this gift or that, to one person or another, as he will explain next.

Paul gives the analogy of the human body as a means of understanding how the various spiritual gifts fit together. He first emphasizes the fact that it is one Body, one organism, one unit. All

the parts are made of the same substance and get their life from one Head. The head is of the same substance as the body though, and cannot live without it. Conversely, the body cannot live without the head. If a part is missing, the body is crippled and not whole. One part cannot say to another, “I don’t need you!”.

It all seems so obvious— until we apply it to what goes on in the typical “church”. One part does indeed say to another, “I don’t need you!”. Believers with one gift will ignore or despise those with other gifts. People will assume that only one “part” has a particular gift. The “pastor” is held up as the only one with discernment and prophecy and vision, ignoring others who may also have these gifts. Surely the Body is hopping on one leg and has one hand tied behind its back!

Paul then points out that our ideas of importance are not God’s. The parts we deem weak or unnecessary may be the most vital, and the ones we think are most important are nothing special. Paul tells us that God did this deliberately, so that no part of the Body would feel superior to another part. We are individual parts of one Body, not identical spokes in a wheel or interchangeable machine components. All parts have equal access to the Head; all are directly a part of the Body and not secondary or inferior parts. Then Paul specifically mentions some parts that apparently the Corinthians held up as special or prominent. He reminds them that the body of believers is more than its eyes, more than its hands. In fact, he will downplay those gifts assumed to be superior and show them what parts are really the most vital, the “weak” parts.

### **13:1–13 The greatest quality**

This, the “love” chapter, is undoubtedly one of the more familiar passages of scripture in the New Testament. Paul gives a definition of real spiritual love before showing its place in the Body. It is the foundation of all the gifts. But believers seem to forget this, especially when it comes to dealing with each other. Many clamor for



having their own way, for making others follow their particular “vision” or goal. But if they truly love others they will not “demand their own way”.

Ignoring the context, many take Paul’s statements about gifts that cease as some kind of doctrinal thesis. He is not saying which (if any) spiritual gifts would cease with the death of the apostles (cessationism). They argue that “that which is complete” means speaking in “tongues” is a thing of the past, by making the New Testament “that which is complete”. But this begs the question; the context simply doesn’t go anywhere near the idea of putting restrictions or time constraints on the Spirit, or identifying exactly what is meant by “that which is complete”. All he seems to be saying is that the gifts are for this life and not heaven.

He has mentioned the problem of immaturity before, and here he seems to present the spiritual gifts as things which are needed until we reach maturity. With that in mind, Paul will now get to the matter of “speaking in tongues” as compared to prophecy.

## **14:1–25 The greatest gift**

With love as both the basis and the ultimate goal, Paul gives the purpose of the gifts: to build up the Body. This lengthy chapter begins with a discussion of “speaking in tongues”. There is disagreement among scholars over whether these “tongues” or languages are real human languages that the speaker has not learned, or the languages of angels, or possibly a “Holy Spirit” language. Whatever they are, they are of supernatural origin.

In this section, Paul stresses the importance of mental understanding as opposed to only an experience. The purpose of all the spiritual gifts is to build up the church, not to just be absorbed by individuals. Without interpretation there is no understanding, and without understanding there is no building up of the church. Self-improvement is fine but it must include other-improvement as well.

With another quick reference to the Corinthians' lack of maturity, Paul explains that these languages are a sign for unbelievers, while prophecy is for believers. What sign is this? Possibly just to indicate to unbelievers the presence of God among the believers. It's possible that miraculous signs of any kind are more prevalent when there is either little access to the written scriptures or when the unbelievers are spiritually blinded to the point that the words alone cannot get through. Jesus had said that "A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a sign!" (Mt. 12:39), giving further weight to this. In general, miracles seem to accompany times when God is about to do something new, a change in the way he deals with mankind, or to signify an important event. So Paul is telling them that sign gifts are not of primary importance in the church, and in fact are relatively useless. Many churches today would do well to realize this.

### **14:26–40 Order in the meetings**

In all the New Testament, very little is said about how, when, and where believers should assemble together. Along with Jesus' statement that "you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem... true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth" (John 4:21-23), we have to conclude that the practices of churches throughout history have borne little resemblance to anything found in the NT. Conspicuous by their absence are the ideas of special buildings, pulpits, altars, or a clergy class ruling over a passive laity in a perpetual parent/child relationship. Neither do we see any hint of a human or mystical "covering", which actually usurps the place of the Holy Spirit in the life of every believer.

In contrast, as we see here, the Christian gatherings were meetings where everyone participated and used their various spiritual gifts. The spiritually mature were to guide and teach the less mature, and prophets would give revelations from God. But Paul is not actually praising them here for their participation in the meetings; he is

reprimanding them for the chaotic manner in which they did so. There is to be order in the meetings, but not an order born of ritual or liturgy. Both stilted ritualism and chaos are harmful extremes.

Is every pastor a prophet? Yet we treat them as though they are, frequently saying “Let us hear what message the Master has laid on the pastor’s heart for us today”. That’s prophecy. Yet these alleged prophetic messages from God are really the act of teaching and expounding the scriptures, the result of hours of preparation and research. There’s nothing wrong with that at all, but we cannot call it prophecy or assume that every sermon is a revelation from God. And where do we get the idea of sermons anyway? Historically, they have more in common with the ancient Greek and Roman orators than with anything in the Bible. “Pastor” is a spiritual gift, not an office, and no one is ever designated as a perpetual speaker in the Christian gatherings.

Notice that the prophets were to take turns. (There is some question about who exactly is discerning or weighing what the prophets say. Are they other prophets only, or all the people, or any spiritually-mature person? Most translations don’t specify it, but some lean toward the others being prophets.) This assumes that there were several in the Congregation, and that their speaking was impromptu as opposed to the typical Sunday sermon with its alliterated 3-point outline. Speaking of which, there is nothing in the New Testament to specify a particular day for these meetings. Nothing is ever said about a certain day of worship being a prescribed practice for believers of all time regarding their gatherings. There is also no mention of a formal membership list, committees, trustees, etc. Those have more to do with corporations than families.

Remembering the immediate context of order in the meetings, we come to a very controversial passage beginning in vs. 34. But first note that this discussion of order is repeated at the end (vs. 39–40); the intervening discussion could be lifted out without breaking the flow. In fact, because of this, some scholars believe it was either

added by later scribes or belongs at the end of chapter 14 instead of where it is. But it will be treated here as a legitimate part of Paul's letter, and in the place it appears.

There are no quote marks in Greek, but quoted material is often ended with the word *He* and is typically translated as “or”, if it is translated at all. We see this word twice in verse 36, and we can tell by the preceding content that Paul is quoting someone else. As just stated, the passage starting in verse 34 and ending with 38 is clearly out of the flow of the discussion about order in the meetings. So we have good indications of both the beginning and ending of the quoted material.

Verses 34 and 35 are the words Paul is quoting. We see “the law” mentioned, yet there is no such statement about women being silent in any of the Old Testament laws; it is in fact seen in the [Jewish Talmud](#) (which declared that any sort of exposure of a woman, even of her voice, was lewd). Even if there had been such a law in the Torah, this is the same Paul who wrote passionately against believers staying under the law in his letter to the Galatians. It also contradicts what Paul wrote elsewhere about women being allowed to prophesy in the meetings. Remember that Paul put forth a lot of effort fighting against the Jews who wanted Christians to submit to circumcision and other requirements of the old law, so it is highly unlikely that he would turn around and appeal to it here.

Paul strongly opposed the silencing of women in the churches. This view is also consistent with his other statements about the prophesying of women in the congregation. Some interpret Paul's rebuttal as being aimed at an *anticipated objection* instead of a quote from the Corinthians. But there is nothing in the rebuttal to indicate this, no such words as “someone will object”; see 15:35 for example.

## **15:1–15:58 The Gospel**

Paul is about to address the Corinthians' question concerning the resurrection of the dead, but he prefaces it with a definition of the Gospel.

## **15:1–10 Evidence for the Gospel**

He begins with a statement that some take as meaning salvation can be lost. But it can easily be understood as referring to a misplaced faith, one that was never genuine to begin with. That is why Paul repeats what he had told them earlier, the Gospel itself. Had someone already been genuinely saved, they would already know the Gospel. (And if we take Heb. 6 as saying it can be lost once but never regained, then there would be no point in repeating the Gospel for that reason either.)

Notice four critical components of the Gospel: (1) Jesus died for our sins as prophesied, (2) Jesus was buried, (3) Jesus rose again the third day as prophesied, and (4) there were credible witnesses to these things. Our faith is based upon prophecy and eye-witness account, in the death and resurrection of Jesus who paid for all sin, once and for all (Heb. 7:27). Paul himself was a witness to the risen Jesus, and in a very unique way. So the fact of Jesus' resurrection from the dead is well-established, and now Paul will build upon that foundation.

## **15:11–49 Implications of the Gospel**

The Corinthians seemed to have forgotten their beginnings, their reasons for meeting together. Yet resurrection from the dead is absolutely critical to the faith.

## **15:11–19 Resurrection**

Without there being a resurrection of the dead, not even Jesus was raised, and our faith is useless and without purpose. And all who

preach the Gospel are then labeled as false witnesses. If our faith is only for this life, then Christians are to be pitied for following a false hope. These are the logical conclusions to disbelief in resurrection. So if the Corinthians had truly believed in the risen Jesus, then they had to also believe in the resurrection of the dead.

## **15:20–28 Death and life**

Now Paul explains why we die at all: sin. It came through one person, Adam (note that Eve is never mentioned here at all). We all die because of him, and Jesus is held up as the direct opposite, the One who would bring life. That the death spoken of here must be physical is based upon the fact that Jesus' death and resurrection were physical, or we'd have to attribute spiritual death to him, which is impossible. Yet Jesus' immortal resurrected body is the "firstfruit", the beginning. The rest of us do not yet have our new immortal bodies but we will surely get them at the right time. And then Death itself will finally be defeated. Again, this must be physical death, because the spiritually dead will remain so forever once this life is over.

## **15:29–34 Immersion (baptism)**

The controversial statements here are in the context of Paul's argument for physical resurrection and how the Corinthians were not being consistent with their faith in Jesus. So it seems that Paul is addressing yet another one of those inconsistencies. Beyond that is pure speculation, and certainly not an endorsement of rituals for the dead. Paul then expresses his frustration with the Corinthians by saying, "If there's no resurrection, then who cares about anything? Just enjoy yourselves"— followed by a rebuke and warning for them to wake up.

## **15:35–49 Old and new bodies**

We can almost see Paul putting his head in his hands and weeping as he ponders their ignorant question, “What kind of body will the raised have?” After telling them what a stupid question this is, Paul patiently teaches them to look around at the obvious. The “planted” body is completely unlike the “raised” body, as anyone should know. Seeds are not at all what they will grow into once planted. But they must be planted in order to change; they must “die” before they can “live” again.

Paul describes the raised human body as a “spiritual body” that bears the image of Jesus (vs. 49). This new body cannot see corruption as the physical one does, and it will not have “flesh and blood”. And just as we have all shared in the corrupt flesh of Adam, so also we who believe will all share in the immortal body of Jesus.

### **15:50–58 Our ultimate hope**

Then Paul introduces a new “secret”: not everyone will have to experience physical death! In an instant, we will be changed from the mortal to the immortal. First the bodies of the dead will be raised in immortal form, and then we who are still alive will be changed. Paul will have more to say about the timing of this glorious event in his letters to the Thessalonians. All he says here is that it will be “at the last trumpet”, but there is great controversy over exactly what that means. Whenever that happens, then the scripture will be fulfilled that the “sting of death” will be no more.

### **16:1–9 Believers helping each other**

The Corinthians had asked Paul questions about a collection for “the Master’s people”, and he responds that they should follow what the Galatians did and set aside funds on “the first of Sabbaths”, according to how they have prospered. Many take this to be an

endorsement of the Christian “tithing” and Sunday worship, but does the context support that?

No. First of all, we see that this was a specific collection for the believers in Jerusalem, not something that was practiced continually for all believers. “First of Sabbaths” refers to the day of the wave offering, which is the first day of the week after Passover and the start of marking off 7 weeks until Pentecost (see verse 8). Second, it was to be freely given, not a kind of legalistic tax. In addition, it was to be done in proportion to one’s prosperity or increase. As long as your expenses meet or exceed your income, you are not increasing. This was not a way to make some believers comfortable at others’ expense (2 Cor. 8:13). And there is no indication in the text to support Sunday worship. Nothing is said about corporate worship at all; it only speaks of individuals (“each one of you”), and no mention is made of an “offering plate” or official place to bring these gifts as they were being collected. There is no mention of any group or individual or place that could be considered the equivalent of the Old Testament “storehouse” or altar.

## **16:10–18 Personal recommendations**

Paul orders the Corinthians to respect his emissary Timothy, who we can surmise may not have otherwise received such respect due to his youth (1 Tim. 4:12). Others are to be respected as well, and again the foundational quality of love is emphasized.

## **16:19–24 Greetings**

Finally, Paul sends along greetings from others, especially the group meeting in the home of Prisca and Aquila. And to guard against the threat of forgery, Paul makes sure to include a greeting in his own handwriting. Note the curse upon foes of Jesus, whom Paul hopes



will return soon. We can be assured that these whom Paul would curse are those who have hardened their hearts against the Gospel.

# 2 Corinthians

## Background

The second letter to the Corinthians was written by Paul the same year as the first, around 55 a.d. We know from 2 Cor. 2:13 and 7:5 that it was written from Macedonia. The main topic is about Paul establishing his credentials as having authority from Jesus, against accusers among the Corinthians. Paul will state clearly that his authority is not to tear down but to build up. No one could claim better or closer faithfulness to the teachings of Jesus.

## Outline

1. **1:1–14** Greetings
2. **1:15–2:3** Defense of Paul's change of itinerary
3. **2:4–11** Instructions on restoring a repentant believer to fellowship
4. **2:12–17** Missionaries and motivation
5. **3:1–6** Establishing credentials
6. **3:7–18** The veil covering Jewish minds
7. **4:1–5:4** Perseverance, boldness, and hope
8. **5:5–10** Faith, sight, and courage
9. **5:11–13** Defending credentials
10. **5:14–6:2** Reconciliation
11. **6:3–10** Added credentials
12. **6:11–7:4a** Purity and reconciliation
  1. **A 6:11–13** Paul's plea for them to reconcile with him
  2. **–X 6:14–18** Unequally joined
  3. **A' 7:1–4a** Paul's plea for them to reconcile with him
13. **7:4b–16** Godly sorrow and comfort
14. **8:1–15** Following an example of generosity

15. **8:16–24** Trustworthiness
16. **9:1–15** Living up to a good reputation
17. **10:1–12:13** False missionaries
  1. **10:1–11** A warning to Paul's opponents
  2. **10:12–11:30** A challenge to Paul's opponents
  3. **11:31–12:10** Only Jesus is worthy of boasting
  4. **12:11–13** A comparison to Paul's opponents
18. **12:14–13:4** Three witnesses
19. **13:5–10** Test yourselves
20. **13:11–14** Greetings and final warnings

## **1:1–14 Greetings**

As with his first letter, Paul begins with the positive. He explains that the things we suffer are partially to make us sympathetic with others who suffer and to show them how we get through it. This is good to remember whenever we start thinking Christians aren't supposed to suffer, or that being saved means a life of ease. Paul uses his own experiences as an example of this principle. The Corinthians had been generous with both monetary gifts and prayers.

## **1:15–2:3 Defense of Paul's change of itinerary**

Then Paul explains that he had intended to visit them previously but was unable. For this "crime" he was accused of not being reliable or honest. He appeals to their memory of his original presentation of the Gospel to them, which he did clearly and without confusion. This should dispel any accusations about his intentions.

The "how" and "why" of the security of the believer is stated in 1:22. We have been sealed and given the Holy Spirit as a down payment on what is to come. Both of these are legal terms: a seal is an

official stamp of authenticity, and a down payment is a guarantee of the eventual completion of a transaction. So every true believer is stamped with the Seal of God, and has a Deposit to guarantee our inheritance, which is eternal life in heaven. Neither of these things depend upon us or have any kind of escape clause. We are not at liberty to revoke either. Remember that Paul had earlier spoken of how we will have our deeds tested, and here he gives further assurance that our deeds have nothing to do with our salvation, but only our rewards.

Paul says that he and other leaders did not consider themselves masters but co-workers. Many think that authority among believers is all about domination and control, but instead it is about people of varying gifts serving each other. He then explains that he had sent the earlier harsh letter for the purpose of showing how much he cared about them, and that he had no pleasure in having to write such a letter.

## **2:4–11 Instructions on restoring a repentant believer to fellowship**

When Paul uses the singular (someone, a person, a woman) he means a specific individual. There is good support for this also in light of the fact that when Paul discusses a false teacher he names names, but a deceived or ignorant person doesn't get named. This section seems to be addressing the situation of the man practicing incest that Paul had written about before. He is telling the Corinthians to now restore this repentant man publicly, since he had paid the due penalty for his sin and turned away from it. The devil would have loved nothing more than for this healing believer to be crushed and defeated, and for the others to be hard and proud.

## **2:12–17 Missionaries and motivation**

After briefly mentioning his short visit to Troas, Paul gives an analogy of the believers' effect on the world which parallels that of Jesus' "salt and light" analogy. We are described as "smelling like God". To those who are open to the Gospel we are a sweet aroma of life, but to those who are not we are the stench of death. This is good to remember when we witness, since by their reaction to this "smell" we have some idea of whether the lost person is open or not to hearing the Gospel. Further, he points out that we are to be sincere in our witnessing, not following the worldly model of marketing.

The idea of marketing the Gospel is a great blight on the churches today. Everything is packaged to sell to the masses and appeal to the emotions. The emphasis is on the experience, on the here and now, instead of on Jesus and his sacrifice for us. We have lost our "scent", our saltiness, our light. People are no longer able to "smell God" in us, so they don't react with revulsion even if they are not open to the true Gospel.

### **3:1–6 Establishing credentials**

Apparently some at Corinth were demanding that Paul produce some credentials to prove his teaching authority. But he reminds them that they themselves are his "letter of recommendation", one written by God. Everything comes from him, not any human, and the old ways are gone. We are under a new contract or Testament that brings life, as opposed to the old Law that brought death. Yet if even the old Law was to be honored, then the honor due the New Testament must be far greater. Paul is trying to express how much superior the new ways are to the old, and he uses it to explain his boldness in speech.

### **3:7–18 The veil covering Jewish minds**

Paul makes the statement that the minds of people are still veiled whenever Moses is read, and some take that to mean they are incapable of accepting the Gospel message. But that notion is demolished in the very next statement: when someone turns to the Master, the veil is removed. Fatalism, the belief that all events are predetermined and therefore inevitable (Calvinism is a form of fatalism), would say it exactly backwards: When the veil is removed, someone turns to the Master.

## **4:1–5:4 Perseverance, boldness, and hope**

Paul again testifies to his motives and innocence in declaring the truth to them. But then he refers again to “veiling” and talks about unbelievers being blinded by “the god of this age”. Some would take this to mean that the devil overrides a person’s will so they cannot respond to the Gospel. But if this were true, Paul would be contradicting himself. The key is found in Romans 1, where we see that God only “gave them over” to depravity after they suppressed the truth (vs. 18). These people had known God but rejected him (vs. 21). Clearly, the Paul that wrote those words would not tell a different story to the Corinthians.

He again points out that it is not he or his fellow workers but Jesus that is being preached. The same One who said “Let there be light” was shedding light in their minds. Yet this amazing light is held in common pottery so to speak, mere mortals. As such, we are under constant pressure but we must endure it and be found faithful. But of course our strength comes only from God, not ourselves.

As further encouragement, Paul tells them that the same power that raised Jesus from the dead will raise us up too. Outwardly we appear to be wasting away, but inwardly we keep getting renewed. We keep our eyes fixed on the goal, on things we cannot yet see, which are the only things that last. We live in this “earthly house”

temporarily, to be replaced by an “everlasting house”; we groan in our mortal bodies as we wait for our spiritual ones.

## **5:5–10 Faith, sight, and courage**

Paul makes the comment he has made elsewhere: we have the Spirit as a down payment for our immortal bodies; it is guaranteed. This gives us confidence, the assurance of our hope in the Master. But of course this hope is no license to sin; Paul has made that very clear in his writings. Yet neither is it right to constantly doubt our salvation, as this would be a lack of faith in the power of God to keep us safe (see 1 Peter 1:5).

Another point in this passage is that to be away from the body is to be at home with the Master. This contradicts the idea of “soul sleep”, which argues that when a believer dies they enter into an unconscious state until resurrected. There is no hint of any time gap between the two events (death and heaven), seeing that they are even written in the same sentence. Who looks forward to eons of sleep? There is no comfort in being in the Master’s presence if we are unaware of it.

## **5:11–13 Defending credentials**

Once again, Paul has to defend his motives and actions against the false teachers. He appeals to the Corinthians’ personal experience with him and the fact that his motives should be obvious. What matters is what is in the heart.

## **5:14–6:2 Reconciliation**

Paul writes once more against any idea of a license to sin, that we should no longer live for ourselves. We are a new creation that

seeks to please the One who died for us. An important statement about what exactly Jesus did for us is brought out here: that he reconciled (restored to friendship) the world to God. This is the Gospel message we are to be spreading. We are ambassadors on Jesus' behalf. He reconciled the world, so that all anyone has to do to be saved is accept Jesus and what he did.

But this is not Universalism, which is the belief that all who ever lived will eventually be allowed into heaven; it doesn't distinguish between reconciliation and salvation. What Jesus did was to reverse the separation between God and man that Adam caused, making salvation by faith possible (and "legal" concerning God's holiness). The difference between a person's spending eternity in either heaven or hell is based solely on faith in the risen Jesus, not on our deeds. So "judgment day" is not about salvation, but about payment for wages earned. John 3:18 says, "Whoever *believes* in him is *not condemned*, but whoever *does not believe* stands *condemned already* because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son."

So the whole world was reconciled with God by Jesus' sacrifice, and now we are to spread this Gospel to everyone, showing them that they can have salvation just by trusting in the Jesus who died for them and rose again. Reconciliation involves two parties, so even though God did his part in this, we still have to accept it to make the reconciliation complete. Those who are not reconciled to God have only themselves to blame. After explaining the Gospel message, Paul once again implores the believers to not receive God's favor in vain but to "walk the walk", to live like salvation matters.

## **6:3–10 Added credentials**

Again Paul gives his credentials, listing the ways in which he and others have given themselves to the spreading of the Gospel. He shows by personal example the proper Christian life, and the



perseverance required in the face of opposition. He contrasts appearances and outward treatment with the inner strength and purity of those who are truly disciples.

## **6:11–7:4a Purity and reconciliation**

### **A 6:11–13 Paul’s plea for them to reconcile with him**

He appeals to the Corinthians to observe his openness and honesty. Any problems between them and him are laid at their feet, so he challenges them to return his openness.

### **X 6:14–18 Unequally joined**

Next is the famous passage about being in partnership with unbelievers (trad. “unequally yoked”). This is not between spouses of varying ethnicity or skin color, as has been popularly supposed, but between believers and unbelievers. Marriage isn’t even in view here. The language Paul uses is clearly about good and evil, light and darkness, God and Satan. He appeals to their knowledge of the old Law for the need to be separate from all evil.

### **A’ 7:1–4a Paul’s plea for them to reconcile with him**

Paul continues to implore the Corinthians to open up to him and stop the false accusations. He has done nothing to deserve their suspicion of his motives, since he has in fact bragged about them to others.

## **7:4b–16 Godly sorrow and comfort**

Paul regrets having had to grieve them over various issues, but at the same time he is convinced it was necessary. It fulfilled its

purpose of changing the people's minds about their wrong attitudes.

## **8:1–15 Following an example of generosity**

Paul abruptly changes to the subject of charity among believers of differing locations. He stresses that such giving cannot be coerced, demanded, or forced, but must be free and voluntary. Verses 8-9 make it even clearer that this is not any kind of divine command.

What Paul is telling the Corinthians is that they must follow through on their prior actions when it comes to giving; they must not only talk about it but do what they said they'd do. Notice that this is not to be a case of "giving beyond your means" as the popular saying goes, but from what we can afford. Many preachers like to insist that a Christian can't really give until they have first "tithed", and they lay a burden of guilt on any who disagree. But this flies in the face of what the Bible actually says to believers. God looks on the heart, not the bank account.

Further emphasis on the nature of true giving is spelled out for us: Giving is not so others will have relief while you will have hardship, but to produce equality. We give to those who are in need until they are back on their feet, and then if the tables are later turned, those who are then in need can expect help from others.

Notice also that there is no mention here of giving to "the Master's work" or buying a building or paying salaries or anything else tradition has invented. This is about people with means helping people without means, and it only goes one way until the situation is remedied. It is not a perpetual, planned, legalistic obligation at all. When preachers try to shame people into "giving", they remove any possibility of it being done Biblically, since paying out of fear or guilt is the wrong motivation.

## **8:16–24 Trustworthiness**

Brief mention is made of Titus, whom Paul recommends to them and encourages them to respect. There is speculation that the unnamed believer traveling with him may be Onesimus who is mentioned in Philemon, but we really don't know. But above all, Paul wants everything to be done with the utmost integrity, especially concerning the handling of money.

## **9:1–15 Living up to a good reputation**

Paul continues with strongly encouraging the Corinthians to follow through on their intention to give generously, recommending that they don't wait till the last minute to collect the money. Paul has stuck his neck out in boasting about them, so he doesn't want to look like a liar if they don't put their words into action.

Again, he makes it clear that any real giving is a matter of personal conscience, because "God loves a cheerful giver". We can't give cheerfully when we have fear or guilt. It is God, not any preacher, who will prompt the people's hearts to give as he wills. Then as further incentive he reminds them of the Gift of Life they received.

## **10:1–12:13 False missionaries**

Now we come to a lengthy passage in which Paul expresses his exasperation with the Corinthians regarding his standing as an Ambassador or missionary (trad. apostle, a transliteration of the Greek word for someone sent out on a mission).

## **10:1–11 A warning to Paul's opponents**

Paul would much prefer to be gentle with the Corinthians, but he warns them that if he has to he will be more than the “paper tiger” he is accused of being. Of course he was meek in person, not wanting to draw attention to himself but to Jesus. But now, since they’ve been asking for it, he intends to take the gloves off at his next visit.

Some take Paul’s military analogy here as a sanction for the occult practice of ritual exorcism, all based on the phrase “pull down strongholds”. Specifically, they think we actually have to go to a “demonic” area and pray and do certain things to drive the demons away, and they go from city to city performing rituals. Yet nobody ever seems to notice that nothing changes; evil marches on. And there is no Biblical precedent for this. Instead, the context indicates an internal struggle, the one even Paul expressed frustration with in Romans 7.

### **10:12–11:30 A challenge to Paul’s opponents**

If the Corinthians thought they belonged to Jesus, then certainly Paul could more easily make that claim. Yet the false teachers were apparently not only challenging his authority, but his very salvation. But he tells them where the line is drawn when it comes to boasting. And it is not their approval but the Master’s that really matters.

Now Paul launches a long rant about the Corinthians’ amazingly easy acceptance of any teacher that comes along while at the same time rejecting Paul and the others. They are easy prey for smooth talkers. With much sarcasm he tells them he was not like that, being humble and honest, but maybe he should have been harsh and domineering like these “super apostles”. And this is where we see the well-known statement that Satan pretends to be a “messenger of light”. The churches have pretty much forgotten this, following any and all who tickle their ears. Then Paul reluctantly lists the things he has suffered for the Gospel, and dares the false teachers to match

his dedication in the face of hardship. If these things are seen as a weakness, then Paul is glad, because it honors the Master.

### **11:31–12:10 Only Jesus is worthy of boasting**

Here Paul gives his account of having been taken up to heaven to receive visions and revelations from the Master. Although he speaks of this in the third person, it seems obvious that he is really speaking about himself. He and the apostle John are the only two mentioned in the NT as having either gone into heaven or having seen a vision of heaven. But unlike John, and unlike many today who claim to have made multiple visits to heaven, Paul was not permitted to tell what he heard or saw there. It's possible, but of course not known for sure, that this is when he was given the "secret" of the community of believers, which is salvation by faith alone as the hallmark of what we call the "church age".

Next he tells of his "burr in the flesh", another controversy. But the main point is that the purpose of this was to keep him humble after his visions (another hint that he was speaking of himself). There is debate about the nature of this irritation or suffering, over whether this was an actual physical infirmity or a spiritual harassment. Support for the spiritual view is from Paul calling it a "messenger of the Enemy", while support for it being physical is by virtue of the word "flesh" and also his statement in Gal. 4:15 about them being willing to give their own eyes to him. Another possibility is that Paul is referring to the pagan practice of spitting three times to ward off a spell cast by "the evil eye", making his reference to the Galatians' willingness to "gouge out their own eyes" a play on words. Yet on the other hand, we remember that during his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus, he was struck blind for three days, so it could also refer to a literal eye problem.

### **12:11-13 A comparison to Paul's opponents**

Paul sarcastically asks the Corinthians' forgiveness for not being a burden to them like the false teachers, and for doing all those miraculous signs among them. In spite of miracles they still listened to those who challenged his right to speak with authority.

## **12:14–13:4 Three witnesses**

Twice in this passage Paul establishes the testimony of three witnesses in his lengthy defense. The Corinthians had accused Paul of treachery and deceit, yet he assures them that he will not change the way he relates to them, but will continue to live the example of a faithful servant of God. He wants to build them up, not tear them down, in spite of how they have treated him. Yet if he must, he will not come in humility the next time, but in boldness. He will give them the proof they demand that Jesus does indeed speak through him.

## **13:5–10 Test yourselves**

Paul warns them to test themselves before he comes, so he won't have to make himself treat them harshly after all. He challenges them to make sure first of all that they are really saved.

## **13:11–14 Greetings and final warnings**

And as was his custom, Paul ends the letter with a final plea for them to mend their ways, and a blessing.

# Galatians

## Background

The letter to the Galatians was written by Paul around 48 a.d. It is the first letter he wrote, soon after returning from the areas noted in Acts 13 and 14. The central theme is salvation by faith alone, nothing added nor removed. He writes also in defense of his authority to confront and oppose the legalists.

## Outline

1. **A 1:1–5** Greetings
2. **–B 1:6–9** A different Gospel
3. **—C 1:10–12** Paul's motives
4. **—D** Reminders
  1. **1:13–2:10** Paul's actions and history
  2. **2:11–14** Paul confronts Peter
5. **—E 2:15–2:21** Justified by faith alone
6. **——F 3:1–5** What happened to you?
7. **———G** Law
  1. **3:6–14** Abraham, faith, and law
  2. **3:15–18** Examples from law
  3. **3:19–4:7** The purpose of law
8. **———X** True or false
  1. **4:8–11** Turning back to fake gods
  2. **4:12–16** The crime of telling the truth
9. **———G'** Law
  1. **4:17–20** Ulterior motives of the legalists
  2. **4:21–5:1** An allegory about slavery to law
  3. **5:2–6** The limits of law
10. **———F'** **5:7–12** What happened to you?

- 11. ———**E' 5:13–26** Freedom vs. license
- 12. ———**D'** Reminders
  - 1. **6:1–6** Individual and collective responsibility
  - 2. **6:7–10** Harvesting what we plant
- 13. ———**C' 6:11–13** The critics' motives
- 14. ———**B' 6:14–17** The true Gospel
- 15. **A' 6:18** Greetings

## **A 1:1–5 Greetings**

Paul begins by giving some of his credentials as a hand-picked Ambassador of Jesus. He also includes greetings from others with him and praises God for the sacrifice Jesus made to rescue us all from “this evil age”.

## **B 1:6–9 A different Gospel**

No sooner is the greeting given than he confronts the Galatians over their amazingly quick abandonment of the true Gospel of grace for a different “Gospel”, one which would again enslave them to a religion of salvation by good deeds. He strongly condemns any who preach such a distorted Gospel and rob believers of their freedom.

## **C 1:10–12 Paul's motives**

Paul is apparently responding to charges that he was only after people's approval, but he reminds them of the fact that he got the Gospel directly by revelation from Jesus Himself, not from anyone else, not even the other Ambassadors before him. And of course he would not be persecuted if he were only acting on human impulse.



## **D 1:13–2:14 Reminders**

### **1:13–2:10 Paul's actions and history**

He relates how formerly he had been Christianity's bitterest enemy, hounding and persecuting the believers, even having some put to death, thinking he was just being a good Jew (actually, an outstanding Jew, as he had surpassed his peers among the Pharisees). He was stopped cold by Jesus, after which he went away alone for three years. Only then did he meet with the others in Jerusalem, where he was acknowledged by the church leaders as having received a commission from God. He presents this as his sworn testimony and not just idle talk. This approval by the leaders refutes the claim some make today that Paul was subverting the faith; some even go so far as to say Paul was the Antichrist warned of by John, since he fought against putting Christians under the Law. Yet not one of the acknowledged disciples trained directly by Jesus ever named Paul as a fake or deceiver.

A mere fourteen years later, the church was already being infiltrated by "false believers" who were trying to enslave the true believers with laws and rules. He went to Jerusalem very cautiously, to test the openness of the current leaders to what Jesus had commissioned him to do. Their reputations, even as hand-picked disciples of Jesus, were of no concern to Paul. No one was to be judged on the basis of credentials but only on the Gospel alone. He cites James, Peter, and John as the top leaders, who then accepted Paul as having the same authority as they had to speak for Jesus.

### **2:11–14 Paul confronts Peter**

By this time Paul's authority had been recognized by all the believers, as shown in the confrontation with Peter over this issue. Peter had allowed the pressure of the false teachers to cause him to slide back into Jewish legalism, and Paul had to *publicly* rebuke him.

This is significant on two levels: Paul had the authority to rebuke an Ambassador that had been with Jesus during his time as a human, and the rebuke was public, something that is not tolerated in churches today.

## **E 2:15–2:21 Justified by faith alone**

The Law could never justify anyone but only condemn them. It told them what sin was and that they were not perfect in the sight of God. So salvation can only come by faith, and that faith must be in Jesus. The fact that we still struggle with sin, however, in no way condones sin or associates it with salvation. The Jewish Christians had died to the law; their relationship with it was broken. Therefore they, and all of us, died to the ways of sin and to offending God. Our lives are wrapped up in his, so that we must turn from the old kingdom to the new. Besides, if law could save people, then there would have been no purpose for Jesus to come and die for us.

Of course, Paul is not saying we lose our identity or personality and become “absorbed” into Jesus, as some religions teach, but that we are to walk in step with Jesus and his will.

## **F 3:1–5 What happened to you?**

Paul cannot fathom why people would prefer to try and earn that which is available for free. He asks them rhetorically how they were saved in the first place, and how they received the Holy Spirit. Law had nothing whatsoever to do with it.

## **G 3:6–4:7 Law**

### **3:6–14 Abraham, faith, and law**

The Gospel is all about faith, not works. Abraham was not credited with righteousness by anything he did, but only by his faith in God's promise to him. And it is this same faith by which all nations would be blessed in Abraham.

In contrast, as he continues his grilling of the Galatians over their desire to work for that which is freely offered, Paul goes on to explain that if anyone wants to keep the law they have to keep *all* of it. But many Christians say, "You don't have to make animal sacrifices, but you must keep the Sabbath (and whatever else I personally feel everyone should do)". This attempt to mix the old and the new is exactly what Jesus said was impossible, with the illustration of the wineskins (see Luke 5:33–39). He redeemed the Jews from the Law, and Gentiles were never under it at all.

### **3:15–18 Examples from law**

Illustrations are a good way to explain principles, and here Paul uses their knowledge of ordinary laws, especially a Last Will and Testament. God had made a unilateral promise to Abraham, specifically to a particular Descendant of his, the Christ. It could not be affected by any other contracts. So the law that came 430 years later was not at all related to that promise, and it therefore did not nullify or replace it; inheritance can only come by a Will or promise.

### **3:19–4:7 The purpose of law**

So if the law does not save, what good is it? Paul explains that it served as a guide, to bring people to the point where they could inherit the estate. It was a contract between two parties, not a will made by one; there is no need of any mediator for a Will. Therefore a sharp line is drawn between law and promise.

It is in this particular context about the divide between law and promise that Paul writes the statement, "There is no Judean or

Greek, no slave or free, not even male and female, for you are all one, united with Christ Jesus.” To be united with Jesus is to be united in his death to the law; the testator has died and the guidance of the old law is no longer in effect. That would be the only way out of the old contract. Otherwise they’d still be under it, even though they have the Promise, because the Promise could never affect the contract. So that is why Jesus had to die, and why only those who are united with him have also died to the old law. And only those with faith in him and his resurrected life are thereby part of the Descendant and thus heirs of the Promise.

Yet some people want echoes of the law to persist: hierarchy, clergy, altars, sacrifices, and rituals. They want to impose the Jewish tithe, to call the church building or organization “the storehouse”, to put us into bondage. That is the whole reason Paul is writing to the Galatians: to put all such nonsense away. We are now one in Jesus (3:28) and there is no more hierarchy, no more privilege, no more of the old ways.

For Paul who was a Pharisee, his choice of words in 3:28 is most forceful. There was a rabbinical prayer, “Thank God that I was not born a gentile, a slave, or a woman!” (see [this source](#).) He dismisses each and every one of those boasts in order, as well as showing that the law does not apply to those who are united with Jesus. Sadly, while Christianity quickly accepted the equality of Jew and Gentile, and reluctantly conceded that there should also be no slavery, it still clings to a hierarchy between male and female, along with one between an imaginary clergy and laity. Our unity is in Jesus, not in society or biology.

Verse 28 is *not* about how people are to be saved. Through verse 25 Paul has been discussing salvation as freedom from the old law, and in verse 26 he begins to explain the condition of people who are already “children of God”. This is repeated in 4:6 as well. The whole passage is for the purpose of building a case against those who had

already accepted the Gospel turning back to the law, not instructing people how to be saved.

So by faith we are all heirs of the promise made to Abraham, a promise outside of law and thus unaffected by it. We are not minors under a guide. Jesus died “at the time set by his Father” to make believing Jews all dead to the law and inheritors of the estate. Slaves do not call their owner “father” but only “master”, so the fact that we can call God our Father is another indication of our having inherited eternal life, and of Jews having been freed from the law. And such a condition is irreversible; Jesus cannot repeatedly die in order to repeatedly free us, which also would require that the old contract is repeatedly reinstated. Salvation is all about adoption and inheritance, not legal performance regarding a contract that is no longer in effect for the Jews.

## **X 4:8–16 True or false**

This is the crux of the whole letter: the Galatians’ turning away from the Gospel and back toward fake gods and old laws. Paul has built up to this point from the basics of salvation and examples of how laws and contracts and unilateral promises work.

### **4:8–11 Turning back to fake gods**

Paul asks the Galatians how they can want to turn from this freedom he’s been talking about back to “those weak and poor fundamental principles” associated with false gods. Some take that unusual phrase to refer to the ancient Babylonian practice of astrology with its supernatural “elements” and principles. These things had enslaved them before, yet now they wanted to return to this slavery! They were beginning to once again observe the calendar, perhaps even the zodiac (equally possible, the requirements of the old Law).

Ironically, churches today do many of the same things and adopt the same beliefs, which have been repackaged in Christian or harmless-sounding terms: Twelve Step programs, breath prayer, “the silence”, chanting, territorial spirits, prosperity by shamanistic practices such as sacred objects, etc. They combine these with Jewish law: tithing, observing the Sabbath, and many others, as if sacrifice is the *only* thing Jesus did. Paul’s words here to the Galatians are very much needed for today’s believers as well.

### **4:12–16 The crime of telling the truth**

Paul now expresses the great emotional pain he is in because of the Galatians’ turning back to the worthless old practices. He had come to them originally in poor health, evidently a condition that was repulsive, yet they had welcomed him as they would Jesus Himself. How could they now do such a thing as to believe Paul was insincere or seeking popularity or faking authority to speak for God? They had turned against him even though he had told them the truth.

As noted in the text, there are two ways to take Paul’s words here regarding eyes: either he had an eye problem or he was making a play on words regarding the “evil eye” of false religion.

Now that he has built up his case and confronted the Galatians over their abandonment of the Gospel and betrayal of him personally, Paul will begin to go back over the evidence and turn their accusations around.

## **G’ 4:17–5:6 Law**

### **4:17–20 Ulterior motives of the legalists**

Paul now discusses the motivation of the false teachers: to gather a following without the persecution that goes with faithfulness to the

Gospel of freedom. He knows that the Galatians did not just wake up one morning and decide to turn from the truth; they were swayed by people with sinister and/or selfish motives. It is they who were the fakes, the liars, the enemies. They were driving a wedge between the people and Paul so they could take over and be esteemed as leaders. Paul could be very crude at times, and here he uses the words “cut off” to describe what the legalizers are trying to do to him. He is making a veiled reference to circumcision, the favorite rule of the Judaizers, and he will continue to reference this analogy as he goes along.

But he also describes his consternation with the Galatians in terms of labor and childbirth. By saying he is “writhing in the pains of childbirth with you until Christ is formed in you” he is of course not talking about salvation. Salvation is a single event in time, at the moment of faith, when we die to the old ways and are assured the inheritance of eternal life by virtue of our being united with Jesus. So he uses labor and childbirth as a description of the process of spiritual growth and maturity. (See also 1 Tim. 2:15 for another of Paul’s references to childbearing.)

People can be confused by this terminology since Jesus called our salvation being “born again”. Context is the key: Jesus was talking to a Pharisee about salvation, and Paul is talking to the saved about how they are being tricked into a return to old religious practices. Remember that this letter was addressed to “brothers and sisters”, that is, fellow believers. After all Paul has said about law, promise, and inheritance, how can we think this can be reversed? Would he say two opposite things in the same letter?

#### **4:21–5:1 An allegory about slavery to law**

The Galatians had forgotten that Abraham had two lines of descendants: slave (Ishmael) and free (Isaac). These two literal children represented the Law and the Promise. (Note Paul’s use of the analogy: he is using Hagar’s child to represent those under the

Law, that is, earthly Jerusalem, while those who have Abraham's faith are of the heavenly Jerusalem.) Just as Ishmael persecuted Isaac, the unbelieving Jews were persecuting those who became Christians. So Paul is telling the Galatians that they must "send away the slave woman", that they must not go back into slavery to law.

### **5:2–6 The limits of law**

In addition, the people were not thinking through the implications of going back under the law. To be under law is to not be under grace; to be under contract is to not be under promise. Paul turns again to the rite of circumcision as a symbol of all that is wrong with legalism, going so far as to equate the legalizers with that which is "cut off" and discarded. In stark contrast is the only way for anyone to be justified: faith empowered by love. Referring back to the previous pairings, Paul now expresses the Jew/Gentile pairing as "no circumcision or uncircumcision" in Jesus.

### **F' 5:7–12 What happened to you?**

Turning back to the people after aiming at the legalizers, Paul tells them that they had been running a good race but the legalizers cut in front of them. Though he is confident that they will eventually get back on track, he has no kind words for what is apparently a particular individual who is causing all the trouble. He appeals to reason: if he (Paul) were just going along with the circumcision, why would they be persecuting him? As a final insult to the legalizers, Paul adds deep sarcasm to crudity by suggesting that those who are so fond of cutting should just keep going!

### **E' 5:13–26 Freedom vs. license**



But after all this effort at driving home the point that we are free, Paul puts it in balance by reminding the Galatians that freedom is not license, as he also wrote to the Romans. Our freedom is *from* sin, not *to* sin. We are free from the prison of legalism, but should we then spit in the face of the One that bought our freedom? That's what Paul is saying about the new "law" of love in Christ; we are now free, but we are also indebted to the blood of Jesus that bought us. We no longer desire those things that would grieve the One we claim to love.

Does Paul once again apparently suggest we have a salvation that can be lost, by saying "those who commit such things will not inherit the kingdom of God"? No, he's just mentioning that the outward acts of "the flesh" are opposite the outward acts of the spirit. The lost are known for self-indulgence, and such will certainly not inherit the Kingdom. Only children get an inheritance, and they are not disowned every time they stray.

## **D' 6:1–10 Reminders**

The case has been made and the closing arguments given. Now Paul begins to wind down with some general instructions.

### **6:1–6 Individual and collective responsibility**

We are a Body, a community of believers. As such we must help each other when we stumble. This is a preventive measure that Paul is prescribing for the Galatians, to keep them from stumbling again. Instead of comparing ourselves with others we must always look to Jesus, our true "role model". And those who teach such truths are to be honored and also helped materially if needed.

### **6:7–10 Harvesting what we plant**

There are consequences to actions and beliefs. God will not be fooled or bribed or dishonored; He will certainly pay us back in proportion to how we lived. So the wise will live in such a way as to please God, and that includes striving for the good of others. And we should put fellow believers first, as Paul also wrote in 1 Tim. 5:8.

## **C' 6:11–13 The critics' motives**

Many assume that Paul's reference to writing in large letters must be proof of his having eye problems, but notice where he writes it: just before making one last jab at the legalizers. He is emphasizing their sinister motives, and writing large so they don't miss it. They are the ones whose motives are to be questioned.

## **B' 6:14–17 The true Gospel**

There is only one Gospel, one Way, Truth, and Life. We all are “cut off” from the world, not by a physical act but by faith in Jesus alone. We are new creations and can no longer keep living as though we belong to the world. Paul reminds them that he has been “branded” with Jesus' seal of ownership, his physical sufferings for the faith. His detractors could make no such claim.

## **A' 6:18 Greetings**

In spite of all the intense emotion and harsh criticisms, these are still believers and still precious ones for whom Jesus died. Paul signs off with what the Galatians should know by now is a genuine blessing.

# Ephesians

## Background

The letter to the Ephesians was written by Paul around the late 50s AD. It addresses general topics and appears to have been intended for circulation among the various Congregations. Jesus is exalted throughout, with gentle appeals for righteous living.

## Outline

1. **1:1** Greetings
2. **1:2–14** Love, purity, and adoption
3. **1:15–23** Glory, power, and unity
4. **2:1–5** Dead to sin
5. **2:6–10** Our inheritance
6. **2:11–22** Reconciled
7. **3:1–12** The secret and grace given to Paul
8. **3:13–21** Encouragement through adversity
9. **4:1–6** Unity and humility
10. **4:7–14** Spiritual gifts
11. **4:15–16** The head and body
12. **4:17–5:2** A new attitude
13. **5:3–5:17** A higher standard
14. **5:18–6:9** Be filled with the Spirit
15. **6:10–17** The armor of God
16. **6:18–20** Prayer requests
17. **6:21–22** Personal business
18. **6:23–24** Blessings

## **1:1 Greetings**

As in all his letters, Paul begins with greetings to fellow believers. He identifies himself as one sent out by God.

## **1:2–14 Love, purity, and adoption**

We always need to remember the tremendous blessings we have received as a gift, one given out of love. But what are we to conclude from the statement “he chose us for himself before the foundation of the world ”? Note first of all that the purpose of the choice was for us to be holy and flawless; it does not say the purpose was for us to be saved by force. Salvation is well-established in all Paul’s writings as being solely by faith, a faith we exercise by free will. So what God chose for us who believe is that we will be made holy. God also decided that we would be more than servants; we would be children.

Grace is the favor bestowed upon the lesser by the greater, and this is what God did in offering Jesus to pay the penalty for our sins. This was a legal matter in that the charges against us were dropped as a result. In addition, God revealed that this salvation by faith for all was the goal to which the progression of history was aimed. But it should be pointed out that this offering of Jesus was a self-sacrifice, not a human sacrifice, as the skeptics allege. As Paul states in Col. 1:19, Jesus embodies the entirety of God.

Once again we see something about destiny, and once again we note that it is not salvation that was chosen for us, but that those who were the first believers would glorify God. And everyone who would believe would be given something unique in all of history: the “down payment that guarantees our inheritance”, that is, the Holy Spirit to live within each believer. No other group outside of “the church age” would be blessed in this way. No righteous person

before Pentecost was said to have this lifelong indwelling or this guarantee.

## **1:15–23 Glory, power, and unity**

Paul was overjoyed that the Ephesians had placed their faith in Jesus, and he promised continued prayer for their spiritual growth and maturity. As their understanding of their riches in Jesus increases, so too will their gratitude. And we are promised the power to grow, the same power that raised Jesus from the dead and seated him above all other authorities and powers. All power comes from him, and it enables his Body, the believers, to grow to completeness.

## **2:1–5 Dead to sin**

Paul describes our current condition as being dead to sin. The majority of translations say “you were dead in sin”, but that’s not in the Greek. It’s the present tense, and the implied article there is never translated as “in”. But the concept of death in that culture and time had the primary meaning of separation, not inability. To be dead to God is to have a broken relationship with him, and to be dead to sin is to have a broken relationship with it. It doesn’t mean we can no longer sin, but only that we are no longer in agreement with it.

Then Paul goes on to contrast how we are in our new relationship compared to the old. We obeyed the flesh and the devil and thus deserved the wrath of God. But in spite of that, God showed us all mercy by buying us with the blood of Jesus and restoring our broken relationship with God. And it was all on God’s initiative; we didn’t ask him to do this. But of course we need to accept the free gift God offers because of what Jesus did, and we do this by trusting in him. Then we will be dead to sin and alive to God.

## **2:6–10 Our inheritance**

It is by God's favor and initiative that we can be saved by faith, not by our own works or plans. We didn't ask Jesus to sacrifice himself for sin. But knowing this, nobody can boast about themselves.

Some teach that vs. 8-9 say our faith itself is a gift from God, but it doesn't say that at all. It is the whole thing— salvation by grace through faith— that is the object of “not of yourselves”. This is an issue of Greek grammar and syntax and does not come through clearly in English. But from the totality of New Testament teachings we know that this gift is the whole plan of God: salvation through faith because of Jesus. So God does not have to give us faith before we can be saved; rather, he gives us the choice, the opportunity, to be saved if we just put our faith in Jesus.

Those who believe are held up as a prize, a masterpiece made by Jesus Himself. We are the crowning achievement of his suffering, death, and resurrection, and a sign of defeat to Satan. We must not forget that we are the work of Another and become proud of ourselves instead of Jesus. We are to honor him by doing the good things he has planned for us. Again, there is no hint of being forced to do these things; the Letters are filled with pleas for us to choose to do right. God has plans for us, but we are not forced to carry them out. Our future rewards are based upon how well we chose God's path instead of our own.

## **2:11–22 Reconciled**

Before Jesus came, the Gentiles were without hope of salvation. Yet we know that individuals could convert to Judaism and be considered righteous in God's sight. So Paul is not saying no Gentile could be saved before, but that the Gentile nations had not been “chosen people” of God. They were outside of both the Promise and the Law— as people groups, but not as individuals. God may

choose groups for his purposes without violating individual free will (see Romans for a more detailed discussion).

Now, through Jesus, there is to be no more dividing wall between Jew and Gentile. All are “chosen” on the basis of faith alone. The old Law was voided by virtue of Jesus’ death, and our adoption by faith was made possible by virtue of Jesus’ resurrection. All can come to God on the same basis and be reconciled. This new entity or “house” is built upon one foundation, the Apostles, whose cornerstone is Jesus. Such a building is more than a house; it is a temple holy to God.

Note that Jesus is the cornerstone. A cornerstone is laid at the foundation, not put up on top of the roof. This is his function as a human, and the example he gave for us all to follow. As illustrated in Phil. 2:5–11, Jesus demonstrated what we are to follow: laying aside privilege and power in order to get under others and lift them up. Jesus expressly taught this in his rebuke to the disciples for wanting positions of importance in the coming kingdom (see Mt. 20:20–28 and Mk. 10:35–45). In his humanity Jesus both showed and taught the attitude and actions his followers must have.

### **3:1–12 The secret and grace given to Paul**

The reason Paul is a prisoner at this time is because of the very thing he’s been writing about: the Gospel is for everyone, including Gentiles. God had entrusted Paul with making known his plans for this age, plans that God had revealed directly to him personally. It was something that had never been revealed before.

In spite of this, Paul considered himself the very lowest of the Ambassadors. Yet this served the purpose of making it all the more obvious that this was of God and not Paul. God was now revealing his ultimate plan of salvation via the community of believers, an entity nobody saw coming. This sent a message to all the “rulers

and authorities in the heavenlies” that God is supreme and cannot be out-witted. Jesus’ sacrifice and resurrection was the very epitome of all God’s plans through the ages.

### **3:13–21 Encouragement through adversity**

For all of these reasons, Paul asks the people not to be discouraged by what he is currently suffering for the sake of the Gospel. Instead they should be proud of this suffering, because it will strengthen them and help them grow, giving them ever-increasing appreciation for the gift of God.

### **4:1–6 Unity and humility**

Now he implores the people to live and act according to their understanding of the great things God has done for them. We are all of one Spirit, forming one Body, through one Gift. We have one Master, one faith, one immersion, one God and Father. But we should remember that our unity comes from this, and not from a false peace imposed externally.

### **4:7–14 Spiritual gifts**

Paul begins to talk about spiritual gifts but introduces the topic with references to Jesus’ accomplishments. What does it mean that Jesus “captured captivity”? There is much speculation because the context doesn’t give us much to go on. Likewise, what does it mean that he also “descended into the lower parts of the earth”? Certainly we’d all agree that Jesus came to the earth, which could be considered “lower parts” as compared to having “ascended”. Some claim it must mean he went into the realm of the dead, but differ over exactly where and why. Certainly it would be ridiculous to think that Jesus was tortured by Satan but escaped, as some speculate.



But a case can be made for saying Jesus went to the place of the dead and took out of there all the righteous people who had died before him. They could only now be taken to heaven since the Sacrifice had finally been made.

Whatever those statements mean, they had to happen in order for Jesus to dispense gifts. We cannot assert that any of the lists of such gifts are meant to be exhaustive; that is, that these are the only gifts there are. Paul seems to be mentioning a few of them to give some idea of what the Spirit does within the body of believers. Does the order of gifts signify importance or a hierarchy? This context says nothing about that, but Paul did say that he and the other Ambassadors were laying the foundation (see 1 Cor. 3). Yet again we must remember that the foundation supports and lifts up the rest of the building from beneath it, not from the rooftop. If there is any hierarchy in Christianity, it is upside-down to the worldly model.

These are gifts, not “offices” or positions of domination, or any kind of clergy class (which implies that they are special or privileged) over the common people. These people are gifted to nurture, not to oppress, dominate, rule over, or boss. They build up, not tear down. While it is obviously wise to listen to the spiritually mature and gifted, it is their example that is most important. They lead by being what the others should aspire to, not by decree or command. That is exactly how Jesus led while on the earth.

## **4:15–16 The head and body**

Here Paul seems to refer to the common Greek belief at the time, that the body grew out of the head. Thus the head was the source or originator of the body. Yet the head and body are one unit, of the same substance. This is how Paul illustrates our relationship to Jesus. He is both our source of eternal life and our own “flesh and bone”. No other body part is also a source of eternal life. Each

believer reports to God, not to each other, just as each body part only reports to the brain and not the other parts. And just as the head provides nourishment to the body, the body provides support to the head.

Shepherds guard and protect those who cannot protect themselves. When people are first saved, they are vulnerable and dependent. But if the shepherds do their jobs properly, these infants grow to adulthood, to the point where they can eventually become shepherds themselves. They are not to remain children perpetually. These tender ones are the people who must be treated tenderly and protected from falsehood. Two important implications arise from this:

1. There is no excuse for people to think they can shirk personal responsibility by deliberately remaining children. Many people have always been content to stay in the shadow of a preacher, as if they are exempt from all Paul has been talking about. We have the ridiculous situation of senior citizens being taught by young, inexperienced people who simply regurgitate the contents of the approved quarterly; we have masses of people sitting passively in pews while a public orator with the right worldly credentials lectures them “authoritatively”. Instead, the elderly should be teaching the young, and the experienced should be teaching the newly born. And this is spiritually determined, not by diplomas or seminaries.
2. To speak the truth in love is not a club that, ironically, can be used to beat people who dare to express some righteous indignation when confronted by unbelievers or heretics. Paul is talking to shepherds guarding tender lambs. But when a wolf comes along, that same gentle shepherd is obligated to get nasty and use whatever means are necessary to remove the threat. It’s a two-sided coin: protect the vulnerable, but repel the hostile. This is what good shepherds do. But we see the “sheeple” biting the ankles of the few remaining good shepherds every time a voice is raised or an alarm sounded.

## **4:17–5:2 A new attitude**

Paul now implores the people to get busy and stop acting like unbelievers. Continuing to live in such a hard-hearted way will result in their falling prey to sin and vice. The more we push in the wrong direction, the easier it gets to keep sliding downward. Instead, the whole idea of repentance is to change direction and go God's way. We must throw away all that drags us down and be renewed in truth and holiness. No more deceiving each other or losing control. We must stop nursing grudges and get over ourselves. Otherwise we "give the devil an advantage".

We must also stop being lazy, which can be applied to growing spiritually as well as to providing for physical needs. And we must not think that only certain words are considered by God to be "foul". In any given church, one may hear few curse words but much backbiting, slandering, tearing down, and improper judging. This is in stark contrast to building up. Yet again, remember that we're talking about how believers are to treat each other. If someone teaches heresy or an unbeliever attacks, those are legitimate times for harsh words and judgment.

## **5:3–5:17 A higher standard**

Jesus is our example to follow; he sacrificed himself out of love for all people. But does verse 5 mean we can lose our salvation if we persist in these things? Not at all; what Paul has written teaches the opposite. As before, he is contrasting the actions and attitudes of the saved and the lost. We should stay so far from such things that people have no reason to even suspect us of doing them.

We are warned to also stay away from smooth talkers, people who are out to deceive and undermine our faith. We are of the Light and must not wallow in darkness anymore. Some, who believe that all evangelism must begin with establishing friendship with unbelievers,

frequently go to the point of listening to their arguments. They are not well-grounded enough in the Bible to give a strong defense or to see the errors in the unbeliever's thinking. So error creeps in, and apostasy follows. Instead of leading the unbeliever to the truth, these immature believers follow the unbelievers into falsehood.

Here we see a command to expose error. Many today think this is wrong, but to see evil and not report it is every bit as sinful as any other form of disobedience. God told Ezekiel (ch. 33) that a faithful guardian must warn of danger. If they fail to do so, they are guilty of treason. Or as James put it, "So, if you know what's best but don't do it, you sin" (James 4:17). All of this requires effort on our part to practice discernment. We need to pay attention and keep our eyes open, walking the narrow path and not turning aside. We need the Spirit's power to accomplish this.

## **5:18–6:9 Be filled with the Spirit**

In beginning his long description of Spirit-filled living, Paul commands mutual respect among all believers. This is the complete opposite of domination or assuming authority over others, as already pointed out. He will now list ways in which we can be filled with the Holy Spirit.

He begins by contrasting this filling with that of alcohol. Notice that the scripture here does not say "never touch alcohol", but simply that we must not let it overcome us. The Spirit cannot work through people who fill themselves with mind-numbing substances. If there is any void in us, we must let the Spirit fill it instead. We can also keep a song in our hearts in praise to God, and share these with others. And no particular form of music or method of producing it is either condemned or commanded. Whatever comes from a pure heart in praise of God is the point. The entire Bible never singles out any music or art form as being intrinsically evil. And above all, we must be thankful.

The last item in this list of ways to be filled with the Spirit begins a sub-list of its own about ways to support each other. Each item in this list points back to that thought. Most translations cut into the middle of “being supportive of each other because you fear the Anointed (wives, to your own husbands, as to the Master)” to break the part about wives and husbands from the statement about mutual support, making it an entirely new topic. The wives-to-husbands part is a fragment that has no verb of its own; it is dependent upon “supporting one another”. And it means that whatever this support is, that which is for women is identical to that which is for all believers; what is true of one is true of the other since they share the same verb.

Here again Paul speaks of the head as the source of the body, not its ruler or commander. They are one unit, one flesh and one spirit. Paul clearly presents this union of husband and wife as a depiction of the union between Jesus and the community of believers. Jesus is God, of course, but Paul is not stressing divinity here, only unity. Yet why does he call the man the source of the woman? It can be seen as a reference to Eve being made from Adam, but in this context it seems to refer to his being the support and protector, since he is both physically stronger and socially more powerful. There is another element of context to consider, but first we must address what Paul says to husbands.

Notice that it is the love of Jesus that the husband is to model— not his divinity, salvation, or purification. Paul says “love your wives in the same way” and “so this is how men must love their wives”. What he says about Jesus’ other qualities and accomplishments are reasons to love, not mandates to copy. We must not confuse the divinity of Jesus with his humanity, nor to assign one aspect to men but the other only to women. And since we all are the Body of Jesus, and he does not abuse us nor squash our personalities, so also a husband must not abuse his wife nor deny her personhood. The two are of one flesh.

Another important point is that the man leaves his parents to join to his wife. This illustrates the fact that Jesus left his Father to join to his Bride, and then he went back to his Father's house to prepare a place for us. When Jesus returns for his Bride there will be a wedding feast as well. It is Jesus who joined to us, not we to him, and it is the husband who leaves home to join to his wife, not she to him. This again is how Jesus modeled humility and service, a model for all believers to follow, not just women.

Now for another element to all this, the Roman law called "the marriage without hand" (see [this source](#) and search for "without hand"). Since wife abuse was a common practice, in the first century a.d. the Roman emperor Augustus decreed that a woman and her dowry remained under the control of her father and his family. He could take her back from an abusive husband and give her to another man. The intent of the law was to reduce the divorce rate, but instead it only made it worse. The only lasting relationship a woman had was with her birth family, rather than her husband.

The preceding historical note makes the most sense of why Paul only told husbands to love and wives to support: because he told wives to identify with their husbands instead of their fathers. He needed to say the former because he said the latter. The whole message was, "Since you wives are not to go back to your fathers, you husbands must be careful to love your wives and not beat them." So in contrast to the views of patriarchal society, Paul commands husbands to love and protect their wives. They must follow Jesus' example of self-sacrifice for the people's purity by treating their wives at least as well as they treat their own bodies. This means providing and caring for them, recognizing that the two of them are "one flesh".

In the first century, a woman was considered property. She always belonged to one man or another and had few if any rights. So what need was there for Paul to tell wives to submit to husbands, as many translations put it? He could not have been referring to what

society already imposed upon them against their will; they had no choice in the matter. So Paul was saying something quite radical for the time: wives had a choice! They could now choose to defy the Roman household codes and defer willingly to their husbands (and expect deference in return as well), identifying with them instead of their fathers.

Another consideration is the fact that Christians had to be careful about how they worded things. Rome had spies everywhere, and anyone could easily be accused of sedition. That would explain why some things had to be stated delicately or indirectly. And there may have been shared experiences that did not require everything to be spelled out. So the clear passages must take priority over the less clear.

Other groups who needed to “support one another” were parents and children, masters and slaves. Note that Paul is not seeking to instantly overturn all social norms, and to boldly oppose slavery would certainly have brought charges of sedition upon him. Instead, just as God had slowly unveiled his plan for the ages, our freedom in Jesus in some cases had to happen gradually. So in the mean time slaves and masters who were believers had to know how to act. And of course this principle applies also to women; we no longer have a societal taboo against women in leadership, in the workplace, or as full equal partners in a marriage, and women have the ability to earn their own income. There is no more reason to continue first century norms for women than there is for slavery or class distinction.

## **6:10–17 The armor of God**

Our power to do all these things must come from God. The analogy Paul uses here of military armor indicates that our defenses come from God and not our own strength. We must not go out to battle unarmed or unprotected. "Putting on the armor" is not something to be taken lightly or done hastily.

We hear the Truth, the Gospel, which gives us the righteousness of Jesus and not our own. But the shoes we must put on by means of study and learning. This is our preparation, and we dare not leave these shoes off or fail to tie them. And we require a shield, which is firm trust in God. Last but not least is the Sword, an offensive weapon which is meant to be used effectively. A soldier untrained in how to use a sword is as useless as one who is trained but keeps the sword in its sheath.

We need to stop briefly here to clear up a misunderstanding. The Greek word endings indicate that it is the Spirit that is the sword, not the pronouncement (a different Greek word than the one translated “word”) of God. The Spirit is the source of all that God decrees, whether spoken or written. That is our source of power, our strength, our guide. Of course the written Word is part of that, and no less so than when God would speak audibly. It is the One who originates the message that matters, not the means of conveyance. But since we know that God never contradicts himself, then we can use what is written as an anchor, to which all that is spoken must agree.

We are to stand firm then, not run and hide at the first sign of opposition. Most believers seem to avoid any and all conflict, but what kind of soldiers are those? And what kind of shepherds run away from the wolves? (A subtle hint is found in John 10:13!) We must not be cowards but faithful soldiers who keep training for battle.

## **6:18–20 Prayer requests**

Prayer is constantly needed in all of this. Paul asks for prayer support in his own battles, for boldness and fearlessness in spreading the Gospel. He had many enemies and needed support as much as anyone.



## **6:21–22 Personal business**

He intends to send Tychikos to Ephesus to keep them up on his affairs and put their minds at ease about him. This shows Paul's tender care for the people.

## **6:23–24 Blessings**

With a final blessing, Paul prays for peace over all the believers.

# Philippians

## Background

The letter to the Philippians was written by Paul and Timothy about 60–61 a.d. while Paul was in prison in Rome. This city of Philippi was where he presented the Gospel to the jailer, and the synagogue outside the city was where he met Lydia (Acts 16). It is a letter of gratitude, encouragement, praise, and prayer.

## Outline

1. **1:1–6** Greetings
2. **1:7–11** Prayer partners
3. **1:12–17** Turning adversity into opportunity
4. **1:18–26** Torn between two worlds
5. **1:27–2:11** Rewards for suffering
6. **2:12–18** Perseverance in holiness
7. **2:19–30** Recommended emissaries
8. **3:1–11** Warnings against legalists
9. **3:12–14** Straining toward the goal
10. **3:15–4:1** Unity in faith
11. **4:2–3** Unity in leadership
12. **4:4–9** The peace of God, the God of peace
13. **4:10–19** Consistent generosity
14. **4:20–23** Greetings

## 1:1–6 Greetings

In this greeting Paul mentions “guardians and attendants”. These two words are typically translated “overseers/bishops and

deacons/ministers”. But our word *overseer* tends to lean more toward the idea of ruler and less of protector, while *deacon* is not a translation at all but a transliteration, which means to write a word as it sounds in the target language. *Diakonois* means one who serves or waits tables, just as *minister* meant originally. But it had no connotation such as a paid speaker or CEO, as in most churches throughout history. There is some evidence that these attendants were benefactors who had the means to help the believers in matters of law or finance.

Paul is very grateful to the Philippian believers for their continued partnership with him in spreading the Gospel. Because of this, he is confident that God will keep supplying them with increasing spiritual blessings. Note that it is God, not the people, who both began this work and will complete it.

## **1:7–11 Prayer partners**

The people have continually prayed for Paul and worked by his side. So one of the things he prays for on their behalf is spiritual discernment. They are to test everything, not swallow everything blindly.

## **1:12–17 Turning adversity into opportunity**

Rather than hindering Paul’s efforts, his imprisonments have actually helped. The guards and many others became aware of the reason for his arrest, and as a result the Gospel was made known to them. And it makes others bold, seeing that not even imprisonment can shackle the Gospel. To Paul, nothing mattered more than getting the truth out. Even if some people sought to use it to draw disciples away from him and to themselves, Paul is happy, as long as it’s the truth that’s being preached. God will deal with improper motivation in his good time.

## **1:18–26 Torn between two worlds**

Paul expresses his being torn between being dead and in heaven with Jesus, and here on earth to continue his work. But for the sake of others, he is happy to still be here to help the believers grow. And there is no hint here of “soul sleep” or delay between physical death and being conscious in the presence of God.

## **1:27–2:11 Rewards for suffering**

Now his attention turns to the people’s behavior, so that the Gospel will not be maligned. There is to be no fear of opposition from people who are still under God’s condemnation. Suffering is part and parcel of salvation, so it should not be seen as something unexpected. But Paul doesn’t stop there. He holds up Jesus as the example to which all believers must look, as one who has suffered for the sake of a greater good. It must be understood that the suffering we are to endure has two qualities: It’s for the sake of Christ, and it’s at the hands of unbelievers. Never is “suffering for Christ” to come at the hands of fellow believers. No one claiming to belong to Jesus can use “suffering for Christ” as an excuse to keep abusing other believers and demanding that their victims remain silent and passive.

Chapter 2 verses 5–11 is one of the most powerful and compelling passages of the entire New Testament, and it’s full of deep theology. Although this is one of Paul’s most positive and uplifting letters, we have controversy here because it reveals very basic truths about Jesus’ deity and humanity, as well as a lesson in how those with privileges are to view them.

It tells us first of all that Jesus was “in the form of God” in the very beginning. He didn’t start out as a man and work his way up, as the false religions declare. Neither did he eternally exist as any kind of sub-level of God, as the ‘eternal sonship’ teaching asserts. He was

not a mere angel (see Hebrews) or any other lesser being. Yet in spite of divine power and privilege, Jesus did not cling to it and refuse to stoop down to our level.

Voluntarily he set aside his divine privilege and made himself like one of us lowly creatures. It was not forced upon him or decreed by the Father over him, but something he chose to do. It was in this humble situation that he took on the position of slavery, humbling himself and perfectly obeying the Father, even to the point of a tortuous and humiliating death. And if we truly follow his example, we too must be willing to lay down any privileges to which we may feel entitled. As Paul told the Corinthians (1 Cor. 9), he did not cling to his right to be paid for his work, in spite of it being justified by scripture. This has serious implications regarding the debate over the sphere of women in the church. Even if one could support privilege in the church and home by sole virtue of biological gender, such privileges are to be given up.

Yet this was not the end; God raised him back to glory and gave him the most exalted Name. Jesus did not permanently remain lower than the Father, but was restored to full equality as before. And because of what he did, Jesus will ultimately be acknowledged, willingly or not, by all sentient beings as the Master, to the glory of God the Father. Jesus spoke in prayer of his being one with the Father, and that they would again share the glory they had in eternity past.

We must remember that though Jesus was always divine and always will be, he did not become human until that point in history. Otherwise the statement about taking on the form of a human would mean nothing. Yet he will always remain human as well. In his divinity he is still fully equal with all three Persons of the Trinity, but at the same time, in his humanity he will always be the Son, and we will always be his adopted siblings.

## **2:12–18 Perseverance in holiness**

This is all for our motivation, as an example to follow. Because of all Jesus did, we are then to carry our salvation to its ultimate conclusion. Yet many stop there and conclude that we have to work for our salvation. But they ignore the very next statement: “For it is God who is empowering you”. Salvation is God’s work; obedience is ours. Salvation is still a gift, still fully of God, and still not a reward. Instead, the context is all about following the One who is already our Master and Savior, the One we already belong to. It is this growth and new life we carry out (not “work for”).

Further, we are to stop whining about this following and suffering. We must hold on tight to the Word of Life and not to our own righteousness. Paul’s statements cannot be used as another attempt to throw out our security as believers, but simply as he writes here: that we stop relying on ourselves and thus make all Paul’s earlier teachings on how to grow as having been a waste of time.

## **2:19–30 Recommended emissaries**

Paul hopes to send Timothy to the Philippians soon so he can relay news about them. Paul doesn’t call Timothy an actual physical son here, but uses the term to describe his close relationship with him. For this reason he wants the people to treat Timothy with great respect. He had earlier sent Epaphroditus to them, a “co-worker and comrade-in-arms”. The people had worried about his (Epaphroditus’) health, but Paul is happy to report that God had mercy and healed him. Now he can visit them again, and they were to hold him in the same esteem as Paul and Timothy, since he had also risked his life for them.

## **3:1–11 Warnings against legalists**

Now Paul turns to words of advice and warning. There are people who want to control and micromanage, to rule and enslave. He had the legalistic 'Judaizers' in mind especially, those who kept trying to force circumcision on all believers. Paul himself was a Jew with the highest legalistic credentials, but as great as his accomplishments had been, he counted them all as utterly worthless, even as "a pile of manure". All the greatest accomplishments, the highest credentials, the most flawless performance was now considered unworthy to be compared with knowing Jesus the Anointed, God in the flesh. He had lost it all, but gained much more.

In light of that, how can anyone today insist that we must do this or that to get or remain saved? This works-salvation is known as Lordship Salvation, but it really isn't about the Master at all. It's all about us, our performance, our own righteousness. Look at Paul, and the radical change in him after salvation. Yet in all his letters he keeps pointing away from himself and towards Jesus. Salvation is still by faith alone. Those works could never save Paul, and they won't save us today. Instead, he resolved to only know Jesus and the power of his resurrection— not his own power. But remember that this is no license to sin, as Paul made very clear in his letters to the Romans and the Ephesians. We behave out of love and respect for God; we die to sin because we are saved, not to become saved.

## **3:12–14 Straining toward the goal**

We have not attained our own resurrection or even reached full maturity, but we continue to pursue it nonetheless; Jesus has already taken possession of that which we reach for. We strive then, not to acquire what is already guaranteed to us, but what will result in our maturity and reward. We are not to sit on our inheritance, but to invest it, remembering Who it really belongs to. Yet at the same

time, we are responsible for that investment. So we chase after that goal, straining toward the time when our faith becomes sight. A “prize” awaits all who run the race. Again, this is works/rewards language and therefore cannot refer to salvation itself.

### **3:15–4:1 Unity in faith**

Paul encourages the people to all run in the same direction and follow his example. They should note the contrast between his life and the lives of those who are really enemies of Jesus, who live only for the world. We are no longer citizens of this world but of the kingdom of God, and we should live like such citizens. Paul views the people as his medal of honor, his trophy, and he wants them to stand firm.

### **4:2–3 Unity in leadership**

Now Paul starts to name names. Two women named Euodia and Syntyche have contended at Paul’s and Clement’s side, and he asks someone named Syzugos to be of assistance to them. They are called Paul’s co-workers, which should not be glossed over. Many people brush off these women as mere assistants instead of being on a par with Paul and the others. Had they been men, nobody would even think twice about this. Yet Paul even tells this Syzugos to assist them, showing their importance and worthiness of respect as leaders.

### **4:4–9 The peace of God, the God of peace**

Now some general instructions on practical Christian living: Be happy, don’t worry, depend on God and speak to him often. This will result in inner peace, something the world tries to work for but Christians can have for nothing. This in turn will serve to guard our



thoughts from that which would bring us down. Paul speaks of both the peace of God and the God of peace. If we keep our focus on the good and pure, we are walking with the God of Peace, who will never leave us.

## **4:10–19 Consistent generosity**

While the Philippians had been inconsistent in the past with their giving to others, now they were showing maturity in this area. To assure them that he isn't hinting that they should give him something, Paul tells the people about his contentment in every situation. And he commends them for sticking with him in spite of their own suffering. They were the only Congregation of believers to do so and went beyond expectation to help him. Yet whatever they did for him resulted in credits to their account spiritually.

## **4:20–23 Greetings**

As was his custom, Paul signs off with blessings and praise to God, along with greetings from other believers.

# Colossians

## Background

The letter to the Colossians was written by Paul and Timothy about 60 a.d. while Paul was in prison in Rome. It is a rebuttal to an undefined false teaching or collection of teachings, after first presenting the true teachings.

## Outline

1. **1:1–14** Greetings, prayer and praise
2. **1:15–20** Jesus' divinity, humanity, and supremacy
3. **1:21–23** Reconciliation and persistent faith
4. **1:24–2:3** Paul's mission
5. **2:4–8** Warnings about crafty arguments
6. **2:9–15** Spiritual relationships and truths
7. **2:16–23** Standing firm against falsehood
8. **3:1–17** The believer's proper focus and behavior
9. **3:18–4:1** Treating each other properly
10. **4:2–18** General instructions and final greetings

## 1:1–14 Greetings, prayer and praise

The Colossians were known for their faith and love for all believers, and for their spiritual growth. Paul prays that even more will be added to them: good behavior, pleasing God, success, knowledge of God, and the power to endure. As he has mentioned more than once in other letters, all believers have a guaranteed inheritance. Notice the past tense: we have been rescued from darkness; we have had our sins cancelled.

## **1:15–20 Jesus’ divinity, humanity, and supremacy**

This passage is an excellent one for answering all who claim Jesus is something less than God. Jesus is clearly shown here to be the Creator God, the source of everything, and the sustaining power of all that exists. Yet some stumble over the phrases, “firstborn of all creation” and “firstborn from the dead”, as if he were a mere creation. His being “born” here, as the context shows, is not his coming into existence, but his taking on human form (see Phil. 2:5-11) and then having that form rise from the dead in a new and immortal condition. He was the first to do that. Others rose from the dead before him, but still in their old, mortal bodies. His full deity is further enforced by the clear statement that in him lives the entirety of God, not just a part. This is the so-called “hypostatic union”. He was not part this and part that, but all of both.

Note the head/body metaphor that Paul is fond of using. The Greek indicates head of, not over, and stresses the unity of head and body as well as the Greek understanding that the body grew out of the head. Since it immediately precedes the statement about reconciliation between God and people, and since the context here is about not only divine power but “holding everything together”, we cannot arbitrarily assign the modern meaning *boss* to the word *head*. We will see more references to this throughout the letter. Our inability to fully grasp this hypostatic union is no excuse to ignore it or misapply it.

## **1:21–23 Reconciliation and persistent faith**

Now Paul moves from how Jesus reconciled God and people to the purpose of that reconciliation: that we could be presented to God as flawless. This is something Jesus does for us, not something we do for ourselves. Yet what does Paul mean by saying he trusts that

they persist in the faith and are not removed from the hope of the Gospel?

At first glance this may appear to support Conditional Security, that is, that salvation itself can be lost. But context is the key, and it keeps speaking of our salvation being based upon faith in what Jesus already did. Paul sees this as the foundation that was laid, and it must be stable. A wavering foundation is one that was not properly laid. So Paul is addressing initial salvation and not the possibility of lost faith. If the right foundation was laid, we will naturally continue to follow it.

So just as the foundation determines how the building progresses, our salvation determines our actions. If it's true and firm we will continue in it, but if not, we will waver. So our continuing in the faith is proof of the right foundation having been laid, not that the foundation can be taken away. He is telling the people to look at the solidness of their faith to determine if they had been saved in the first place. It's the difference between "If you are saved you will continue in the faith", and "To remain saved you must continue in the faith".

## **1:24–2:3 Paul's mission**

Now Paul briefly shares how God continues to refine him through physical hardship, and that this is for the believers' benefit. He relates that he became a servant (Gk. *diakonos*) to them by God's command, and that God had revealed to him the "secret" that had been kept hidden until now. What is this secret? That everyone, Jew and Gentile, can have the Holy Spirit in them due to faith in the risen Jesus, and through that we have hope, the assurance of "things not seen" (Heb. 11:1).

He had been working hard among all the believers to spread the gospel and then encourage new believers to grow and mature. He

endeavors to guard them against deceptive teachings, and he is happy to see some strength and conviction forming in them. Now he urges them to keep on going and live out the teachings.

## **2:4–8 Warnings about crafty arguments**

Specifically, Paul warns them against subtle and cunning worldly wisdom. This can come in the form of appeals to human tradition and the “elements of the world”. This letter, and in fact the entire New Testament, gives examples of such arguments, such as putting experience over sound doctrine, thinking that love is a license to sin, or concluding that since everyone is a sinner then no sinner can ever be confronted. Most people are not trained to recognize bad logic, or to ask hard questions about some new or pious-sounding teaching. Many in churches today follow even the most outrageous and demonic teachings, as long as they come with a Christian-sounding veneer. Churches often look to secular psychology for what are really spiritual problems, and few would be able to discern the difference. Thinking and standing against error are difficult and demanding tasks, but they are vital for the health of the Christian community.

## **2:9–15 Spiritual relationships and truths**

Once again Paul stresses that Jesus is the embodiment of the entirety of God. When we are united with Jesus we are complete. And again we see the Greek word *kephale* meaning *head* (see 1:15–20), but this time the topic is not the head’s unity with the body but its being the source of life.

Being united with Jesus means we share in his baptism, death, and resurrection; we are alive to God but dead to sin. But what Jesus accomplished for us is more than new life; it is also declaring us “cleared of all charges” by canceling the legal code that stood

against us. He nailed this list of charges to the cross as a formal declaration of innocence. Because of that, all legalism and condemnation is “made prisoner” instead. The law that put Jesus on the cross is now nailed there in our place, and we are free.

## **2:16–23 Standing firm against falsehood**

In light of our being declared innocent, by virtue of what Jesus did for us and our acceptance of it by faith, we must not let anyone judge us on the basis of what we eat or drink, what days we observe, or any such external legalism. Notice that even “Sabbaths” are among the things we are not obligated to observe. They were part of the old legalistic system that had brought condemnation, but they were only a shadow, a temporary darkness. Our union with Jesus is all that matters now; it is reality as opposed to shadow.

So we must guard against legalists who try to set themselves over us and put us under slavery. They fake humility instead of being part of the reality of our Source, Jesus. Paul refers specifically to those who participated in the conjuring of angels to do their bidding, and because of the visions they had they were conceited. As such they were like headless bodies (yet another head/body reference), cut off from the Source of Life.

Since we “died” to those things, why do we try to go back under their authority as if they still have power over us, making us “do this but don’t do that”? This question Paul asks should still be asked today, since there is still a lot of legalistic control being taught in the churches.

## **3:1–17 The believer’s proper focus and behavior**

Here again we see our salvation referred to in the past tense. And because this is so, we must keep looking up and stop focusing on this world or on what used to be. We died to this world, and we are hidden or kept absolutely safe in Jesus. And when he is finally revealed to the world, we will finally be given the remainder of our inheritance.

As a result, we must treat all the “dead” things of this world as exactly that. We are new people, being continually changed into the image of Jesus. And this new image does not distinguish between ethnic groups, social ranks, or any other such divisions. We are to replace all that with new “clothing” that is the opposite of the old. And this new clothing can be summed up as Love. If we have that, the rest will follow. Everything must be done with the goal of glorifying God.

### **3:18–4:1 Treating each other properly**

Now Paul focuses on interrelationships among believers. He begins with the principle of mutual submission, mutual teaching, mutual concern. We are all equals and must treat each other as such, in gratitude to God and in the Name of Jesus. There is no favoritism here, no superiority, no bossing or ruling.

Keeping that in mind and considering the context, we see some specific areas in which people might question how this mutual submission works out in practice. Wives support husbands because we all are connected to the Master. Husbands love wives for the very same reason, and remember that “love does no harm to its neighbor” (Rom. 13:10). Children obey parents and parents don’t aggravate children. Slaves obey masters sincerely, and masters treat slaves fairly and kindly, as they are treated by their Master.

What this section does not say is anything about domination. Support and identification cannot be twisted into a

domination/submission relationship. Women of the time were presumed to be inferior and expected to obey their husbands, so what would be the point of telling them to obey? Instead, Paul recognizes society as it is but gently institutes a revolutionary change: the equality of all believers. We all serve the Master; nobody is closer to him than anyone else.

## **4:2–18    General instructions    and    final greetings**

Now Paul gives instructions about praying and acting wisely. We need to keep our eyes open for opportunities to spread the gospel, and to be careful how we act in front of the world. He tells of people he will send to the Colossians, along with greetings from those staying with him in prison. He also gives personal recommendations for them.

A woman named Nympha is mentioned as one who has a Congregation of believers meeting in her house. We must not assume she is merely being hospitable, just because she's a woman. Had this been a man, nobody would think twice about his being a leader or being worthy of respect. That the believers meet in her house is an indication of her leadership and respectability.

Lastly, Paul instructs the Colossians to read this letter also to the believers at Laodicea, who in turn were to give their letter from Paul to the Colossians. The letter to the Laodiceans was not preserved for us, but God certainly had his reasons. Paul makes sure this letter is known to be authentic by adding a greeting in his own handwriting, possibly due to the problem of forgeries referenced in 2 Thes. 2:2.



# 1 Thessalonians

## Background

The first letter to the Thessalonians was written by Paul, Sylvanus, and Timothy about 50 a.d., soon after Paul arrived in Corinth. The primary motivation seems to have been Paul's need to defend himself against slander. He touches briefly on the matter of prophecy as well, which he will focus on more in his second letter.

## Outline

1. **1:1–5** Greetings and praise
2. **1:6–2:1** Imitating Paul
3. **2:2–13** Paul appeals to their knowledge of him
4. **2:14–16** Imitating many believers
5. **2:17–3:13** Longing to see them again
6. **4:1–12** A charge to continue in holiness
7. **4:13–5:3** Concerning death, resurrection, and the Lord's return
8. **5:4–11** Proper response to the Lord's return
9. **5:12–22** General instructions
10. **5:23–28** Final blessing and greetings

## 1:1–5 Greetings and praise

The people are commended for their faithful work and enduring hope. Their salvation was evident by the power of the Holy Spirit among them after they heard the Word. Paul reminds them that he too displayed this same power when he was among them.

## **1:6–2:1 Imitating Paul**

They began to imitate Paul and the others and welcomed their teaching, even in the face of persecution. They have become renown for their faith and their having turned completely from idols to God, and they eagerly wait for Jesus' return for them. All of this is proof of the power in which Paul had come to them.

## **2:2–13 Paul appeals to their knowledge of him**

The gospel had been brought to these people after Paul and the others had experienced insulting treatment at Philippi, yet they were bold anyway. They came not with deception and cunning but the truth of the gospel, not being concerned with popularity but with pleasing God. They used no flattery and were not greedy, did not seek praise and did not “throw their weight around” over the people. Instead, Paul and the others were like parents tenderly soothing their children. They were kind and gentle and encouraging through it all.

## **2:14–16 Imitating many believers**

As a result, the people received the gospel gladly. But like the Jewish believers who were being persecuted by their own people, these believers too were being persecuted by theirs. Paul relates how his own people keep trying to forbid the Gentiles from hearing the gospel.

## **2:17–3:13 Longing to see them again**

Paul expresses his desire to visit them again in person, in spite of the obstacles Satan has been throwing in front of him. He had decided to stay in Athens and send his co-worker Timothy to strengthen and encourage them. Paul had told them before about the persecution that is promised to believers, which he and others had experienced. It was persecution that was keeping him from visiting them, so he sent Timothy to check up on them and put his mind at ease. But Timothy had returned and the news was good. This gave Paul great encouragement in his trials. He praises God for them and is all the more eager to see them again, wishing them continued growth and strength.

## **4:1–12 A charge to continue in holiness**

Paul reminds them of instructions he gave earlier about proper Christian behavior, and to continue in them and strive for maturity. This extends to how they do business in the world, not just among themselves. Many in the churches throughout history have ignored this teaching, treating “church” as a box to keep their religion in, while being just like the heathen out in the world. But at least the believers here were treating each other with love, something that isn’t always the case in many churches.

## **4:13–5:3 Concerning death, resurrection, and the Lord’s return**

Now the focus turns to questions the people had about what happens when believers die. Instead of being exceedingly sad like the lost, they were to be comforted by the fact that we will see departed believers again in heaven. After all, if we believe that Jesus rose from the dead, there is no reason to doubt that his followers will rise too. Here we have a firm picture of not only our hope for resurrection, but an event commonly referred to as the Rapture. The

Greek word means to snatch away or plunder, which was translated into Latin and then anglicized into *rapture*. Even in its modern sense, to be enraptured is to be caught up with our emotions. But context determines what is being caught up and why.

This particular context is about the righteous dead and the hope we have. Paul just told them that he is giving them a reason to hope, to not mourn like the heathen. We who are alive at the Coming of the Lord (not the Day of the Lord) will be snatched away immediately after the righteous dead. This is when the Lord Himself comes down from heaven with a shout from the ruling Messenger and the trumpet of God. But the Lord doesn't come down to the earth, only in the clouds, to which we all are raised. So it really is a meeting in the clouds; first the dead and then we who are still living.

This, again, is all given to us as a reason to hope, something to encourage us. Many in the churches today mock this hope, saying that the Rapture is only escapism for people who are afraid of suffering or think themselves "holier than thou", but those are false charges. People are to find great comfort and hope and encouragement in knowing it and in continuing to watch and wait for the Lord's return.

There is also a parallel with Jewish wedding customs, one found frequently throughout the New Testament. The groom-to-be would prepare a room in his father's house, then come at an unpredictable time for his bride, with his friends shouting and blowing trumpets. He would take her to his father's house for a feast, which would last seven days, and then they would begin their life together. In the same way, Jesus said that in his Father's house were many rooms and that he was going there to prepare a place for us, his Bride. At the right time, unannounced and unknown to the Bride, he will return for us and take us to heaven to the wedding banquet. There will be seven years of celebration there, while the earth experiences seven years of God's wrath against all who refused his invitation and despised his Son, the Groom.

Paul also addresses the timing of the end. He had already told them about this, but briefly summarizes. “The Day of the Lord” will come suddenly and unexpectedly, like a thief during the night. People will be caught off-guard, thinking they have finally achieved peace and security, but doom and destruction rain down upon them instead. It is likened to when a pregnant woman’s time comes to give birth; we never know when the hour will come, but when it does, there is no doubt, and no stopping it.

## **5:4–11 Proper response to the Lord’s return**

In contrast, believers are not to be taken by surprise. We are “in the light” and people of the day, and have no excuse for falling asleep. In fact, we are to remain dressed for battle. Paul uses some of the same symbolism here as he did in writing to the Ephesians about “the whole armor of God”. We are to keep watch and be alert. We are mocked today for watching, for pointing out the lateness of the hour, for looking for clues about the nearness of the Lord’s return. But faithful soldiers and brides remain true to the end.

Notice the words Paul uses: they will be taken by surprise, but you will not. There is a clear difference between how Paul refers to the Lord’s coming for believers, and how he refers to the Day of the Lord for unbelievers. Two different events for two different groups. And we are told that the coming precedes the day.

We are not destined to suffer this impending wrath of God, but instead are to be taken out ahead of it by Jesus. Some would brush this off as the general hope of salvation, but look at the context. It’s all about our hope in a specific coming, in which we will be snatched away to heaven while still alive. It is something Paul uses to encourage the people who have been wondering about “times and seasons”. People don’t ask about those things in regards to general salvation.

## **5:12–22 General instructions**

The focus turns again, this time to watching their own Congregation for faithful workers and for guardians. These serve by warning others of spiritual danger. Yet in a world filled with heresy and falsehood, guardians have a lot of negative things to warn about, and we would naturally expect this to intensify as we near the end. This we observe, yet most guardians are shouted down and told to be silent.

Paul instructs them not to scorn prophecies, and he says this right after telling them not to squelch the Spirit. Prophecy is from God and we dare not ignore it. Yet this must be balanced with discernment; we are to test everything. We are to sift through it and keep what is good and from God, while discarding all that is not.

## **5:23–28 Final blessing and greetings**

Paul now gives his customary farewell, with blessings and challenges.

# 2 Thessalonians

## Background

The second letter to the Thessalonians was written shortly after the first. Its main focus is prophecy, specifically in response to a forgery (2:1–5). Paul is correcting misunderstandings and undoing the damage caused by the fake letters.

## Outline

1. **1:1–7** Greetings and praise
2. **1:8–12** God's revenge
3. **2:1–12** Correcting misunderstandings about prophecy
4. **2:13–15** Standing firm in the truth
5. **2:16–3:5** Prayer and praise
6. **3:6–12** Warnings and examples
7. **3:13–15** Perseverance
8. **3:16–18** Final blessing and greetings

## 1:1–7 Greetings and praise

As with the first letter, this one begins with encouragement in the midst of hardship. Persecution continues, presumably from their own people around them as before. But relief will come one way or another, in this life or the next.

## 1:8–12 God's revenge

God will eventually inflict vengeance upon those who deserve it. Some argue that a loving God would never do such a thing, and they oppose all who speak of judgment. But scripture clearly equates judgment with justice, with revenge, and with retribution for sin. This is to God's honor due to his being holy. Holiness is frequently ignored in favor of love, but both are true of God.

So Paul implores the believers to keep on in the faith and keep pursuing maturity. God will bring us safely to our inheritance, but we have deeds to do in the meantime that will earn eternal rewards.

## **2:1–12 Correcting misunderstandings about prophecy**

As with the first letter, this one also addresses questions the people had about the Coming of the Lord. Some people had brought false reports or prophecies or letters allegedly from Paul, claiming that the Day of the Lord had already happened or was imminent. This would mean, considering the content of the first letter, that the Coming must therefore have happened already, and they had missed it somehow and were now in the Day. While we aren't told precisely, it would appear that the Coming and the Day are not the same event. First, Jesus will come for us and meet us in the sky to take us to heaven, and then the seven-year Day of the Lord arrives and ends with Jesus coming down to the earth with all of us behind him.

But Paul assures them that no such thing has happened, and that no such messages had come from him. He also explains how they can be sure it hasn't happened, in a passage that gives us more detail about the sequence of these events.

First in line will be The Departure. Almost all translations and commentators transliterate the phrase The Apostasy instead of actually translating it. The Greek word for departure does not specify what is being departed from, so context must be checked to find out



what that is. And the context here is all about the last days but nothing about false teachings. All English Bibles rendered it as departure until the KJV: Wycliffe (1384), Tyndale (1526), Coverdale (1535), Cranmer (1539), Breeches (1576), Beza (1583), and Geneva (1608).

Recalling the first letter, this Departure can be nothing else but what we call The Rapture, the snatching away of the righteous dead and living which happens before the Day of the Lord. The people were being told that they had missed this great hope that Paul had told them about in the first letter. This continues today, with many claiming that we are already in the Tribulation, or that we will certainly go through it. Such people are described by Paul as deceivers, those who try to throw believers into despair and confusion.

The second event is the appearance of the Lawless One. This person will exalt himself as above all so-called gods and will even seat himself in the temple of God, claiming to be God. Of course, there must be a temple for this to happen. People mock this idea as well, claiming all references to another temple must certainly be allegorical, a popular *escape* clause in itself (*pun intended*). But Paul is not giving any vision or parable here. He is speaking plainly to dispel a rumor, and laying out concrete events the people could look for. Nothing like this happened when the temple was destroyed by Titus in 70 a.d.

Another factor is introduced here: the restraining force that holds back the Lawless One. First Paul points out that the evil associated with the Lawless One is already at work but is currently restrained. Many try to say that since there is evil in the world then the Bible doesn't say there will be a certain evil person but only a general evil characteristic of the age. Yet Paul mentions both here, the Lawless One and the general evil of the world, so they cannot be the same. This is yet another attempt to brush aside Bible prophecy as being not literal or future.

So who or what is this Restrainer? There are two ways to approach this. One way is to base our interpretation on the grammatical gender of the nouns and pronouns. The Spirit takes the neuter pronoun (it), as also does the Restrainer in verse 6, but the Restrainer takes the masculine pronoun (he) in verse 7. If the church were in view then the feminine pronoun would be used. The only entity in that context taking the masculine would be the Lord, so we can deduce that “what is restraining” (verse 6) might be the Spirit, but the coming of the Lord Jesus for us is what allows the Lawless One to be revealed.

However, grammatical gender is not a decisive factor beyond matching words together in a sentence. For example, the Holy Spirit takes the neuter grammatical gender (it) in all cases, yet when described as the Comforter in John 14:17, the masculine grammatical gender (he) is used. So the pronouns depend not on some intrinsic quality of the Holy Spirit, but strictly on the arbitrary (non-biological) gender of the nouns used to refer to the Spirit. Likewise, though the church is portrayed in scripture as feminine (a bride), that same Greek word is also used to describe an angry mob in Acts 19:32. So we can see that the grammatical gender of a word has nothing to do with the literal or figurative gender of a person or group.

If grammatical gender does not help identify the Restrainer, then it could be just about anyone or anything. However, it must be an entity that has been restraining the Lawless One, so it would not be either an evil or merely human entity. Thus we can narrow the possibilities to a supernatural benevolent entity. And since we have scriptural descriptions of angels of God being apparently equal in strength to those of Satan (e.g. Dan. 10:13), this narrows the possibilities further to being God or the only other entity filled with the Holy Spirit: the church. Certainly the Holy Spirit will be active after the Lawless One is revealed, since many come to faith and are martyred for it. But the church has been a restraining force in the

world throughout its existence, albeit not as powerfully as it was meant to be.

This Lawless One's appearing will come with Satanic power: miracles, deceptive wonders, and great deceit. Those who have loved darkness will be completely fooled. And because they loved darkness and deception, God will "give them over" (see Romans) to the extreme and make them go in "the wrong direction". Like The Departure, this is a deliberate, divinely-given misdirection (not "strong delusion"), not a general condition of the time. People speculate on what this could be, but context hints that it has to do with the Lawless One pretending to be God. It could also refer to a fake alien invasion to cover the mass disappearance of Christians.

## **2:13–15 Standing firm in the truth**

Turning back to the people at present, Paul praises God for "choosing them from the beginning". Choosing them how, and for what? To be saved by means of the Gospel through the work of the Spirit. God chose the work of the Spirit to be the means by which people are regenerated upon hearing and accepting the Gospel. As commented elsewhere, there is no choosing of people for either heaven or hell by some alleged eternal decree of God that ignores human free will. But there is God's choosing the method by which we become saved. Paul expressly states that this is all by means of the Gospel. As with the account in Acts 11:18, God has chosen not only Jews but also Gentiles for this salvation.

From another angle: If it is said that God chooses these people at Thessalonica, does it imply he has chosen no other? Not at all; that's poor logic. Of course God chose the Thessalonians— since they came to him in faith. There would be no point in praising the people for their spiritual growth or encouraging them to strive for more, unless these things were matters of free will.

## **2:16–3:5 Prayer and praise**

Paul asks for continued prayer and assures the people that the Lord will strengthen and guard them from the evil one. Along with that, they are to watch out for any believer who gets out of line. They should instead follow Paul's example in integrity that he showed among them.

## **3:6–12 Warnings and examples**

Specifically, Paul commanded that if anyone won't work, they should not eat. Today things are complicated by government handouts, but this does not absolve the churches of holding to Paul's command. If anyone is a believer and is truly in need, the church should be taking care of them. Had the churches consistently practiced this, no believer would ever have to go on government welfare. Instead, many today believe that government handouts to those unwilling to work is an act of love.

## **3:13–15 Perseverance**

Finally, Paul tells them not to lose heart. Even the simplest encouragement can lift a person up, so we would do well to keep an eye out for the discouraged and help them. But for those who refuse to listen to sound instruction, Paul commands us not to associate with them. We cannot look the other way and pretend all is well; we must face problems and deal with them.

## **3:16–18 Final blessing and greetings**

Paul signs off with his own handwriting, as a stamp of authenticity. This was especially important in this case, seeing that the whole

purpose of the letter was to prove that it came from him.

# 1 Timothy

## Background

The first letter from Paul to Timothy was written somewhere between 61 and 64 a.d. Timothy's mother was a Jew who became a Christian, and his father was a Greek. Paul had left Timothy to look after the community of believers in Ephesus, but while this letter has traditionally been referred to as a pastoral epistle, it should be noted that Timothy is never addressed with any title or is said to have that particular gift. He had traveled extensively with Paul (see references in Acts and Paul's letters) and is mentioned in Heb. 13:23, likely after Paul's death.

The cultural backdrop of this letter is well-established and must be considered in order to accurately interpret Paul's teachings (see [Against Ancient Heresies](#)). Timothy was in Ephesus, a large and prosperous city (one of the ancient wonders of the world) dedicated to the fertility goddess Artemis (Greek; the Roman name was Diana). Women were especially drawn to this goddess because she was believed to protect them through childbirth, which carried a high mortality rate for mothers of the time. They also taught that woman was superior to man and possessed secret knowledge. And since the worship rituals involved sex for the purpose of imparting this knowledge to men, naturally the men approved as well. It was also believed that the priestesses were the descendants of the Amazons, who enslaved men to build the city for them. This is why they kept genealogies to prove their ancestry. And as Christianity spread there some mixing of teachings arose. One such teaching was that Eve, the superior, must have preceded Adam, to whom she imparted wisdom and made fully human, thus being his 'savior'.

It should be noted that the letter to the congregation in Thyatira (Rev. 2:20) rebukes a woman referred to as Jezebel for what appears to be the same kind of practice as that of a priestess of Artemis. The city was known for its trade guilds and worship of Apollo, and the fellowship meals of these guilds included offering food to idols followed by orgies. Apollo was the twin of Artemis, and his earthly oracle was to be a maiden (later, a woman over 50) called the Pythia (python); see also Acts 16:16 where the slave girl is called a *puthona* in the Greek text.

We also need to be aware of two rare words that Paul uses in 1 Tim. 2:12-15. The first is *authentein*. It is used in a context of murder or other forms of violence, and the early 'church father' Chrysostom (who was active in the destruction of places of heathen worship such as the temple of Artemis) used it in the context of sexual license. It was never used to mean legitimate authority; in fact, it had no good connotations at all, and it appears only here in the entire New Testament. The second is *teknogonias* which literally means childbirth, in reference to both the act of birth and the raising of the child; see the verb form in 1 Tim. 5:14.

## Outline

1. **1:1–2** Greetings and praise
2. **1:3–11** Timothy is to stop false teachers
3. **1:12–17** Paul as a true teacher
4. **1:18–20** How Timothy is to stop false teachers
5. **2:1–7** Praying to keep government from meddling with the community of believers
6. **2:8–10** General criticisms
7. **2:11–3:1** Specific criticisms
8. **3:1–7** How to select guardians
9. **3:8–13** How to select attendants
10. **3:14–15** Timothy's own behavior
11. **3:16–4:5** Warnings about the future

12. **4:6–16** Timothy as a role model
13. **5:1–16** General instructions
14. **5:17–18** Qualifications for appointed elders
15. **5:19–22** Disciplining wayward elders
16. **5:23–25** Personal medical advice
17. **6:1–2** Masters and slaves
18. **6:2–5** More about false teachers
19. **6:6–10** Selling the Gospel for profit
20. **6:11–16** Running from temptation
21. **6:17–21** Final blessings and warnings

## **1:1–2 Greetings and Praise**

Paul opens the letter with the usual greetings, identifying himself as an Ambassador sent directly by Jesus.

## **1:3–11 Timothy is to stop false teachers**

Timothy is to tell people to stop teaching falsehood. They are obsessed with myths and genealogies which distract them from the work of God, the purpose of which is to change the heart and produce a faith that is not obsessed with these other things. Some have deviated from this and are passing themselves off as teachers of the law, though they have no idea what they are talking about. And laws are not for the righteous anyway, but for the unrighteous:

- lawbreakers and rebels
- the irreverent and errant
- the profane and slanderous
- murderers, especially those that murder their own parents
- the promiscuous
- homosexuals— The Greek word *arsenokoitais* is one coined here by Paul but derived from Lev. 18:22–23 and 20:13 in the Greek Old Testament. The contexts in both references clearly



indicate the sin of a man “sharing the bed” with another man; see also Rom. 1:24–27, 13:13, and Heb. 13:4. Though Paul doesn’t mention women here, he did so in Rom. 1:24–27, and the wording there leaves no room for claiming that the “unnatural” behavior involved anything but humans. That is, Paul is clearly talking about humans doing unnatural things with humans, not humans with fallen angels or animals. Of course those things are condemned as well, but the point here is that we cannot exempt homosexuality or define the Greek word as not including perversion between humans. And note that this item is only one in a list that would condemn many others as well, along with the fact that these are all what we consider ‘big’ sins that hurt others as well as defy God.

- kidnappers, liars, perjurers, etc.

## **1:12–17 Paul as a true teacher**

Paul is a qualified teacher, chosen by God, in spite of what he once was. He had been the best of the Pharisees (Phil. 3:4–6), yet in God’s eyes he had been vile and sinful. Consider these two important points as well: Not only did he have to give up his former ways when he was saved, but he also had to give up his former status as a teacher until he had been properly informed, as he states clearly in Gal. 1:12–13. His example is a prototype of many who would come to faith after him, such that we should never say someone is too bad to be saved.

## **1:18–20 How Timothy is to stop false teachers**

Paul is delegating this teaching charge to Timothy for the Ephesian believers. But Timothy must be careful to be unbiased in the discharge of this duty; none are exempt from the discipline that is

needed. Paul holds up two men as examples of some who have “shoved off” and “shipwrecked” concerning the faith. The Greek reads “concerning the faith”, not that these two have ruined the faith of others; that is, it’s the faith not their faith. They have turned away knowingly, given that “they shipwrecked” is in the active voice and “shoved off” is in the middle (they did it to themselves). Above all, they were a bad influence and thus had to be removed from the fellowship.

Notice also that these two are handed over to Satan to be taught a lesson. This would not be done at all to unbelievers (see 1 Cor. 5:12–13), who would simply be thrown out as fakes. The fact that Paul adds the purpose is what makes the difference. We should note that Paul named these false teachers, while another he will mention later is not named. The reason for the difference is not stated by Paul, but if someone is expelled from fellowship for the danger they posed to the faith, it would be reasonable to presume that they should be named so that other congregations could identify them and refuse them fellowship.

## **2:1–7 Praying to keep government from meddling with the community of believers**

Timothy is to tell them to pray for a peaceful life by praying for others, but especially for the secular leaders so that they would not harass the believers. This is especially important given the preceding discussion, which Paul cites as the reason (“therefor”). It is inaccurate to take this to mean we should pray for anything and everything a government might do. Then they must demonstrate the Christian life in every way as a witness to society, because God wants everyone to be saved; Jesus died for all, not just some. And if anyone knows the truth it is Paul, who was sent to the non-Jews.

## **2:8–10 General criticisms**

Timothy is to tell them to be sensible and self-controlled. The men need to calm down and live clean lives, and the women need to stop flaunting wealth and start acting with dignity like that of Judaism professors. The Greek words are now known to refer to women in Judaism who were paid teachers (professors) of Jewish converts, not simply “women who profess to worship God”; see [Jews and Godfearers at Aphrodisias](#). So the female teachers must not copy the demeanor of priestesses of Artemis who would flaunt their status. Paul is addressing the particular problems there in Ephesus, not establishing some timeless principle that all men are unruly and all women flaunt wealth and engage in fertility rites. This is about sensible and godly decorum in contrast to the surrounding culture.

We will pause here to point out an important logical principle: A command for some people to stop doing something is not also the granting of permission for other people to start. For example, suppose children are playing in a playground, supervised by teachers. They are free to play as they choose but within guidelines, such as no hitting or shoving, no cutting in line, etc. Then suppose one child hits another and is given a reprimand. Does this mean the other children are now permitted to hit? Of course not. So when Paul tells a group of people to stop teaching falsehood, he is not at the same time giving permission to teach it to those not in the reprimanded group. Likewise, men are not allowed to flaunt wealth, and women are not allowed to pray with “unclean hands”. This principle may seem obvious here, but it will come up again in more controversial passages, such as when he talks about husbands and wives.

## **2:11–3:1a Specific criticisms**

One of those women needs to go back to square one and be a humble student first; she cannot keep the status and practices of a priestess of Artemis but must learn before she can teach again. This parallels Paul's earlier experience as noted in 1:12–17. And the grammar (present active indicative) does not allow the interpretation of a timeless command for all women, but one that is limited to the present time for a woman. In addition, not only has Paul switched abruptly from plural to singular ("women must... I am not allowing a woman"), he has also gone from instructions for women who are already teaching to a woman who must stop for a time. We must also remember that Paul is addressing believers; instructions and commands to unbelievers would be nonsensical. This will prove critical in the last verse of the passage.

Some argue that the phrase "I am not allowing a woman to teach" means teaching that she is the originator of the man, per the Gnostic creation order. But the grammar does not allow it since *authenthein* is not a noun but a verb. That is, it is not "she is the *authenthein*" but "she must not *authenthein*". If the former were true, we would also expect the wording to be along the lines of "I do not permit her to teach that a woman was the source of a man..." Referencing the principle established in the discussion on 2:8–10, Paul is not saying that men can *authenthein* anyone either, or that men can teach falsehood.

The purpose of Paul's reference to creation order is of course very much debated, but at the very least this is an obvious rebuttal to Gnostic teachings. Paul has not discussed hierarchy here and it is not even implied in Genesis; to say otherwise is to beg the question. The topic throughout has been false teaching, and Paul ties the matter of a deceived woman (Eve) to a woman who is presently in a state of deception, as the grammar indicates. It denotes the continuing results of a past event, and it is singular. This means it cannot be interpreted as Eve's past sin having results on all subsequent women, which would require a word that is both singular and plural (she sinned but they are still in it), an impossibility. Such

an interpretation would also amount to arguing that while Adam's sin affected both males and females, Eve's somehow only affected females. Notice also that while Paul names Adam and Eve, he abruptly switches to the generic: Adam made first, then Eve, Adam not deceived, yet the woman. As we will also see with verse 15, Paul has "switched horses in midstream" for some reason, a reason we cannot lightly dismiss.

Verse 15 reads "But she will be saved... if they continue in faithfulness...". We must not gloss over these pronouns. People might say "If any man steals, he will go to jail" and we understand that this applies to all men (and, logically, to all women as well, in spite of the masculine terminology). Or people might say "If men steal, they will go to jail." But what nobody says is "If a man steals they will go to jail" (unless we impose the much later English generic singular, which those who vehemently oppose such usage cannot allow for this one case, just to make sense of the passage). But Paul says "she will... if they", and we have no choice but to take it as it is without accusing Paul of the poorest grammar, and only at this spot in all of his writings. Both this and the unique use of the generic singular would be special pleading.

Who is "she"? It cannot be Eve or all women because this is singular and she is still in sin. So since the only woman being referenced here is the one teaching error, it must be that woman. But who are they? We look for an antecedent (the earlier noun it could refer to) but find nothing obvious. What we do know is that they are not new believers, since they are to continue in faith, not enter into it for the first time. And they cannot be Adam and Eve, or all Christian women, because this woman's being saved is conditioned upon what they do. We could speculate that they are the woman and the man, or maybe the women who are teaching accurately and faithfully, but that's as far as the passage will take us. In any case, whether she will be saved depends upon what they do.

As for the word *saved*, its semantic range includes not only salvation in the eternal sense but also restoration. To argue that Paul always means the former begs the question; we can only know the range of meanings if we can clearly define it from every context. But in this case the context does not indicate the former, since it refers to what others continue to do. But if we insist that it is within the bounds of *saved* to mean that she will be saved by the continued faithful witness of others, then even more difficulty is introduced into the passage.

Why would Paul refer to eternal salvation as “the childbirth” only here? No other passage in the New Testament ever points to Jesus’ birth as what saves, but always to his death and resurrection, and the emphasis here is not on the product of that birth but the process. And why point it out only for this woman (or all women)? Women are saved the same way as men, so Paul’s unusual and roundabout expression here would make no sense. It also cannot refer to ‘role playing’ whereby a woman is shown to be saved by her behavior since, again, men would be required to play their roles too, and salvation is only by faith. And how would Paul know that she will be saved by their example? And then what will we do when Paul tells Timothy that he can save both himself and those who hear him? In contrast, the meaning restored or preserved fits easily and simply in the context of this Christian woman sitting down to learn so she can be turned from her deception and restored to her teaching ministry.

So why did Paul use this expression? He seems to be engaging in one of his many plays on words to talk about restoration while demeaning Artemis. This woman has to be humbled from teacher to student, and the purpose is to remove the false teachings. This is, in a spiritual sense, much like child-rearing. If we say she was not yet saved then we must wonder why the congregation would ever have let her teach in the first place, and why she is allowed (really, commanded) to learn (grow) if she had not yet been spiritually reborn. In other words, Paul’s attention to this issue makes no sense

at all if the woman in question isn't even a believer. So this "childbirth" is the mentoring that mature believers will provide.

Above all, what we cannot do with this passage is elevate only one interpretation as "what God plainly says". There is nothing plain or simple about it, long held to be one of the most challenging in the New Testament. Scholars differ widely on practically every part of it, and charges of agendas or bias can be thrown in all directions. It is wise to always interpret the disputable by that which is not; the overarching principles of our faith take precedence. Whatever interpretation one chooses, it must conform to what Jesus taught and demonstrated, and to the apostles' teachings for all believers.

### **3:1b–3:7 How to select guardians**

Timothy is to select guardians based upon their already having achieved spiritual maturity and demonstrated the ideal Christian life. The guardian is not an authority, just as guards on the city walls were not the rulers of the city. Rather, this is one who protects the perimeter, who warns of danger and is prepared to fend it off if it comes near. The clear emphasis is on character and practical criteria by which to judge anyone (the Greek is not gender-specific) who aspires to this service. Undue emphasis has been placed upon "husband of one wife" and not nearly enough on the other qualities. Given that the culture expected men to have many courtesans, and that women were not afforded the same privilege, there is no reason for Paul to admonish women to only have one man. This quality of marital faithfulness is then followed by calmness and self-control, as well as responsibility and reliability. This does not describe the worldly alpha male but the good shepherd. Neither is this on-the-job training but the recognition of a life already dedicated to God.

Recalling the logical principle mentioned earlier, another instance is illustrated here. If "husband of one wife" means the guardian must be male, then it also means much more: He must be married, he

must have children, and those children must be well-behaved. It is fallacious to pick only one item from the list as binding while making the others optional, since all are said in the same sentence and given the same weight. Also, one might remember the discussion of “a woman” and presume Paul is once again referring to an individual, but there is a key difference: It says “anyone” instead of “a man” or “a woman”. And we see no mismatch such as he/they.

### **3:8–3:13 How to select attendants**

Timothy is to select attendants based upon the same criteria as that for guardians. While scripture never gives details about the function or responsibilities of these attendants, we notice that Paul directs that they not be “profiteers”. This may be a clue that these were people who raised donations for the believers in need, but we can only speculate. Notice that Paul does not (nor does anyone else) connect these attendants to the seven chosen in Acts 6:1–7. And the logical principle for guardians applies here as well: If attendants must be male, then there must always be seven of them and they must care for Greek widows. The “high rank” mentioned here is not earthly authority but spiritual reward, the crown of every believer living to please and serve God.

### **3:14–3:15 Timothy’s own behavior**

Paul pauses here to finish up the instructions, almost as if he had originally planned to end the letter at this point. But even in this we need to correct a misunderstanding. He is not giving instructions on how worshipers are to behave in a church building or sanctuary, but how Timothy (or possibly anyone) should conduct himself in the carrying out of these directives. The church is not a building made of brick and stone, but of the people, those whose very bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19).



## **3:16–4:5 Warnings about the future**

Verse 16 seems a bit out of place, but only until we see that verse 17 is the contrast to it. First Paul recites what sounds like a common Christian saying about the essentials of the faith, but note the reference to a “secret”. This is not a “mystery” that has to be figured out, but something that had been hidden and was now being made plain. The Spirit was then “openly” proclaiming that in the course of time many professing believers would wander off to follow the teachings of demons, and these teachings would be notable for their excessive micromanagement, of which Paul gives two examples: forbidding marriage and eating certain foods. We could add many more from our own experiences in the institutional church: rest on Sunday, no meat on Friday, no dancing or drinking, fashion rules, chains of command, attend ‘church’ on Sunday and holidays, etc. This has been the norm for most of the Christian era and is only getting worse, adding such things as forbidding to speak ‘negatively’ or to criticize pastors.

## **4:6–4:16 Timothy as a role model**

Paul has been telling Timothy what to teach others, but now his attention turns to Timothy himself, reminding him that he serves Jesus and not just the people. Again he alludes to the myths of Gnosticism in verse 7, referring to them as silly old fables, and urges Timothy to approach his duties as an athlete in training for a contest. But what does Paul mean by “the savior of all people, especially the faithful” (verse 10)? We can deduce from all the other writings of Paul that only those who accept God’s offer of reconciliation through Jesus are saved, so this statement is just another way to say the same thing. There are no other references that would permit the understanding that some people are more saved than others.

Timothy is to be a role model, in spite of his youthfulness. He was evidently given a gift through prophecies made when he was dedicated for his service, and such a thing is not to be taken lightly. But what does Paul mean by use of the word “preserve” in verse 16, typically translated “saved”? It should be obvious that since Timothy was among those who would be “saved” by his own teachings, it cannot mean salvation from eternal wrath, but preservation from the falsehoods Paul has been writing about all this time.

## **5:1–5:16 General instructions**

Having established the importance of Timothy’s own character and example, Paul now turns to more personal directions for various groups of people in the congregation: older men, younger men, older women, younger women, and widows. There was no need to address widowers since they could support themselves, while widows were at the mercy of relatives or charity. The principle Paul is establishing is first of all that families take care of their own, so that the congregation is not burdened and can better serve those who have no one. But even the truly needy were not to be supported by the congregation if they were of low character or young enough to remarry (and there is no reason to think Paul’s specification that she be at least 60 applies in all cultures and times). Paul gives the reason for such rules: to protect the reputation of the faith.

Paul adds that anyone who fails to care for their own family is worse than an unbeliever. This is certainly not limited to men, given Paul’s specific rules for women with widowed relatives. Now does “worse than an unbeliever” mean those who fail to provide for their families lose their salvation? No, because it would be nonsensical to say that an unbeliever is worse than an unbeliever. What the context seems to indicate is that they are *behaving* worse than unbelievers, living according to a lower standard, and must be reprimanded. As with the situation Paul mentioned in 1 Cor. 5, a believer (and with the church’s approval!) can sink very low and still be restored when they

repent, and one does not receive discipline if one is not a child of the family (Heb. 12:6–8).

Another faith question is raised in the statement about young widows who “have broken the pledge” (lit. “left the first faith”). Yet if it referred to salvation, it would not be designated as first, and we would be adding significant meaning to the text to say it means the faith they had at first. The phrase as a whole seems to refer to a possible pledge to remain single. Yet it is followed by mention of some who have turned back to Satan, but look at the statement just before it about not giving critics a foothold. These critics (lit. “those opposing”) are not identified as Satan and could be anyone; the same goes also for “some”. So it would appear that Paul is once again warning against giving such a bad witness that observers turn away from the faith as a result; that is, the “some” does not point to these women but to outsiders. It would also be quite inconsistent for Paul to make failure to remarry a salvation issue (ref. 1 Cor. 7, especially verse 9). And remember that we are still in this letter concerning false teachings and women in a culture of Artemis worship.

The gentleness of the Christian is to be the norm, especially when dealing with fellow believers, and even more so if they are in need of help. Paul showed through his treatment of the woman teaching falsehood, that though she was in error she was to be kindly but firmly corrected. Yet when we encounter hostile unbelievers, such gentleness can, and often does, lead to compromise and failure to clearly speak the truth. This is not to say we mock and revile the lost, especially if they’re not hostile, but on the other hand we must not fail to stand firm for the truth, even if we’re labeled as hateful or narrow. But keep in mind that one person’s definition of ‘nice’ is not necessarily another’s, and neither are on a par with God’s. Look in the Gospels and the Letters, and see what Jesus and the apostles did— both gentle and harsh— and when they did which.

In verse 14 we see the Greek word for *childbearing* or *childrearing*, and it's in a list of common activities for women of that time and culture. But Paul gives the reason for this, and it's not to codify the limits of a woman's permissions but to once again guard the reputation of the faith. Further, note the wording Paul uses to describe her status in the home: She is the "house despot" (Greek). If anyone is designated by Paul as the 'head of the house', it's the woman; it could not be stated any more plainly than it is here.

## **5:17–5:18 Qualifications for appointed elders**

Now Paul turns his attention to elders who "stand before", as opposed to simply the older men and women mentioned earlier. This "stand before", (Greek *proistemi*), is the same word Paul used in Rom. 12:8 as one of the spiritual gifts, and it refers to one who is a leader, patron, supervisor, or director. He also used it in 1 Tim. 3:4 regarding the qualifications for guardians. One might see a contradiction between what Paul just said about a woman being the "house despot" and what he said about the others, but that would only be the case if the guardian and 'standing elder' are seen as rulers. So since Paul would not contradict himself, we must conclude that guardians and 'standing elders' are not ruling authorities.

## **5:19–22 Disciplining wayward elders**

Paul specifies "double honor" for these elders, especially for the ones who teach scripture, and cites a principle from the old Law as the rationale. But while most interpret this as a figurative appeal for a literal paid position, the context here suggests that Paul is only drawing an analogy. One indication is the complete absence of any specific monetary value, which seems a glaring omission when we remember his specification for the age of an eligible widow. Another is the complete absence of any mention of salary for other alleged positions; that is, who is to be paid "single honor", and how much is

that? And of course Paul only uses the word “wages” for the Old Testament reference, but “honor” for this one. Can we dismiss the literal meaning so easily? In other words, had Paul wanted to talk about honor, could he have said it differently or more clearly?

The primary point of this “double honor” is revealed in verse 19 and is the counter-balance to it: “double shame”. While it would take more than a casual accusation against such an elder for it to even be considered, the elder who is found guilty of wrongdoing is to be rebuked publicly as an example and warning to the other elders. This is a serious matter that Paul emphasizes by charging Timothy to carry it out without bias or favoritism. Additional weight is given to this matter when Paul warns Timothy not to designate anyone an elder too quickly, or he (Timothy) would share in whatever error they commit. The modern habit of putting pastors above scrutiny or criticism stands in stark contrast to, and obvious violation of, this directive; much favoritism is shown to the entitled, and their sins are covered over with excuses no one else can use. All of Paul’s teachings concerning leaders put them on a higher standard of morality, not a lower one. And the churches have long ignored the warning against the hasty appointment of elders.

## **5:23–25 Personal medical advice**

Paul pauses here before moving on to the next topic. He tells Timothy to drink some wine for his ailment, which we know was not stomach problems but frequent urination, due to the unhealthy water there in Ephesus. (The Greek word for “stomach” is not *stomakhon* as in this passage, but *gaster*.) Wine would not only cut down on water consumption but also supply some medicinal value, since it’s known to be healthy in small amounts. Then Paul informs Timothy about both hidden sins and hidden good deeds. We can only speculate as to why he interjected these things at this point, but it is likely that Paul did not write the whole letter in one sitting, and he has already said that he intended to see Timothy soon anyway.

## **6:1–2a Masters and slaves**

Now the topic is masters and slaves, and once again the emphasis is on protecting the reputation of the faith, not dictating a list of duties or condoning the institution of slavery. It was a fact of life and the believers needed to know how to behave under it. Paul was not so much interested in correcting society's ills as he was in correcting the believing community, which in turn would transform society. He cautions slaves to treat believing owners with respect as their spiritual equals.

## **6:2b–5 More about false teachers**

Paul contrasts the teaching he has been giving to Timothy with that of those he calls conceited and ignorant, and he describes them with similar terminology to that of the false teachers he mentioned in chapter one. Note that Paul does not hold back from derogatory terms for such teachers, a habit that would surely earn him a strong rebuke from those who wish to impose their own definition of niceness on everyone.

## **6:6–10 Selling the Gospel for profit**

Paul expounds on the last characteristic of these people when it comes to the love of money, since they thought the faith was just another way to make it; they were selling the gospel for profit. But it's no different today, as anyone can see not only by watching TV but also by observing the typical church organization. While the majority of preachers may be sincere and godly, even they use the terminology of employment and career when speaking of their activities concerning the faith. They submit applications to churches as anyone would apply for a job, they're given a compensation package and staff, they have an office and supplies, they preside at

business meetings, and they usually get a pension as well. Is this not the meaning of “they have received their reward”, as Jesus said in Mt. 6?

And who can deny that when one receives a salary, one is tempted to compromise on matters of the faith? If nothing else, “children supporting their parents” (2 Cor. 12:14) obligates the ‘parents’ to please them. Or in the other extreme, some shepherds demand that the sheep care for them and obey them without question, berating them for not continually increasing their financial support. Clearly, even if a pastor may not consciously love money, the system’s very design gives Satan a foothold, and the demands of the ‘position’ tend to crowd out time spent only on spiritual matters. We would do well to heed the advice of Peter and “not neglect the Word of God in order to wait tables” (Acts 6:2).

So Paul’s warning to the rich in verse 9 is not just a general one but applies to teachers as well. As it says in Prov. 13:8, the poor hear no threats; they’re not the targets of thieves or swindlers or political enemies. This is not to say that wealth itself is evil, but only that it poses a great danger. Those who have it need to keep a close eye on its effect on them.

In verse 10 yet another faith question is raised, and again we must ask who “they” are. Paul has been discussing people who sell the gospel for a profit, and the description doesn’t sound as though these are believers. They have been lured away in the same manner as the seeds being choked by weeds in Jesus’ parable of the sower (Mt. 13:22), and there is disagreement over whether the seeds being choked or scorched by the sun refers to believers. Another factor in the parable is that Jesus was still speaking before the Holy Spirit had come.

## **6:11–16 Running from temptation**

At this point we are hardly surprised to see Paul tell Timothy to run away from such temptations. Some may think it spiritual or a test of faith to play with fire, but the fire of temptation is deadly and powerful, and we dare not think ourselves impervious to its attacks. Evil is something to be resisted, not challenged (James 4:7). This is a spiritual war, one that requires “contention”, and Paul solemnly charges Timothy with a mandate to keep these instructions to the very best of his ability.

## **6:17–21 Final blessings and warnings**

After ending the previous section with praise to God, Paul gives additional warnings to the rich. Then he turns back to Timothy, once again urging his faithfulness to this assignment, and once again emphasizing the need to keep away from the distractions of the ignorant teachers. The reference to “what is falsely called knowledge” is a clear and direct jab at Gnosticism, the over-arching theme of the letter.



# 2 Timothy

## Background

The second letter from Paul to Timothy was written around 64 AD, which is partly determined from the content, where Paul speaks of finishing his race and being poured out like an offering. Thus the overall tone of the letter is a last-minute pep talk, an encouragement and final charge for Timothy to do his duty and carry on the work.

## Outline

1. **1:1–7** Greetings and praise
2. **1:7–12** A warning against fear and inaction
3. **1:13–18** Encouragement to stay the course
4. **2:1–13** Teaching others to teach
5. **2:14–19** Focusing on what matters
6. **2:20–26** Choosing to be useful
7. **3:1–13** What signs mark the end of the age
8. **3:14–17** Sifting true from false
9. **4:1–8** Staying at one's post until the very end
10. **4:9–22** Final blessings and hope

## 1:1–7a Greetings and praise

As usual, Paul identifies himself as an apostle of Jesus, and he speaks of Timothy as a dear child. He remembers him often, especially his “non-pedantic” faith. The Greek word refers to micromanagement, to an obsession with details and control. That kind of faith is harmful and counterproductive, while Timothy’s is genuine. This pure faith has been passed to Timothy like a family

heirloom on his mother's side. It should be noted that since his father was Greek, the responsibility for keeping faith was clearly on his mother and grandmother, whose qualifications for the job were proved in Timothy. It is this heritage which he is to fan into flame, empowered by the spiritual gift he received from Paul's dedication of him.

This teaching by the women in Timothy's family makes an important point: that women are qualified teachers. It stretches credulity to think that such women lose this wisdom and ability if a male student is beyond a certain age, such that she who was once wise and instructive is now to be considered deceiving and seducing. Even if this were true, it makes no sense whatsoever to have the deceivable teach the vulnerable. To think that such women could raise a Timothy only until he reached a certain (and arbitrary) biological age, at which point they were to keep silence, is to abandon all logic and sense.

## **1:7b–12 A warning against fear and inaction**

Paul's warning against cowardice may indicate that Timothy was hesitant to take on his responsibilities, possibly because of his youth, but also undoubtedly because it would involve suffering. To shrink back would mean to be ashamed of Jesus. But Paul's loyalty and fearlessness were rooted in knowing his Savior and trusting him to guard his reward till the day Jesus returns for us.

## **1:13–18 Encouragement to stay the course**

Paul continues to remind Timothy of all he has learned from him, whether by word or deed. He seems to hold up some bad examples as further motivation for Timothy to keep to the course, followed by some good examples to keep him motivated.

## **2:1–13 Teaching others to teach**

Once again Timothy is charged with passing the teachings on, but not to just anyone; they have to be trustworthy and qualified people. Character is always the focus in any such admonitions of Paul. These people would also have to be willing to endure hardship, just as Timothy would. The rewards come to those who earn them, which is only one of many instances in the New Testament that put responsibility on us for using the power God makes available to us. God will not cause spiritual growth without our cooperation, or there'd be no need for any of these warnings and encouragements. And of course the ultimate example is Jesus, whose endurance of suffering is our model. But even if we falter, he will never disown us, a promise we need to remember when we doubt our own faith.

## **2:14–19 Focusing on what matters**

Paul's warnings against needless squabbling echo those of the first letter. Timothy must discipline himself to focus on the only words that matter, and to recognize the great responsibility of understanding and teaching them properly. As before, Paul names dangerous teachers so others can take warning. But note the nature of the false teaching here: that the Resurrection had already happened. It should be obvious that this does not refer to Jesus' resurrection, since that fact is what every saved person believes. Instead it must refer to another resurrection, one that all his followers will experience.

So the question is whether this Resurrection refers only to the final one of all human history, or to the one known as the Rapture. We are given a clue in the fact that these two false teachers were frightening people by telling them this event had already happened and they had missed it. Who would believe they had missed the apocalyptic end of human history? Or even the Great Tribulation?

Only the Rapture would explain how people could be fooled into thinking they missed the Resurrection. And Paul reinforces the impossibility of something like that happening without our knowledge by reminding Timothy that Jesus knows who are his, and he will not forget them or abandon them.

## **2:20–26 Choosing to be useful**

Now Paul uses the illustration of common household containers to teach Timothy that our usefulness to God depends upon our attitude. If we purge ourselves from the unsavory aspects of life and fill ourselves with good qualities, we will do great things for God. Once again this is our responsibility; God does not determine which kind of container we are, but uses us according to what we make available to him. It's our choice but his power. We are to discipline ourselves like soldiers or athletes who are dedicated to their causes. At the same time, Timothy must remember that this is not something he can dictate to people; like Paul, he must lead by example.

## **3:1–13 Signs marking the end of the age**

This familiar description of conditions in the last days has often been cited as applicable to our time. No one would dispute the fact that life in the time of Paul was hardly a bed of roses, especially after all he had said about his sufferings. So for him to put the last days in a class of their own is a clear indication that the intensity and pervasiveness of these evils would be much worse. Paul gave these things as a sign for us, and we need to pay attention.

Of particular importance is his statement about fake believers. We tend to forget that evil does not knock on the front door and hold up an ID card for us; it pretends to be one of us. It slowly introduces teachings that on the surface appear to be harmless or even

beneficial. But one step leads to another, and one by one the false teachings replace true ones. Those without discernment will follow such teachers without question, and they accuse anyone criticizing the false teachers of being hateful and negative, or even thwarting the work of God. But the goal they and their teachers pursue will never be reached, and their faith will be ruined. We need to take Paul's warnings seriously, and all the more as the end approaches.

### **3:14–17 Sifting true from false**

Shifting back to Timothy again, Paul urges him to keep a tight grip on that which has been a part of his life from earliest childhood. The sacred writings are not dead letters or fables, but the living, breathing Word of God. They are meant to be used for our spiritual growth, whether by encouraging the good or discouraging the bad. It's our spiritual Owner's Manual.

### **4:1–8 Staying at one's post until the very end**

As if all of this hasn't been enough, now Paul challenges Timothy with a solemn charge before God to stay at his post. This isn't optional or secondary; this is what the Christian leader is called to. Timothy is not to be a 'weekend warrior' but to see this as a continual and lifetime commitment. This charge is for every Christian leader, because as Paul warned, a time would come when there would be no tolerance for such teachings— a time that many would agree we have now reached. Keep in mind that these people who won't listen to the truth are found within the community of believers; these instructions have all been about how Timothy is to instruct the Congregation.

### **4:9–22 Final blessings and hope**

Paul goes back to the example of his own life to motivate Timothy to stay the course. Again he mentions the last days with reference to Jesus' sudden appearance, which the faithful will live in great hope of seeing. This is described as a hope that will earn a reward, one that Paul himself expected to receive. How many believers today live in the daily hope of Jesus' sudden return? Sadly, there are many who not only have lost this hope but who are hostile to those who still have it. Yet if Paul believed Jesus could return in his lifetime, it must be an event without prior notice, like a thief in the night.

Now Paul nears the end of the letter with typical personal business and the joy of knowing that his sufferings have not been in vain. But notice his attitude toward someone who opposed his message and did him much harm: He is confident that the Lord will give the man what he deserves. Yet today, any believer who voices any such 'negativity' is called hateful and un-Christlike. Clearly there is a place for righteous indignation and wishing for the enemies of the Gospel to get what's coming to them. Can we accuse Paul of contradicting his earlier injunctions for Timothy to be gentle? Instead, we must conclude that gentleness is for those who simply disagree on disputable matters, while harshness is in order for those who oppose the gospel itself and do harm to the faith.

# Titus

## Background

The letter from Paul to Titus was written around 63 a.d. before Paul's final imprisonment. These are specific instructions on how Titus should set up the community of believers on the island of Crete, the converts Paul had made earlier.

## Outline

1. **1:1–5** Greetings and purpose
2. **1:6–9** Qualifications for Elders
3. **1:10–16** Identifying false Elders
4. **2:1–8** Male and female Elders
5. **2:9–14** Slaves
6. **2:15–3:8a** General instructions and God's compassion
7. **3:8b–11** Reminders for Titus
8. **3:12–14** Personal business
9. **3:15** Final greetings

## 1:1–5 Greetings

Paul begins with a reference to himself as a lowly slave of God, whose job is to be an apostle. In spite of his credentials and honored commission, he is not boastful or high-minded. Our hope is in eternal life through Jesus, who in his mercy chose Paul as one through whom this Gospel would be spread. Like Timothy, Titus is also called a "child" by Paul.

## 1:6–9 Qualifications for Elders

He had left Titus in Crete to “appoint Elders in every city”. Notice that there was to be more than one Elder (spiritually mature, tested and found faithful and qualified) per city. Some people might claim that each of those Elders ran an individual congregation, but the context doesn’t give us that. In the first century there was only one congregation per town, though they met in various homes. It’s probable that each small group had an Elder, but it’s also just as likely that there was more than one per group. At any rate, there is no firm backing for the traditional concept of the ‘head Pastor’ as a kind of CEO or president.

Paul gives a brief list of qualifications for Elders. Again, as explained in the commentary on 1 Tim. 3:1b–7, these lists do not specify that only males can be Elders, or that they must be married and have children. The point is that they are upstanding members of society and the community of believers. Notice that they were to be gentle and encouraging to some, while also being able to refute any who contradict sound instruction. This is a principle Paul has discussed in other letters, that of being a good shepherd. The good shepherd is gentle to the sheep but harsh to the wolves.

Note that Paul equates the Guardian (Greek *episkopon*) with the Elder (Greek *presbuteros*); he makes no distinction between them. Elder thus refers to the quality of the person but Guardian refers also to the person’s duties, and for that Paul uses a term that essentially means a manager or steward for God. Just as he has stipulated the spiritual qualifications of these people, he now adds a description of their responsibilities: to know the true teachings in order to expose the false. So these people had to not only be of the highest quality in how they lived, but also be so well-versed in the truth that they could be trusted to confront and expose falsehood. Of course, this means the person must be able and willing to confront others.



Another important thing to note is that these are appointments. Age is not something that anyone can be appointed to. So here we have a clear precedent for two possible meanings of *presbuterous*, the other being a simple reference to the aged. But the context of this whole short letter is that of appointment, and thus not about the elderly.

Servants (*diakonos*) are not mentioned in this letter at all. One would expect to see them mentioned here if Paul is laying down the framework of an organization, with Guardians or Elders on top and Deacons below them, and the common people on the bottom. What the people of Crete needed was not an institution but protection and nurturing while they were immature and in training.

## **1:10–16 Identifying false Elders**

After berating the Cretans, Paul turns to the example Titus must give to them. He is pointedly charged not only with setting an example of holiness in a debauched society, but also with teaching the believers the basics of the faith and making sure they learn the lesson well. He is told to contain and oppose any who dispute the truths of the faith, especially the Jews who were pushing circumcision for the sake of profit. Paul even quotes a local proverb about how bad the Cretans' reputation was, as being an incentive for Titus to expose them decisively. This is a common theme in Paul's letters, to stand and oppose falsehood, not to sweep it under the rug as is practiced today. As a popular saying goes, "Actions speak louder than words." All the 'God talk' in the world cannot cover up a life of sin forever.

## **2:1–8 Male and female Elders**

Paul repeats the qualifications for Elders, both male and female. The Greek word here is the very same root word as in chapter one:

“Presbyters” were to be appointed in every town. So when many translations use “older men” and “older women” here, they are ignoring the overall context. These are the appointees of chapter one, not all elderly people. Similarly, the Greek word typically rendered “young” is one from which we get the prefix *neo-* meaning *new*, not necessarily *young*. So Paul is saying that male and female Elders are to train new believers in appropriate doctrine and behavior.

This section is written in the familiar chiasmic rhetorical form as follows:

1. A 2:1 Be the example
2. – B 2:2 Male Elders
3. — X 2:3–5 Female Elders
4. – B’ 2:6 Male Elders
5. A’ 2:7–8 Be the example

Titus, like all appointed Elders, is to live out these instructions, to be an example and not just a teacher in word alone. He is to live up to the highest standard so that critics (in this case it seems to be a particular individual) will be exposed as false accusers. This is the wrapper in which the instructions he is to give to others is contained.

Male Elders are to aspire to Titus’ example in every way, with an emphasis on wisdom. But the most detail is given to female Elders. In addition to the qualities they must share with the males (“the same goes for” or “likewise”), these women had the added task of raising the social behavioral bar for the women of Crete, who were not used to such things in their society. The women needed extra training in wisdom, in raising children, in mastering their homes, and in being supportive of their husbands. As discussed in detail in the commentary under 1 Tim. 2:1–10 (General instructions about prayer), this is being said about the women of Crete because they were lacking in this area, not because men are not to be taught to support their wives.

Women in Crete were being irresponsible, neglecting their homes, husbands, and children. Paul will tolerate none of that in the community of believers. Titus is to see to it that the female Elders train the female new believers in what it means to be a Christian woman. Their standards are not to be lowered, either because of their being women or simply being Cretans. The stakes are high because there must be a sharp distinction between the hedonistic culture and the ways of God. Note Paul's play on words between "old" and "new" here; the women who are the opposite of Elders must be novices. Elders were charged with training the new believers, and such training for the women of Crete needed to include the social skills taken for granted by polite society in other places, since they had no proper role models otherwise.

When Paul addresses his instructions to female Elders, he even specifies that they are to act in accordance with the dignity of this appointment. The Greek word here shares the same root as in chapter 1 where Paul commands Titus to "appoint Elders"; the only difference is that the earlier reference is a verb (command) while this one is a noun. So the female Elders must, like Titus, be examples to the women they train.

## **2:9–14 Slaves**

Paul now adds instructions similar to those he's given elsewhere concerning slaves and masters. Of course all believers are to turn their backs on evil and live holy lives, as well as to wait for the expected, glorious, sudden return of Jesus. But there is certainly good reason to emphasize to slaves that they too must live up to the same standards and not give the faith a bad name.

## **2:15–3:8a General instructions and God's compassion**

Titus is to teach all this with confidence and strength, not being intimidated or failing to confront false teachers. He is to remind the people of their duty to be good citizens, to keep away from slander, and to be as peaceful as possible. Though we may have been the opposite of all that while unbelievers, we have received God's kindness and mercy through his "bathing us in the rebirth and renewal of the Holy Spirit". Our good deeds had nothing to do with our cleansing, but only faith resulting in receiving the Spirit.

### **3:8b–11 Reminders for Titus**

Believers should be living examples of all good behavior. We must not indulge in endless unresolvable debates or legalism. Anyone who does so is to be warned twice, and then expelled from the group if they still won't listen.

### **3:12–14 Personal business**

Paul will send replacements to relieve Titus soon, and then Titus is to come back to visit Paul if possible. He is to send out two men with provisions, as one of the examples he is to set for the people. Those who give up everything to spread the Gospel must not be sent out empty-handed.

### **3:15 Final greetings**

Paul does not name individuals here, but only gives a general farewell.

# Philemon

## Background

The letter from Paul to Philemon was written around 59–61 a.d. while Paul was a prisoner in Rome. Philemon was the master of the slave Onesimus. Paul met Onesimus after he had run away from his master, and Onesimus had subsequently become a Christian. Now he is willing to return to his master, and Paul very tactfully asks Philemon to receive him as a brother. By Roman law he could have had the runaway slave put to death.

## Outline

1. **1:1–7** Greetings
2. **1:8–16** Explaining the situation
3. **1:17–22** An appeal for mercy
4. **1:23–25** Greetings

## 1:1–7 Greetings

Paul, writing from prison, identifies himself as being the prisoner of the Anointed. He includes Timothy as co-author, and writes not only to Philemon but also to a woman named Apphia, to another co-worker named Archippus, and to all the believers. Though the content of the letter is primarily to and about Philemon, the others are to read it and learn from it.

## 1:8–16 Explaining the situation

Onesimus was one of Paul's converts to Christianity. Paul could have pulled rank on Philemon but instead appeals to him out of love, to accept the former escaped slave back as a brother. Notice that Paul also uses a little leverage by mentioning his being old, as if to say, "Do this favor for an old man, will you?"

The name Onesimus means "useful", and Paul uses a play on words in saying that although he was formerly useless, he was now living up to his name. Paul wanted to return him to his owner instead of just keeping him as a helper without first having Philemon's consent.

## **1:17–22 An appeal for mercy**

Paul offers, in strict legal terms, to reimburse Philemon for any hardship he may have suffered due to the temporary loss of Onesimus' services. But he adds yet more leverage: Philemon owed him his life! Paul is cashing in on any favor he could in order to motivate Philemon to do the honorable thing as a Christian. On top of that he informs Philemon to prepare a room for his impending visit, so he can be there in person to see what Philemon chooses to do. This is some serious arm-twisting.

## **1:23–25 Greetings**

Paul gives the usual greetings, from himself and others with him.

# Hebrews

## Background

The letter to the Hebrews (a presumptive title based on the content, but never explicitly stated) was written between 49–70 a.d., and probably toward the end of that range. Since the Levitical system was still in place, being referred to in the present tense throughout the letter, it must have been completed before the destruction of the Temple in 70 a.d.

It is the only Letter that mentions Timothy in prison (13:23), which could weigh toward its having been written after the death of Paul. But there is at least one other reason to reject Pauline authorship: Heb. 2:3 states that the author(s) (5:11, 6:9, 8:1 etc. use the pronoun “we”, yet 11:32 uses “I”) had not heard Jesus personally. In addition, Paul always signed his letters, at least partially to guard against forgeries. He had no reason to hide his identity, and it would have been very much out of character for him to do so.

Though it has the most sophisticated Greek of all the Letters, its author remains a mystery. In fact, there seems to have been a deliberate hiding of the author(s)’ identity. Luther suggested Apollos, but later research has suggested Apollos’ teacher, Priscilla (a.k.a. Priska) or possibly her along with her husband Aquilla. Priscilla had been mentioned by Paul as a co-worker as well. Female authorship would explain the omission of the author’s name, as it would not only have gone against social norms of the time, but also could result in the woman’s torture and death at the hands of the Roman government.

There is only one spot in the entire letter that is cited as proof that the author must have been a male. In 11:32 the pronoun “me” goes

with the verb “to relate”, and that verb is in the grammatical masculine. Yet not only is this a great stretch upon which to base male authorship of the whole letter, it ignores the use of what is called the *authorial masculine*, and that this is the only occurrence of this form in the entire New Testament (Strong’s Concordance no. 1334). The references to all forms of the base verb are Acts 8:33, 9:27, 12:16; Mark 5:16, 9:9; Luke 8:39, 9:10; Heb. 11:32), and none of them have grammatical gender associated with them.

There is little doubt that if this occurrence of the word had the feminine grammatical gender, no scholar would cite it by itself as proof of a female author. And lest anyone make the accusation that this is all some modern feminist invention, note that the first scholarly argument for Priscilla’s possible authorship was done by the German scholar Adolf von Harnack in 1900 (see [this discussion](#)). Another candidate is Barnabas, who was a Levite (Acts 4:36, and the content of Hebrews is of course heavily Levitical), yet like Paul, there would have been no reason to hide his identity. Other names offered include Clement of Rome and Luke.

The letter’s theme is the absolute supremacy and uniqueness of Jesus. Much time is spent on explaining the purpose and symbolism of the Levitical system and its fulfillment and annulment in Jesus. It is loaded with theological meat, making it an excellent one-stop resource for defending the faith against all sorts of false teachings.

## Outline

1. **1:1–3:6** Jesus, the Focal Point of History
  1. **1:1–4** Introducing Jesus
  2. **1:5–2:18** The superiority of Jesus above angels
    1. **1:5–2:4** By virtue of his divinity
    2. **2:5–18** By virtue of his humanity
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## **1:1–3:6 Jesus, the Focal Point of History**

### **1:1–4 Introducing Jesus**

This letter begins, not with a greeting or other pleasantries, but with a simple statement of fact. But it says two important things about how God speaks to us that many ignore: little by little, and in many ways. God has not chosen to dump everything out at once, but to gradually tell us more and more, in order to bring us to Jesus at just the right time in history. And he does not always speak in the same way, but he does always speak through approved prophets, attested by their perfect accuracy (see Deut. 18:22). In light of that, we must

not make the mistake of uncritically applying principles or rules for one era onto another. God's character never changes, but his dealings with us certainly do.

There is a tone of finality when it says, "but in these last days he has spoken". Jesus was the culmination of history, the point to which all the "little by little" was aimed. Since God "has spoken" we can deduce that he speaks no more through the prophets to reveal things we need to know. He has given us all we need. This is not to say anything about the spiritual gifts, but simply to close the canon of scripture. Yes, the Letters were written afterwards, but they all point to Jesus and record for later generations what would surely have been lost to them. They were the eyewitnesses of the risen Jesus, commissioned by him to speak on his behalf.

Jesus is said to have "made the ages". Other translations put it as something like his having made the universe. Certainly that's true (Col. 1:15-20), but the context here is about God's having revealed his will gradually through the ages. The Greek word is where we get our word *eon*; if the universe were the intended meaning here, the Greek word would have been *cosmos*. So Jesus is the One who made the gradually unfolding revelations which were designed to present him to us at just the right time in history.

Jesus is further described as the radiance of God's majesty and the exact likeness of his essence. That being the case, how can anyone argue that Jesus is eternally subordinated to the Father, as claimed by many? They look only at the following statement about his having sat down at the right side of the Majesty. But even there, we see that Jesus is both separate from and equal with the Father. Notice also that Jesus is the radiance of God, not only of the Father; those are two different words in the Greek. We must not mentally substitute the meaning Father when we read the word God. And technically, both the Father and the Spirit "fathered" the humanity of Jesus, per Luke 1:35. Adding the statement about Jesus "holding everything up", we understand him to be the agent of creation.

Of course, this all has its ultimate purpose in Jesus' sacrifice for sins. But having accomplished that, he rose again and was returned (not taken for the first time) to his former glory as God (see also Phil. 2:5–11). Since his incarnation, Jesus has had both his eternal divine nature and his human nature, the so-called *hypostatic union*. This causes us confusion because we don't always see which aspects of his relationship to the Father and Spirit are representative of his divinity, and which are of his humanity. There is no hierarchy within the divine Trinity, but there is regarding Jesus' humanity. We simply cannot grasp how the two are joined. But it's this joining that makes it possible for us to be adopted as children of God. That's why Jesus is the only Way to the Father (John 14:6), such that only if we are united with Jesus can we be considered righteous in God's eyes.

## **1:5–2:18 The superiority of Jesus above angels**

When we read that Jesus became above the angels, we must remember that this only applies to his humanity, not his divinity.

### **1:5–2:4 By virtue of his divinity**

Now the writer goes into the many ways in which Jesus is not, and never was, a mere angel. And how much more clearly can his eternal divinity be stated than this? “God, your throne is eternal, and the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your Kingdom... for that reason your God annointed you...” Jesus was always God but also became human at a point in time. And again, Jesus is said to be the one that “laid down the foundations of the earth in the beginning.” In contrast, angels are described as servants that minister to believers. And someday we will be their judges (1 Cor. 6:3).

Although angels are our servants, we must remember that we are presently not as powerful as they. The writer warns that to disobey what God delivered through an angel was severely punished. Yet the

point here is mainly that since such punishment was associated with angels, then how much greater punishment will be associated with rejecting the good message brought by and through Jesus, who is so much greater than they?

## **2:5–18 By virtue of his humanity**

Continuing the theme of contrasting angels with God or humans, it is pointed out that humans, not angels, were the very reason God created everything. And here again, Jesus is shown to have only temporarily been made lower than the angels, then exalted back to glory.

The reason Jesus was made lower was to share in our humanity and to experience physical death on behalf of everyone. This opened the door for everyone who accepted him to be saved. As a result, all of us who have believed in him are one family, to the point where we are exalted above the angels, being children instead of servants. Jesus shared in our humanity, which is not true of angels.

Now we see in verse 16 that he did all this for “the descendants of Abraham”. Calvinism claims this as proof of Limited Atonement, or the theory that Jesus only died for ‘the elect’ and not the whole world, but that takes it out of context. The contrast here is primarily between people and angels, within the larger context of the Hebrews. And we cannot simply discard all the other scriptures that clearly show Jesus having died for the whole world. Logically, to say Jesus did this for a particular group is not to say he did so for only that group. Yes, it was for Abraham’s descendants— and everyone else as well.

## **3:1–6 The superiority of Jesus as Ruling Priest above Moses**

Since Jesus is greater than any angels, it follows also that he is greater than Moses. Moses was a favored servant, but Jesus became God's Son; therefore all who trust in Jesus, not Moses, are members of God's household. So the Holy Spirit pleads with all people to not follow the example of rebellious Israel, but to hear God's voice.

### **3:7–11 Warnings from history**

A warning is given here to do more than listen to true teachings, but also to put them into practice. The nation of Israel is held up as an example of people who had known the ways of God but turned against him. They had seen his great miracles and enjoyed his deliverance, yet they threw it all away and were then considered unworthy of their inheritance, in much the same way that Esau sold his birthright (Gen. 25:34, Heb. 12:16).

Notice the phrase “do not harden your hearts.” It is people who choose to harden their own hearts, not God who imposes it upon them to keep them from being saved. The people of Israel had done it themselves, or else the writer of Hebrews would not be warning their readers against doing the same thing. The implications of “today” and “enter my rest” will be discussed under *Entering God's rest*.

### **3:12–15 Encouraging each other while there is time**

It's all well and good to heed a warning, but it helps a lot to have people reminding each other about it. We believers need to be in the continual habit of encouraging each other so that we do not “harden our hearts” as Israel did. Note the primary cause of their punishment: unbelief. It was not Jewish ancestry that would save the

readers of this letter who might still be in unbelief, but only faith in God.

## **3:16–4:11 Entering God’s “rest”**

Not all of the Israelites rebelled, but God punished those who did. It was the unfaithful, the rebellious, who would be kept out of God’s “rest”. God will not wait forever for people to change their minds, so it is imperative that we don’t put it off.

There are two erroneous teachings derived from this passage: (1) Since Today is still continuing then the days of creation week must have been long ages, and (2) Israel’s having escaped from Egypt yet later being denied entrance to God’s “rest” must indicate possible lost salvation (Conditional Security).

The first error claims that if the seventh day is the day God rested from creative work, and if God still speaks of people entering his rest, then this must still be the seventh day. But that would mean all people, not just the righteous, have entered God’s rest. And it’s clearly stated that a “Sabbath” still remains, meaning it hasn’t started yet. This passage is very clear that only the righteous can enter it, along with all other scriptures regarding salvation. So the rest spoken of in this context cannot be equated with that of the seventh day of creation. “Today” here is held in contrast to ancient Israel, not to creation week. Notice also that “God specified another day called Today.” Not all the “Todays” are the same.

Reference is made to creation week, and it specifically portrays the seventh day as symbolizing God’s rest. But note the direction of the symbolism: The literal seventh solar day is a symbol of God’s rest; God’s rest is not a symbol of the seventh day. And God’s rest will never end; the writer has repeatedly pointed out that the opportunity to enter God’s rest (Today) is temporary, but the rest itself is eternal.

The fact that Today is associated with God's "rest" and is entered into by faith means it cannot be related to legalistic performance; it is God's rest, not God's work. Ch. 4 begins with an explicit statement to that effect: To enter rest is to stop doing one's own work. To work for entrance into that rest (or to remain in it) is to lack faith.

The second error claims that since the history of Israel is to be an example and warning for us (see 1 Cor. 10), then the failure of many of them to enter the Promised Land must be teaching us that salvation can be lost. But one thing to remember is that the physical nation of Israel has always been a special class of people to God. They have enjoyed a relationship to him that no other ethnic group has had. Yes, they all "drank the same spiritual drink... and that Rock was Christ" (1 Cor. 10:4), but they did not have the Spirit indwelling them as believers do in this age, after Jesus came. Salvation was never guaranteed to anyone either before or after the current age, the so-called Church Age (generally held to have begun at Pentecost). They had to persist in obedience or they could be lost. Not so with us who have the Spirit as a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance (2 Cor. 1:22, 5:5, Eph. 1:14). So they had to keep "drinking", but we do not.

The writer is speaking to believers (3:12), but also to Jews. In that group there were likely some who were still really only trusting in their heritage, in Moses. That seems to be the point in spending so much time on ancient Israel. They are being asked to examine themselves, to be sure they had truly accepted the Gospel message, rather than relying on their being Jews to save them.

## **4:12–5:10 Jesus as Ruling Priest in a new Order**

There is an abrupt end to the subject of God's rest here, changing now to a discussion of the Word of God. This phrase or title "Word of God" has been taken to refer to the Bible, but it also clearly refers to Jesus personally (John 1:1, Heb. 1:2). So the phrase encompasses all that God has communicated to us, whether spoken by God's own voice, through the prophets, in and by Jesus, or through his recorded teachings. The important thing is not the medium but the message; it is all "of God." And because God has given us his Word, there are no more excuses, no more mysteries, no more hidden plans (1 Cor. 2). We must take a firm grasp of the Gospel, not keep it at a distance and only stay near it or take it lightly.

There is a controversy here over the statement that Jesus was tempted in every way just as we are. Could he have sinned? Some say no, it was impossible for Jesus to sin. But what it says here indicates otherwise. Jesus is being portrayed as one who is like us, who can sympathize with our struggles against sin. This would not be the case if Jesus had no capacity to sin. He is held up as the One who resisted it, which would be pointless if tempting him had been a waste of time. And because Jesus withstood temptation, we have absolute confidence in approaching God. This confidence is in him, not in us, and he will never fail. Our salvation is assured, because we have a perfect, sinless, and sympathetic Ruling Priest.

The theme of Jesus as our Ruling Priest is now introduced but will be developed more fully later. Notice first of all that a priest represents people to God, not God to people (that would be what prophets do). Jesus is thus shown to be our representative in his humanity. And in spite of being God, as a human he did not appoint himself priest, just as the Israeli priests could only be selected by God. But unlike a human priest, Jesus had none of his own sins to atone for. In addition, he was not a priest in the order of Aaron or Levi, but in a new order: Melchizedek.



## **5:11–6:19 Diversion to discuss maturity**

The writer now interrupts the issue of Jesus as priest to stop and address a problem with the people being written to, and it begins a passage of scripture that has been hotly debated for centuries.

The writer has a lot to tell them but is hampered by the people's lack of maturity. They should have reached the level of teachers by this time, but instead they were stuck in spiritual infancy. They were still going over and over the basics of salvation; they had made no effort to dig deeply into the words of God, preferring instead the easy "milk". Another factor was that Jews were under much pressure to stay in familiar territory (Egypt) instead of stepping out in faith (the Promised Land). The writer has spent a lot of effort up to this point, making illustrations from Israel's history that should spur the people on to confident trust in Jesus. But they are tiptoeing, crawling slowly, barely grasping what salvation means and possibly becoming homesick for the old familiar ways.

Now to the meat of the controversy. Much hinges on details of grammar that are often overlooked. But from a careful study of the grammar we know this is not a hypothetical scenario (if salvation could be lost it would be impossible to regain) since no word such as "if" is in the Greek text here. And we know it isn't about those who were never saved because it would be difficult to use language clearer than the four phrases to describe real believers. Further, we know it is about salvation and not only rewards, again because of those four phrases.

The Greek grammar for "re-crucifying" and "holding up to public mockery" is the present active participle, which indicates a presently-continuing action, not a past action. So the passage is saying that as long as people remain in rebellion against that which they once knew to be true, they are symbolically nullifying the sacrifice of Jesus. Conversely, if they discontinue this rebellion, they can change their minds again. This may seem illogical (they cannot change their

minds until they change their minds), but we see this same issue in 2 Cor. 3:16 (their minds are covered, but the cover is removed if they change their minds). See also Gal. 3:1-5 and 4:9.

In other words, it does not teach that if a person renounces a once-genuine faith then they can never repent. Instead, like the other passages cited, it means that as long as people practice legalism and salvation by good deeds, they're saying that Jesus' sacrifice meant nothing. But if such people repent, they can move on to deeper spiritual things.

This issue is very important regarding the popular practice of Christians turning to all things Hebraic. While there is value in understanding the practices and feasts in regards to how we understand the New Testament, we must be on our guard against considering these things mandatory or indicative of spiritual superiority. Things that give us feelings of spirituality, such as rites and feast days, can be very subtle traps since they substitute faith and knowledge with feelings and experiences.

After all this, the writer assures the people that they are not among those who re-crucify Christ and then turn back again to the importance of growing to maturity. Using the illustration of good soil that produces a crop, notice that what is burned here is not the ground itself, but the crop. Remember that in 1 Cor. 3 Paul speaks of our works being like a building that God will test by setting it on fire. We ourselves are saved but any works that were of poor quality will be burned up. So it is useless works that are cursed and burned, not people or souls.

But the writer is confident that such poor crops will not be produced if the people grow up. Already they have a few good deeds to their credit, and God will not overlook them. They long for them to produce a good crop in full measure, to receive their full inheritance. Once again, the inheritance itself is stated as being obtained by faith, not works (5:12). Works are the crop the soil produces; good

deeds and outward actions are what we expect to see from the saved. (This concept is developed in more detail in the commentary on the Letter of James.)

To show them that our salvation itself is not in danger of being lost, Abraham is held up as an example. God made unilateral promises to him— promises that depended completely upon God alone— that he would surely bless Abraham no matter what. Likewise, our inheritance is sure and guaranteed by the blood of Jesus who sealed the contract. It is this guarantee that is our hope, so any teaching that robs believers of this hope and chips away at their confidence in the promises and guarantees of God can only produce a life of fear and legalistic performance. (See the commentary on Romans for discussion on the “license to sin” accusation.)

## **6:20–10:36 Continuing on Jesus’ new priestly Order**

Now we begin a lengthy discussion of the new priestly order of Melchizedek.

### **6:20–7:10 The Order of Melchizedek**

The Old Testament account of Melchizedek is found in Genesis 14. Not much is said about him other than being a priest and king of Salem (an older name for Jerusalem). Although Genesis is filled with genealogical records, Melchizedek appears suddenly and then is never mentioned again in Genesis. Psalm 110, which Jesus applied to himself, is the only other Old Testament mention of him, and it only refers to the order of that priesthood. It’s possible that he was a pre-incarnation of Jesus, but we simply don’t know.

Many preachers make a big deal out of the fact that Abraham paid this priest one tenth (a “tithe”) of the spoils of a battle. But there is

no record of Abraham tithing on any other occasion, or that he had a regular practice of tithing to anyone else. And it was not based upon his regular income but on one war's captured goods. The whole reason the writer brings this up is to say that Levi, who only ever collected tithes from the Israelites, could be technically credited with paying a tithe to the superior priesthood of Melchizedek by virtue of being a descendent of Abraham.

But the words in Greek mean "so to speak" or "you could even say"; it's not a statement of a literal fact, that somehow Levi existed as a person at that time. A person does not exist until an egg is fertilized, or else we'd have to consider all the sperm and eggs throughout human history as separate people. (What happens when they join together?) And if it were true that Levi was not required to pay the tithe since he was literally in Abraham when he paid it, then none of the other descendants of Abraham would have to pay it either.

So beware of stretching this 'credit through genetics' analogy. If we are born sinners because we all descend from Adam and were "in him" at his creation, then we could also claim to be righteous since we all descend from Noah and his family, or even our own parents if they were saved. Yet this is obviously not the case as the scriptures clearly state, so neither can we be credited or blamed for sin just because we descend from Adam. (More detail about that is discussed in the commentary on Romans.)

## **7:11–17 A new priesthood**

"So then" or "Therefore" refers to the argument just completed about the Melchizedek priesthood being superior to the Levitical priesthood. If the Levitical one had been adequate to deal with sin, then there would have been no need for another priesthood.

But what is often overlooked is the fact that when the priesthood changes, so does the Law. They are inseparable; where one goes, so goes the other. Moses only gave access to the priesthood to the

tribe of Levi, not the tribe of Judah from which Jesus came. And unlike the Levitical priesthood, the Melchizedek one is permanent; Jesus holds the office of Ruling Priest forever. (Incidentally, this is an excellent rebuttal to Mormonism's dual priesthood of Aaron and Melchizedek. They cannot coexist, and no Mormon can claim to be of the tribe of either Levi or Judah.)

So since the priesthood we're under is that of Melchizedek and not Levi, we're not in any way obligated to observe any law associated with Levi. This has obvious implications for the matter of legalism for believers. Most believers think we must still obey the Ten Commandments, but they were only given to Israel under the priesthood of Aaron/Levi. And Gentiles should remember that they were never under the old Law at all.

### **7:18–28 A new law**

The old law could not save or perfect anyone; in fact it's been annulled (see ch. 9 for discussion on how Jesus' death accomplished this annulment of an "eternal" law). But God sealed this new priesthood with an oath: that Jesus would be a priest in the order of Melchizedek forever. There is no other priesthood to come, since this one alone can bring people to perfection. Unlike the old system where sacrifices had to be repeated, Jesus only needed one sacrifice of his own blood, once and for all. It is a great insult to God to claim Jesus didn't do enough.

### **8:1–13 A new offering**

Jesus, our Ruling Priest, serves in the heavenly sanctuary made by God. The earthly temple of Israel was a type or shadow of the real one in heaven, which is why it had to be made to such precise specifications. But it should be obvious that the heavenly temple, Ruling Priest, and sacrifice are infinitely superior to the earthly ones. And because of that, the New Testament (contract or covenant) is

greatly superior to the Old. And as the writer already pointed out, there would have been no need for a greater contract unless the old one was imperfect and defective.

And again we see that the old law is fading away. At the time of the writing the Jews were still in a contractual relationship with God, but he would soon disperse them for unbelief. So the law, though officially annulled, was still fading out and not completely gone. Technically though, the Israelites had broken it long ago and effectively annulled it then, but a contract is between two parties. So Jesus had to die to end God's obligation to it.

Many people think we should still be held to the Ten Commandments and cite Mt. 5:17-18 for support. But not only do they ignore the clear statement here, they miss the meaning of the passage in Matthew. Jesus was saying that he had come to fulfill every single prophecy, as well as to fulfill the law. Thus people are no longer able or obligated to fulfill either. Jesus did not come to perpetuate the Law which is tied to the old Levitical priesthood, but to replace it with a superior one. What he fulfilled was prophecy. Of course, to be the spotless sacrificial Lamb he had to perfectly obey the old Laws, which he did. But that means only those who are united with Jesus really keep it, not by their own efforts, but by virtue of Jesus having kept it. And just as re-sacrificing Jesus is a slap in His face, so also is trying to keep the Law that Jesus already kept.

## **9:1–11 A new temple**

Here we see details about the Temple, and the point of it all is to impress upon us the lengths to which God went to symbolize the superior one in heaven. The curtain symbolized that the Holiest Place was not to be seen until Jesus came with the sacrifice of his own blood. This gives added significance to the tearing of that curtain in the earthly Temple when Jesus died. It was the end of all sacrifice.

## **9:12–10:18 A new contract**

Given the fact that Jesus' blood was far superior to that of mere animals, we can rest assured that it cleansed us completely from sin. He is the one and only Mediator of this New Testament, one which is between God and all people, not just one nation. His death paid the ransom for all mankind and canceled the charges against us.

Now we're given a perspective on all this from ordinary civil law. A Will (or Testament) is not in effect until the one who made it dies. That's the reason for blood being required in the old sacrifices. Only death can put an end to sin; without this bloodshed there is no cleansing, no cancellation of the laws against us. (The Roman Catholic Church calls the Eucharist an "unbloody sacrifice", which this verse shows to be ineffective.)

But just as the earthly sanctuary had to be cleansed with blood, so also did the heavenly one. And no animal's blood could be good enough for that, but only the blood of God in the flesh, Jesus. Yet unlike the earthly sanctuary, the heavenly one only needed one cleansing. Just as people are only able to die once and then face judgment (a good thing to remember when dealing with the concept of karma or reincarnation), so too Jesus only needed to die once to take away all sin. He will appear again, but not for taking away sin. Instead it will be to bring us our promised deliverance (see the section By Faith for discussion of the number of times a person can die).

Again it is emphasized that the old Law was a shadow of better things to come, namely the new covenant sealed in Jesus' blood once for all. That old Law could never perfect anyone, as proven by the fact that the sacrifices had to be repeated. All the repeated sacrifices did was remind the people of their sins. But God was preparing them for the ultimate Sacrifice that would only be needed once. And again, we see that "he takes away the first in order to

establish the second.” This is also what Jesus referred to in his illustration of the wineskins (Mark 2, Luke 5); the old and the new cannot be mixed.

To further emphasize the fact that Jesus completed our redemption, we see that he sat down at God’s right hand and is waiting until all his enemies are humbled before him; he is not still sacrificing. And yet again we see this point which cannot be over-emphasized: “By one offering he has finally completed the holy ones.” It’s a finished work that cannot ever be undone by anyone.

### **10:19–36 A new relationship**

Here is another “therefore”, and it is the consequence of all the previous teachings: We’re free to boldly go into the Holiest Place, the inner sanctuary, to the very presence of God. This is now possible because of the blood of our new Ruling Priest, which was “sprinkled on our hearts” when we believed. We need not waver in our confidence in him since he is perfectly trustworthy.

Verses 24 and 25 are perhaps the most famous verses in Hebrews, with the possible exception of the so-called faith chapter to follow. Yet they are not without controversy, because many take it to sanction mandatory church attendance.

While it’s true that believers are always encouraged to work together as a body (see also 3:12–15), many in the churches use these two verses as a club to beat people over the head for not attending services regularly. But typically, such services are not real Biblical fellowship at all. People can attend for many years without even being saved, and the churches admit this. Many more only go to worship God, never really getting to know the people.

Showing up in appointed places at appointed times to perform appointed rituals is not what the writer is talking about here at all. Instead, it’s about not only staying close to sound teaching but also



interacting in the daily lives of other believers for the purpose of both serving and being served. The churches should first clean their own houses and check up on the regular attendees before hunting down the 'members' who are at least being honest. They need to ask themselves why people drift away in such large numbers.

What is stated here instead is that we are to motivate each other toward love and good deeds; that's the purpose of meeting together. Notice that worship of God is not even mentioned here, but only interactions between people, to encourage each other and to band together as we see the end times approaching. As we recall from the discussion on chapter six, we see in this passage the antidote for the temptation to return to the old law. By sticking together and remembering the impossibility of keeping the old and new contracts at the same time, these people can be assured of keeping the rewards they've earned.

After defining the new relationship believers have with God due to Jesus' sacrifice and our faith in him, verse 26 begins more discussion about the finality of all that. As before, the writer is not promoting the idea that the saved can be lost, but that those who hear the Gospel are not saved unless they accept it. To turn away from it and keep on sinning even after we've known the truth is to condemn ourselves. Notice the warning against failure to appreciate the blood of the new contract. We have already discussed the error of trying to make additional sacrifices, and that's what this refers to. God will surely take revenge against all who treat Jesus' sacrifice as inadequate.

After all that theology about the meaning and effectiveness of Jesus' sacrifice, the writer adds an appeal to the people's own experiences. When they were first saved they were persecuted but stood firm through it all. They must not throw all that away, but endure and receive their rewards.

## 10:37–11:40 By faith

We are not to be fearful and defeated, but to be faithful and overcome. It's plainly stated that "we have faith for the security of our souls." Security, not insecurity. Guarantees and security are neither guaranteed nor secure if they can be lost.

The famous 'faith chapter' (11) begins with a definition: Faith is a sure hope, a conviction about what is not seen. It is confident trust in the Person who will never fail us, even when we are overwhelmed with doubt or hardship or oppression. It's impossible to please God without trusting him, and to do that we must first of all believe that he exists. God makes himself known to all who seek him out in faith. This is no blind, baseless wish, but absolute assurance of something or someone due to that which we can examine. God made sure there were eyewitnesses to Jesus' birth, life, death, and resurrection. The Gospels were written for the precise purpose of giving testimony, and the evidence is appealed to repeatedly throughout the New Testament as the basis of our faith.

There is no need to repeat the details of the passage, but only to touch on a few highlights. One of them is the account of Cain and Abel. When people read the Genesis account they often wonder why Cain's sacrifice was unacceptable to God. Being a worker of the field and not raising animals as his brother did, we can speculate that he did not bring the required blood sacrifice. But here we see another factor: faith. Abel had a better sacrifice because he had faith.

Another very interesting point is the mention of Enoch, who did not die but was taken directly to heaven. The only other person ever to have this happen was the prophet Elijah. Why were these two taken without dying, while people like Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David were not? We can speculate that the others were just not pure enough, but God may have another purpose in future prophecy. It's possible that these will be the Two Witnesses of Revelation who will be murdered and then raised to life after three days.

However, there is nothing in scripture to require everyone to have died at least once. Heb. 9:27 simply states the norm, which is that people don't die or face judgment more than once. Also, the phrase in 9:27 is "for people to die once," not "once people die." Some try to change the meaning to support the teaching of reincarnation, but "one time" is a completely different meaning from "as soon as." Likewise, some who were raised from the dead before Jesus did also died again, since no one but Jesus has yet received an immortal body. In addition, some Christians who are alive when Jesus returns will never have died at all (John 11:26, 1 Thes. 4:15,17).

We also see a contrast in this chapter. Some of these giants of faith received some rewards in this life, and others did not. Some were honored, but others were hunted like animals and brutally murdered. Yet they did not rail against God and say "Why didn't he protect me?" as many do today. People seem to expect God to be like Santa Claus, who exists to only give them good things.

## **12:1–2 Our examples to follow**

Considering the caliber of people who went before us, we should therefore stand strong and stop being content with spiritual infancy or worrying about whether or not we'll get to heaven. And we do this not by focusing on self, as is popular in the churches today, but on Jesus. It is he who will bring us to completion, not us. He gave up the comforts and respect of his heavenly throne for people who were still against him. He, above all the others listed in the previous chapter, is our greatest inspiration and example.

Notice that it's not our faith of which Jesus is the Originator and Completer, but the faith. He does not have to create faith in us as held by the fatalistic view; our faith is a choice we make. And the "race" we run to eventual reward is a matter of something we do; it

must therefore be the opposite of a gift to be received, and thus not having to do with salvation from eternal wrath.

## **12:3–11 Children of God**

Some take verse 4 as referring to Jesus sweating “great drops of blood” in the Garden of Gethsemane, but no such connection is made by scripture (and the Gospels never say it was blood but only that his sweat was as profuse as blood dripping). All it says is that the people being addressed in this letter have not yet had to lay down their lives for the Gospel. But they have forgotten that they are adopted children of God, and as such, they will be disciplined as any good parent would discipline their own children. Parents aren’t responsible for other people’s children, so if God didn’t discipline us, it would mean we don’t belong to him. We must not abandon God for letting us suffer, any more than as children we would all run away from our parents for punishing us when we needed it.

## **12:12–13:7 Our response**

With all that in mind, we should ‘work out’ to get ourselves in shape, instead of being spectators that never make an effort to grow strong. We should do our best to get along with others, yet be vigilant to stand against error which could lead people astray.

Unlike ancient Israel, we have not come face-to-face with a consuming fire, darkness and gloom, a whirlwind, and a loud trumpet accompanying the voice of God. They were afraid to have him speak to them any more, and even Moses was afraid. Instead, we can come to God without any fear, as beloved children. So we have no excuses at all to stay away from God. On the other hand, if the first covenant carried the death penalty for any who failed to meet its requirements, how bad will it be for those who reject the

second? All the more reason to come close to God instead of running away from him.

Chapter 13 begins with a curious statement: People have sometimes unwittingly given hospitality to angels. We must keep that in mind when we encounter strangers, as it could be a test from God of our true attitude toward others. But our motive should not be just to avoid being caught doing wrong; it should be that we genuinely care for people. We should also show our concern for those who have been imprisoned or suffered hardship for the sake of the Gospel.

There is a brief statement about marriage here. Apparently some had asked whether it's okay for believers to marry, and the answer here is the same as that to similar questions to Paul from the Corinthians: Yes, believers can marry, and of course unfaithfulness is not permitted. Interestingly, the Bible never specifies what makes a couple officially married beyond physical union. There are no prescribed ceremonies, oaths, or official documents or sanctions by society. In God's eyes then, they are married by the physical union.

Then the people are given general statements that should be obvious: Be content with what you have, take courage, respect those spiritually mature ones who have been watching out for you, and take their example of life and faith to heart. There are no such words as obey, follow, or submit in that statement about leaders. It literally reads, "Remember the ones leading you, who speak to you the Word of God; consider the outcome of their behavior and imitate their faith." In context the emphasis is clearly on following examples. We are to be like them, but of course not to excuse poor behavior or blindly follow the orders of a despot. This will be emphasized again shortly.

## **13:8–15 Warnings to stay sharp**

Jesus is again presented as One to be trusted. He will never waver or change. And just as Paul wrote, this writer warns the people not to waste time arguing about the old laws or strange new teachings that didn't come from God. Again the writer refers to the old sacrificial system as being inadequate, so that we must not go back to it but instead go "outside the camp" to Jesus.

## **13:16–19 The wisdom of following the examples of proven leaders**

The only kind of "sacrifices" we can add are those of pure words of praise and of being the community of believers we were meant to be. And again, in verse 17, the writer mentions leaders, who are guarding them from error. As stated before, this is not a command to obey the whims of a boss, but an appeal to the wisdom of staying close to those who are stronger in the faith than we are. The responsibility Elders have for the other believers is not to dominate or rule but to serve and protect. It's just a smart move to listen to them. (The Greek here literally reads, "Be persuaded by the ones leading you and defer to them; make this a joy for them since they are being vigilant over your souls and will be held accountable.") Again, there is no mention of authority, rule, obedience, or punishment for failing to obey.

## **13:20–25 Final blessings and greetings**

As the letter winds down with the typical farewells of the day, we see a commonly mistranslated statement. Most render it "a short letter", which this obviously isn't. Instead, the Greek clearly indicates that it was written in bits at different times. This would explain some of the topic shifting as well.

# James

## Background

The letter from James is probably the earliest of the Letters, written no later than 50 a.d. since it does not mention the Jerusalem meeting of around 47 a.d. This is believed to be the James that was Jesus' earthly brother and not one of the original disciples. The content is relatively simple and practical, appealing to common sense.

## Outline

1. **1:1** Greeting
2. **1:2–4** Perseverance
3. **1:5–8** Wisdom and doubting
4. **1:9–11** Rich and poor
5. **1:12–16** Temptation
6. **1:17–18** God, the source of all goodness
7. **1:19–27** Purity and actions
8. **2:1–8** Prejudice
9. **2:9–13** The law
10. **2:14–26** Faith and actions
11. **3:1–12** Teaching and taming the tongue
12. **3:13–18** Wisdom
13. **4:1–6** The battle within
14. **4:7–12** Come near to God, away from evil
15. **4:13–17** Boasting
16. **5:1–6** The rich
17. **5:7–11** Patience
18. **5:12** Oaths
19. **5:13–18** Sickness and faith

## 20. **5:19–20** Saving others from deception

### **1:1 Greeting**

James only describes himself as a slave of God, just as Paul often did, in spite of being the half-brother of Jesus. But notice that the letter is directed at the twelve tribes of Israel, scattered among the nations. Many people advocate the theory of 'lost tribes', the remnant from when Israel and Judah were conquered. But that was long before this letter was written, yet here is James writing to all twelve tribes. Not one hint is made about any of them being lost. However, some could take the expression as poetic license, just a way to refer to Jewish believers not living in Jerusalem. Even so, it should be noted that not one hint of any lost tribes is mentioned in the Bible. In addition, we have all twelve tribes listed in the book of Revelation concerning the distant future compared to the first century, as well as Paul's assertion of his being able to trace his Hebrew lineage (Phil. 3 for example).

### **1:2–4 Perseverance**

James begins by advising the people on the proper reaction to hardship. Its purpose is to refine and mold us, to make us strong and mature. That message has largely been lost today. Most believers think God only wants them to be happy and comfortable. And note the reference to "brothers and sisters"; even though this letter is addressed to "the twelve tribes" of Israel, these are also believers in Jesus.

### **1:5–8 Wisdom and doubting**

Another issue that seems to have been forgotten today is that of asking God for wisdom. Instead we try to work for everything, but



we never seem to reach the goal because we're using our own power instead of God's. We ask God for many things in prayer but really don't expect an answer, and James makes it clear that such an attitude will not get us anything from God.

## **1:9–11 Rich and poor**

In this passage and again later, James targets the issue of how we view riches and social standing. The rich should be humbled by the fleeting nature of wealth, and the poor should boast of their true and eternal riches. Many of our values in this life will be reversed in the coming kingdom.

## **1:12–16 Temptation**

We must be careful not to take the term “crown of life” as meaning salvation, or we'd have to say James is teaching salvation by works (we'll look at that more in the next chapter). But God never tempts anyone to sin, which is an important point to remember on the topic of the sin of Adam, because some claim God put the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil in the Garden of Eden to get him to sin. And Satan is not mentioned here at all, but only our own desires, along with a warning about deception.

Today it's becoming increasingly popular to blame this or that 'spirit' of something for every evil thing we do or experience, such as 'the spirit of lust' or even 'the spirit of poverty.' Such notions come from superstition, not God. We do get tempted by the world around us, and certainly demons are involved in much of that, but the blame for falling lies solely with us. Instead of slamming the door when sin comes along, we invite it in and allow it to stay. Then it “grows up” and takes over.

## **1:17–18 God, the source of all goodness**

In contrast to the notion that temptation comes from God, James tells us that only what is good comes from God. God never wavers or changes, which is very much in contrast to the gods of other religions such as Islam, whose god openly and frequently reverses commands.

## **1:19–27 Purity and actions**

We would do well to heed James' advice here to be slow to take offense. We live in a world where everyone feels entitled to be free of offense. Even many Christians expect others to tiptoe around them and never hurt their feelings. The slightest disagreement is taken as offense and hostility. We are to be sensitive and considerate, but that doesn't mean the hypersensitive can demand never to be challenged.

James advises people to be self-controlled and patient, and that we must go beyond merely hearing the Word to also practicing it. We must choose daily to keep focused on Jesus and the truth of the gospel, and the sound teachings of the Bible. A good sign that we're practicing the teachings is how well we control our tongues, a topic James will elaborate on later.

A religion that is clean and pure is of no credit to us without standing the test: staying clean in spite of our contacts with the world. There is no reward for being clean if we never venture out into the world. A monastic life is largely an untested and concealed life; it's of much more value to be found clean if one is out where the dirt is.

## **2:1–8 Prejudice**

James appeals to the people's own experience to question why they would fawn over the rich and despise the poor. He states in no uncertain terms that it's a crime to favor the very class of people that do the most harm to the faith; it favors the enemy and disgraces the name of Jesus and his people, who are often found among the poor.

In spite of this passage being familiar to most believers, it's rarely followed. Favoritism is alive and well in the churches. The unbiblical clergy class is favored over the so-called laity, men are favored over women, and the rich are courted for their financial support, even though it's these people who do the faith the most damage. Favoritism is a violation of the "royal law" to love your neighbor as yourself.

## **2:9–13 The law**

If one part of the law is violated, the whole thing is violated. So nobody can claim to be better than anyone else since everyone violates the law, and nobody can practice only part of the law. When it comes to judgment, God will judge us with the same standard we used on others. If we want God to go easy on us, then we'd better do the same for other people in this life (see also Mt. 7:2).

## **2:14–26 Faith and actions**

Now to the "faith and works" passage, one which has vexed Bible students for ages. Many believe it to be at odds with the teachings of Paul, who said in Romans 4 that Abraham was made just or righteous by faith alone, in contrast to the earning of a wage.

First of all, remember that this letter was written before Paul's letters (with the remotely possible exception of Galatians), which contain a much more developed theology. Second, James is speaking of a

dead faith, not a non-existent one. If a person dies, does it mean they never existed? Of course not, and neither is a person without works necessarily one who was never born again spiritually. Third, this whole letter is about practical, everyday Christianity. Just as James was amazed that people were fawning over the rich who were exploiting them, he is also amazed at people who claim salvation but never show it.

In verses 14–20 James is talking about the uselessness of a faith no one can see in action, not that such inaction proves a complete absence of faith. He asks how anyone can know you have such faith if they can't see it. People are not like God who sees the heart; we have nothing else to go on but actions and words. So James is building a case against those who have made the claim but never displayed the faith, to ask them why anyone should believe them.

But what about Abraham? James says that Abraham was declared righteous by offering Isaac on an altar, doesn't he? But note the pivotal phrase, "And that fulfilled the scripture that says 'Abraham believed God...' " In other words, what Abraham would later do was determined beforehand by his faith. The point where Abraham was declared righteous by God is the belief, and the offering of Isaac is the result of the test. So James is not contradicting Paul at all; the thrust of his argument is that Abraham was declared righteous for us to see when his faith took action. Otherwise James would not only be contradicting Paul but also himself, because he said "Abraham believed... and was credited with righteousness" and that a person is justified by actions. Which is it?

The answer of course is that God sees our faith, but we can only see actions. After all, God really didn't need to see Abraham's actions in order to know if Abraham had faith, yet the Angel of the Lord said "Now I know that you fear God..." (Gen. 22:12b).

There is a popular phrase, "Faith without works is alone, but faith that works is never alone." Those who say this demand proof by

works that a person has faith, or they call them unbelievers. But that's something only God can know; it's not anyone else's place to judge. We can only see actions, and there are times that actions force us to expel someone from our fellowship. But we dare not call them lost without asking first what they believe.

Again, James is imploring people to put their faith into practice, not writing a thesis on salvation. Those who insist on works for salvation cannot agree where the line is drawn anyway. Exactly what and how many works are required, and where does the Bible say this? Instead, we see the same line of reasoning Paul used about the difference between spiritual infants and mature adults, between the spiritually immature and true disciples. A dead person exists but is useless; likewise, a dead faith exists but is useless. We are not to be content with just being born, but to be useful to God and the other believers.

### **3:1–12 Teaching and taming the tongue**

Now to the subject of Bible teachers. Anyone who is in a position of teaching is held to a higher standard since they're responsible for the spiritual nurturing and protection of others. If all Sunday School teachers and preachers would take this seriously, how many would be left? Did God ever intend for any warm body who can read a teacher's guide to be given a teaching position? As Paul wrote, the standards for teachers and Elders are very high, and God will hold them responsible.

I don't think there is necessarily a break to a different subject in verse two, which begins the passage on the tongue. James just wrote about teachers and how careful they have to be in what they say. Like the rudder of a ship, the tongue can control "the whole body", which can refer to the body of believers. Great damage can be done by false or inept teachers. Of course the section can apply

to every individual believer as well, but there is a strong possibility that James may have had teachers in mind when he wrote this part.

## **3:13–18 Wisdom**

Back again to general Christian behavior, about putting our faith in action. If we do this we won't have the squabbles and conflicts typical of churches throughout history. The hierarchal structure of 'churchianity' fosters the jealousy and selfish ambition James writes about here. And if it was a problem in James' time, before this structure set in, then we can understand why it's so much greater a problem now.

## **4:1–6 The battle within**

What causes those battles and struggles? The same "self" that James wrote about earlier, that tempts us to sin. We crave a lot of things, and even try to fool ourselves that some of them are not desires but needs that God owes us. We are allowed to enjoy the fruit of our labor, but we must not forget the poor. How often do we ask for the means to help them? And we must remember how God views human pride. Just as he will speak of a different kind of resistance on our part, James first speaks of God's resistance to the arrogant. They may succeed in this life, but God will be their judge in the next.

## **4:7–12 Come near to God, away from evil**

This time James offers a strategy for standing firm: Resist! Most of our sin is simply due to our not even putting up a fight. But if we stand against the Tempter he will run away in fear. Yet doesn't this conflict with James' earlier statement that temptation comes from within? No, because he never said all temptation is from ourselves.

We do have an external Enemy, but one that cannot prevail against a strong defense. The pride of self is no match for him, but if we humble ourselves to God instead of being self-sufficient and arrogant, we can't lose.

Bringing down the idol of Self can be painful, but it must be done if we're to conquer sin and stand against temptation. We must also stop watching others like a hawk to see if they fall so we can 'shoot our wounded.' People gossip and backstab and cut each other down continually, or they go to the other extreme and pretend not to see error or sin or heresy.

Here is an instance of "do not judge", and like the others, it's typically taken out of context. James has been talking about people tearing each other down, and it's this kind of judging that is wrong. Instead of judging themselves compared to God's standards, such people judge themselves by their own. They are very much like the Pharisees.

## **4:13–17 Boasting**

Pride is the root of boasting. From our own limited perspective we think that our lives are long and important. But we're in fact mere vapors, fleeting moments in time. As Paul has said, anyone who brags should only brag about the Lord. To know all of these things, and ignore them or fail to act, is every bit as much a sin against God as the commission of evil acts.

## **5:1–6 The rich**

Do you get the impression that James was a little upset with the rich? Like many employers today, they were exploiting workers—and he's addressing believers. Many employers have gone to church each Sunday but lived like the devil all week, saying "Business is

business.” And again, these were the types of people who gave the believers most of their trouble.

## **5:7–11 Patience**

Abruptly James shifts focus to the exploited, asking them to be patient. We hold out the hope of the Lord’s return as our power to endure. Sadly, just when we need it most, this hope has been all but abandoned by the churches today. They have decided that prophecies are just stories about good and evil, and they mock those who still believe the Lord will return for us. After another quick jab at the judgmental ones, James gives examples of patience from the past, the hated and persecuted prophets of old.

## **5:12 Oaths**

Next is a statement that we must be careful not to misunderstand: Do not take oaths. But like the same issue when Jesus was speaking about the Pharisees (Mt. 5), who were using legal loopholes to get out of keeping their oaths, James is only saying we should be people of our word. We should not be trying to see what we can get away with but how holy and faithful we can be.

## **5:13–18 Sickness and faith**

This passage is not a magic formula whereby we can practically order God to heal someone. There is nothing magical about oil used to anoint anyone. But notice whose faith it is that can heal the sick person: the Elders who are praying over them. Most so-called faith healers blame the sick person for not having enough faith to get better, but the Bible clearly lays the blame at the feet of the ones doing the praying and anointing. The prayers of the proud and fake cannot heal, but those of the righteous can.



There are some commentators who believe that James has a specific kind of sickness in mind here, meaning the sickness was caused by sin. But we don't have enough in the context to say for sure.

## **5:19–20 Saving others from deception**

James ends the letter with an encouraging note: that it's a great honor and blessing to bring people back from sin and deception. This of course stands in stark contrast to the 'shooting our wounded' we usually see.

# 1 Peter

## Background

The first letter from Peter was written in the early 60s AD while he was in Babylon. Its overall theme is Christian behavior in a world that was becoming increasingly hostile to the faith.

## Outline

1. **1:1–2** Greeting
2. **1:3–5** Our living hope
3. **1:6–9** Faith that passes the test
4. **1:10–12** The secret of salvation
5. **1:13–19** Holiness and strength
6. **1:20–22** The secret revealed
7. **1:23–2:3** A new immortal life
8. **2:4–10** The living stone
9. **2:11–3:12** A new citizenship
10. **3:13–18a** Suffering for righteousness
11. **3:18b–4:7a** Jesus' suffering and example
12. **4:7b–11** Prayer, love, and service
13. **4:12–19** The season of trial
14. **5:1–4** Elders' responsibility
15. **5:5–7** Learners' responsibility
16. **5:8–9** Stay sharp
17. **5:10–11** Praise
18. **5:12–14** Final greetings

## 1:1–2 Greeting

Peter was considered the “chief” of the apostles until Paul began his ministry. Even afterwards he was known as the apostle to the Jews, in contrast to Paul being sent to the Gentiles. Many have portrayed him as impetuous and brash, but we need to be careful not to read too much between the lines.

He is writing here to believers in various locations and refers to them as those who were chosen according to the foreknowledge of the Father. Note that it is foreknowledge rather than fate; God knew they would choose to accept Jesus.

## **1:3–5 Our living hope**

It is our faith in Jesus’ resurrection that results in God giving us this new birth and the inheritance that goes with it. As Paul also wrote, this promise of eternal life is being guarded in heaven for us; it does not depend upon us in any way to keep it. Further, we’re guarded by God’s power right up to the moment of deliverance. We have no need or right to worry about losing it. It’s this guarantee that gives us the hope of endurance, the power to keep going through many trials. We love and trust in God even without having seen him.

## **1:6–9 Faith that passes the test**

Peter describes the suffering the people were under as being exalted. The trial of faith in this life is painful, but it will prove whether our faith was genuine or not. And the completion of the test is that we spread the gospel.

## **1:10–12 The secret of salvation**

God had given hints in Old Testament prophecies about this age of grace we live in, but nobody could figure it out beforehand. And yet

what was written was ultimately for our benefit. Even the Messengers are very much interested in these things.

## **1:13–19 Holiness and strength**

Because of all that, we should be motivated to be self-controlled and prepared for anything. Our focus should remain on Jesus and not self, on holiness and not indulgence. God will judge us impartially, and we must therefore be impartial in our dealings with others, as James discussed in more detail. Peter defines maturity as relying on the grace of God through Jesus. When we reach this maturity we leave the old ways and become holy, meaning set apart for a higher purpose. Our redemption was not obtained by tradition or material wealth, but by the blood of Jesus, the Lamb. Many today nonetheless put tradition or status over the cross and the Word, thinking that the Word is less trustworthy.

## **1:20–22 The secret revealed**

Although chosen from long ago, Jesus was only revealed to us when he came as a man and was raised from the dead. This is where our faith lies, and what has given us birth into a new family.

## **1:23–2:3 A new immortal life**

In light of the nature of our redemption, we must behave as those who are grateful. We should not only give up that which is worthless but also crave that which is good.

## **2:4–10 The living stone**

Striving for maturity will result in our being used as “living stones” in a spiritual building. We serve as priests, and we must see to it that we serve faithfully, bringing God the spiritual sacrifices of true disciples. Notice that all believers are seen this way, not just an imagined clergy class or just males; we are all equally holy to God.

Jesus, as the cornerstone, is the foundation upon which all of us are to rest. In becoming human, Jesus took the lowest position. How can any of us mere “bricks” think that because he did this in order to lift us up, that we’re more important? Yet many today believe that a minister (which means *servant*) is to rise above the rest and be in charge. Instead, we are to follow Jesus’ example and serve as he did, by getting lower than the rest and serving them to lift them up. If Jesus could do this for us, then we must do this for others.

Before Jesus came the Gentiles (non-Jews) were “not a people” and not shown mercy, but now God’s mercy is for all, and all who come to him in faith are his people.

## **2:11–3:12 A new citizenship**

Since we’re described in this way, we’re urged to think of ourselves as only temporary residents of this world. We should live in such a way that all charges brought against us will always be false. We do this in part by being good citizens as much as possible. Freedom is not license; instead, we are to value everyone and remember that we’re lowly slaves of God. Next Peter will detail the practical outworking of this fact.

He specifies three main groups: servants, wives, and husbands. Notice first of all that he does not present these as pairings of master/slave and husband/wife; he addresses servants without addressing masters. The Greek word for servant means house servant or ‘domestic’, and the word for their masters means owners or employers when contrasted with domestics. These domestics are

to *hupotasso* their employers. This word is not about subservience to an overlord but support and identification with a person in some leading capacity (see [God's Word to Women](#)).

As for the word translated “respect” or “fear”, the Greek word is *phobos*. Like our English word “fear”, it can have a range of nuances: abject terror, a mild sense of foreboding, or a realistic caution. Which one of those it means depends of course on the context. And since Peter speaks of both kind and unkind employers, the nuance will change depending on which kind the domestic is dealing with. We might well ask what kind of fear an employee would have for a good and kind employer, but anyone who has ever held a job understands this kind. At the very least, we fear losing our jobs if we fail to satisfy the directives of the boss. So while one would certainly respect their employer, there is a separate element of fear as well, however mild it may be.

This may all seem very clear and simple, but the plot thickens when we look at the instructions to wives. But before we do, we must know that as in just about every language except English, Greek has what is called grammatical gender. It is the assigning of male or female pronouns or word affixes which are completely unrelated to biology. For example, in Hebrew the pronoun for the Spirit of God is feminine (she), but in Greek it's neuter (it). So the way we can tell which parts of a Greek sentence go together is by looking at the grammatical gender. This will prove critical to our understanding of what Peter says to Christian women.

1 Pet. 3:1 begins with “likewise”, so there is similarity (witness by behavior) between what Peter said to employees and what he will say to wives. As noted in the commentary on Ephesians under ‘Be filled with the Spirit’, there was a Roman law at the time called ‘the marriage without hand’ wherein a woman’s allegiance was to her father for life, not to any husband. Her father could take her back at any time and give her to another man. So the instruction, both from

Paul and Peter, is for Christian women to identify with their husbands instead.

But Peter adds the purpose for this instruction: to win over unbelieving husbands; remember the larger context of minding our behavior for the world to see. The phrase in Greek is always used in a context of hostile rejection of the gospel message (see [Study on Rom. 27:8](#)); it is not used in any context where the topic is backslidden or immature believers. So rather than a general instruction to all Christian wives, Peter specifies here that his instructions are to Christian wives of non-Christian husbands. Theirs was a most difficult position to be in, since they could be divorced or killed by their husbands if they tried to convert them. They had little opportunity to speak to their husbands about religious or spiritual matters. That's why Peter leans so heavily here on behavior and depth of character, qualities the culture did not seem to believe women possessed. Christian husbands, in contrast, had no right to silence their wives and no need to be converted. If they were sinning, they needed to repent, and their wives had every right in Christ to say so.

Continuing in verse 2, Peter shows exactly how this behavior will be a witness to the gospel. Here is the literal English rendering:

**observing of-the** in **fear** **pure behavior of-you**

The blue words are grammatically masculine, and the red words are grammatically feminine. So we can easily see that it's not the women but the unbelieving men who will fear. This ties in with the phrase about being hostile to the Word, because the fear of God is what such people lack. And it's these unbelieving husbands who will see the pure (not "chaste", which denotes sexual purity whereas this word refers to the inner person) behavior of their Christian wives and thus "fear" this wordless gospel message.

Peter goes on to emphasize the inner strength of character a Christian woman must develop. But we encounter another debatable passage in verses 5 and 6. Verse five is in the present tense, not the past as it's typically translated. Again we see the word *hupotasso* in conjunction with "their own husbands". It's only verse 6 which has to be in the past tense since it refers to people who were long dead, Sarah and Abraham. But instead of *hupotasso* we have Sarah rendering *hupakouo* to Abraham, which means "to attend to" (same word as when a servant "answered" the door for Peter after his miraculous escape from prison in Acts 12:13).

But what of Sarah calling Abraham 'lord'? And what does it have to do with women not being afraid or dismayed? The only recorded instance we have of Sarah calling Abraham 'lord' is in Gen. 18:12 when she laughed to herself at the prospect of becoming pregnant by her very old husband. The times we see her doing what Abraham said are when he twice passed her off as his sister in order to save his own skin (Gen. 12:13, 26:9), and she also stood up to him regarding the slave woman Hagar (Gen. 21:10). Isn't it this strong, fearless Sarah that Peter is telling Christian women to be like? Peter does not say they're like her if they call their husbands 'lord', but if they do not fear and are not dismayed. Now we can see why taking the traditional rendering of vs. 2 creates a contradiction: First Peter tells women to fear, and then he tells them not to fear. Rather, he tells them to bring the fear of God to their unbelieving husbands through character and quality, then tells them to fear nothing nor be dismayed.

The last point to cover is verse 7, which also begins with "likewise", continuing the list of ways to live the Christian witness. The Christian husband is to "make a home together with" his wife, not build a castle with her as his maid. Peter also appeals to the men's "realization" that women have "the less stable income". This is typically translated more literally as "weaker vessel" even though there is apparently no firm consensus on what it means. But it's likely an idiom (figure of speech), and in classical literature it did



refer to being at an economic disadvantage. Peter says this along with calling women “joint heirs”, so he’s drawing an analogy between social inheritance and spiritual inheritance.

Regarding the matter of how the husband treats his wife, Peter does not merely say that if he fails to honor her then God will not answer his prayers, but that God will block them and refuse to hear them. The Greek word is *egkopto* and is much stronger than the idea of merely ignoring something. God will actively oppose and hinder the prayers of a Christian man who fails to honor his wife.

Note also that Peter is addressing husbands, not all men, so the weakness their wives have is because they are wives, not just women. Just as slaves were not disadvantaged because of something intrinsic to them as people but because of their position in that society, so also wives were not “the weaker vessel” due to their being women but to their position in that society.

Let’s summarize the list now:

- Employees, support your employers whether they’re nice or not.
- Wives, place your loyalty with your husbands instead of your fathers, so that you can witness without words to them. Though they may be hostile to the gospel, your depth of character will cause them to fear God. Do not be fearful or intimidated, but instead be like Sarah.
- Husbands, treat your wives as the joint-heirs they are, building up the home together with them and remembering their social disadvantage, or God will thwart your prayers.

After focusing on husbands and wives, Peter extends the command of mutual submission to all believers. Our unity comes not from everyone being forced to follow a domineering leader, but from being saturated in the Word.

## **3:13–18a Suffering for righteousness**

Again Peter deals with the problem of suffering, and he encourages the people to be brave. If we do that, we will always be ready to answer any who want to know why we believe as we do. Some take this as a blanket condemnation of all passion and challenge when we're confronted by unbelievers, but notice that Peter is talking about being asked what we believe— not about being harassed, villified, thrown in jail, slandered, or any other openly hostile attack. The gentle and respectful treatment Peter commands here is for those who are honestly asking us why we believe. It is not to be used as a gag on us when we encounter a hostile opponent who is attacking our faith. To ignore this is to ignore the examples of Jesus and the apostles. Good shepherds are only kind to sheep, not wolves. A “potential sheep” will not come with hostility.

## **3:18b–4:7a Jesus' suffering and example**

Like Paul, Peter manages to stir some controversy. He writes of Jesus preaching to “the spirits in prison who long ago were disobedient while God waited patiently before flooding the earth.” We can only guess what this means, but it appears to say that Jesus had a message for those people while he was physically dead — but of course still spiritually alive. Some take it to mean he preached the Gospel to them and gave them a second chance, but scripture does not say so. Peter will, however, give us a small hint in the next section.

Then he points out that the Flood symbolized the baptism (immersion) that saves us now. First, note the direction of the symbolism: the Flood was symbolic of baptism, not baptism symbolic of the Flood. Second, this baptism is not the washing of our bodies with water (water baptism), but “a matter of a good conscience.” This contradicts the claim that we must be baptized in

water to be saved, or even just to be obedient. Faith in Jesus' resurrection immerses us in God via the Holy Spirit indwelling us. Such people have symbolically died to the flesh, so they should live for God.

Those who insist upon being pampered and always comforted are the first to turn from God in the face of suffering, because they have not developed endurance. The world is guaranteed to heap insults on all who follow Jesus, so we should expect it instead of demanding that God explain why he has apparently abandoned us.

Then Peter gives a clue about what Jesus said to the people who died in the Flood: "The Gospel was also brought to the dead so they could be judged." Not as informative as we'd like, but a clue all the same. What we can say is that God judges fairly and would not send someone to hell on a technicality. If the world of the Flood was so vile as to need mass destruction, it's all the more significant that Jesus should go and speak to them.

In spite of the fact that almost 2000 years have passed since this letter was written, the time has always been short. Jesus can return at any time, and we must be found faithful in the use of the spiritual gifts we've received. We never know how much time we'll have to use them.

## **4:7b–11 Prayer, love, and service**

Love is the underlying motivation, and hospitality is one of its expressions. Another is the sharing of our spiritual gifts among ourselves. Gifts are meant to be used for the benefit of others, and exercised to the best of our ability. This brings honor to God instead of to ourselves. And of course if we love others we will pray for them.

## **4:12–19 The season of trial**

Suffering is normal for us, not something to be terribly upset about. This life is a test, and nobody enjoys taking tests. But there is great reward awaiting all who remain true through persecution. Putting up with suffering we deserve is of no credit to us, but it's a great honor to suffer for being a Christian. As legitimate children of God, testing and refinement and judgment begin with us. But if God will punish his own children, how will he treat people who are not of his family? A sobering thought for the lost.

However, let us not sin against our sisters and brothers by calling domestic violence “suffering for Christ”. The suffering scripture describes is that which comes from those who are hostile to the faith, not from fellow believers. Anyone who claims to be a follower of Jesus, yet who abuses or mistreats a fellow believer, is living in denial of the basic tenets of the faith. This applies equally to Christian leaders who browbeat or oppress those who follow them. Tolerance or denial of abuse is one of the ways in which Christians give a very bad witness to the world, which seems at times to have a better sense of love and compassion than Christians.

## **5:1–4 Elders' responsibility**

Peter now turns to the Elders in the churches and appeals to them as an eyewitness of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus: Be good shepherds. It should not be viewed as a job or a chore, but as grateful and humble service to God. This is not a position of prestige or profit or domination, but the tender nurturing of those who have not yet matured. To act as masters (trad. lording over), even if done benevolently or gently, is a direct violation of scripture.

## **5:5–7 Learners' responsibility**

Likewise, the new and inexperienced should respect the mature and wise, but everyone must remain humble. Arrogance has no place in the community of believers.

## **5:8–9 Stay sharp**

All believers need to stay alert for attacks from the evil one, who roams around like a roaring lion searching for prey. We are commanded to stand strong against him, to be stubborn in our faith.

## **5:10–11 Praise**

We cannot stand strong without the proper armor and weapons, which only come from God. Such weapons and power are to be used for his glory alone.

## **5:12–14 Final greetings**

In closing, Peter mentions that he had dictated the letter to Silas, a faithful believer who had also been with Paul (Acts 15-18, 1 and 2 Thessalonians). He also mentions “she in Babylon who was chosen along with you(pl.)” who sends greetings, along with that of “my son Mark”. Some believe the “she” is a literal woman, while others take it as a reference to the congregation there. Scholars are also divided over whether Babylon is literal or figurative. As for Mark, most commentators seem to think he was not the literal son of Peter but his spiritual son, one he had led to salvation, who was with him at this time.

# 2 Peter

## Background

The second letter from Peter was written shortly before his death in about 64 a.d. While the focus of the first letter was persecution from outside, this one deals more with false teachers among the believers.

## Outline

1. **A 1:1–4** Greetings and praise
2. **–B 1:5–11** Our response to the gift of Jesus
3. **—C 1:12–19** Reminder: the first days
4. **— X 1:20–2:22** False prophets
  1. **—Xa 1:20–2:9** Their practices and judgment
  2. **—Xb 2:10–14a** Their self-destruction
  3. **—Xc 2:14b–19** Their doom
  4. **—Xd 2:20–22** Their true colors
5. **—C' 3:1–10** Reminder: the last days
6. **–B' 3:11–16** Our response to what is coming
7. **A' 3:17–18** Final warning and farewell

## A 1:1–4 Greetings and praise

Peter begins with encouraging remarks about the power of God to give us everything we need for living holy lives. So we should not be content to remain newborns, but to grow in maturity and knowledge. This will result in endurance, holiness, and a tender heart for other believers.

## **B 1:5–11 Our response to the gift of Jesus**

This is the “fruit” of the Christian disciple; it validates to others that we’re saved and faithful. This is a public confirmation of salvation, not a means of attaining it. Some mistake it to suggest that we have to produce this outward evidence in order to stay saved, but that’s not what the text says. Others would do well to be concerned about us if we have no works, but the Bible clearly says we are saved solely by faith, plus nothing.

## **C 1:12–19 Reminder: the first days**

We all need refresher courses sometimes, even in subjects we know well. Likewise, Peter sees value in reminding them of what they already know. He’s all the more eager to do so because he has the impression that he will not be on the earth much longer.

He relates his personal witness of Jesus having been raised from the dead by God’s power; it was not a clever fable or second-hand story. He also personally witnessed Jesus’ glory in the Transfiguration (Mark 9), and he heard the voice of God. Certainly, at the end of his life, if Peter had been deceived or lying he would have confessed by this time, but he sticks to his story even knowing he will be executed for it. This is but one of many powerful evidences for the truth of the gospel.

## **X 1:20–2:22 False prophets**

This is the crux or central point of the letter. Peter introduces the topic with a statement about true prophets.

## **X 1:20–2:9 Their practices and judgment**

First we see a frequently misunderstood statement taken out of context, typically translated as “no prophecy is of private interpretation.” Some take it to mean that individual ‘ordinary’ believers, cannot interpret the scriptures for themselves but instead must bow to some infallible interpreter such as the Catholic Magisterium or some other governing authority. These verses ripped out of context are used as a means of suppressing dissent, which is an insult to the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of all believers. Instead, the obvious meaning in context is that Peter is validating the testimony of the prophets. They, like he, did not invent prophecies but got them straight from God via the Holy Spirit.

Most translations give the idea that the phrase about the Holy Spirit means the Spirit “carried them along”, but the Greek shows two parallels of the verb for “carried”: by the prophets, and then by the Spirit. It points to the subject of the phrase in each case: not carried on by people, and carried on by the Spirit. That is, the prophets were not doing their own work but that of the Spirit. It’s the message that’s being performed or “carried on”, not the prophets that are being carried.

After making a point about true prophets, Peter warns that there were also false prophets who did make up their own stories. Such would soon invade the churches. They would introduce wrong thinking and bold heresies, and draw away many after themselves. History has borne this out, and it continues to this day. But God will surely judge them, all in his good time.

Not even angels who sinned could escape judgment. Here Peter mentions the same ones as that of Jude 1:6, and he identifies the place of their prison as Tartarus. As demonstrated also with Noah’s Flood and the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah, God will only wait so long before paying everyone back for their wickedness. But notice that he spared Noah by keeping him safe in the midst of the deluge, and Lot by snatching him out of harm’s way at the last minute. These are types or pictures of how God will keep the



believing Jews safe for the final three and one half years, and also how he will take his Body out of the world before the his wrath is poured out. God knows how to rescue his own and not let them suffer his judgment.

### **X 2:10–14a Their self-destruction**

God reserves justice for a future time, when he will finally deal with those who despise him and only think about this life. They speak abusively against beings much more powerful than themselves, yet even the angels do not presume to say such things. They are like brute beasts, born to be caught and killed.

### **X 2:14b–19 Their doom**

Those false teachers are doomed and cursed, consumed by greed. Deep darkness is the eternal fate they have chosen for themselves, victims of their own traps.

### **X 2:20–22 Their true colors**

Now we come across a controversial statement related to the issue of whether a believer can be lost. Who is Peter describing here, true believers or fake believers? He just talked about the latter at great length, but were these people ever saved? Look at verse 22 for the answer: They never changed. They were always “dogs and pigs” who were merely bathed and dressed up, but their nature had never changed. But why does Peter say they had turned their backs on the “holy precept”? Peter is telling us that these people heard the Gospel but never accepted it. They knew the way but did not follow it; they chose a different path and were trying to bring believers with them.

### **C’ 3:1–10 Reminder: the last days**

Now Peter returns to reminding the people about the true prophets and apostles, whose teachings came through Jesus. Just as the early believers devoted themselves to the teachings of the apostles (Acts 2:42), we can still do that by diligently following their written words.

Next Peter adds some prophecy about the end. “The last days” are described as a time of deception and mocking. Many today are literally saying, “So where’s this return you keep talking about? Everything has stayed the same for all time; nothing has changed.” But God made the world out of water, then used some of it to produce the Flood. Is this not a characteristic of our time? Even the churches have bought into the lie that Genesis and Revelation are just moral lessons rather than history or prophecy. It’s surely a sign of the end, and instead of water, this time God will destroy it all with fire.

The statement about a thousand years is another scripture frequently taken out of context. Is Peter giving us a formula for predicting the time of the end? Some say yes, and they even use it to argue that the days of creation were really periods of time ranging anywhere from a thousand to a gazillion years (take your pick). But there is no reference here to creation week, only to the Flood. The topic is the last days, not the first days. Others take it as a blueprint for the total length of history, where seven days means seven thousand years from creation. But Peter does not give the formula, “one day is equal to one thousand years”; he only says that one day is “like” a thousand years, and vice versa.

All Peter is saying is that we must not become discouraged by these mockers who have deluded themselves into thinking that if nothing has apparently changed, then nothing ever will. God is not constrained by time as we are, so it’s immaterial whether he waits one or a thousand years to do something he promised. He is not late or slow as we count time, but patient. And the reason he is patient is because he doesn’t enjoy destroying people; he wants

everyone to be saved. This refutes the Calvinistic notion that God hates most people and sends them to hell “for his good pleasure.”

## **B’ 3:11–16 Our response to what is coming**

That Day will surely come, and afterwards the earth will be no more. Our realm will be replaced with a new heavens and earth. Knowing all this, we should be all the more diligent in our Christian lives to be faithful servants. The way we can hurry the time when we’ll be given our inheritance is by spreading the Gospel and living holy lives that honor God. This is the mark of the true Christian disciple: to spread the Gospel while eagerly hoping for the Master’s return.

God’s patience is for man’s benefit, just as Paul had written. Speaking of Paul, Peter not only acknowledges his wisdom but also that his letters can be hard to understand. What an understatement! But it’s no excuse for people twisting his writings, which Peter equates with “the other scriptures.” Here we have an eyewitness of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection calling Paul’s letters “scripture”, which is a pretty good rebuttal against the claims of some today that Paul was a false teacher.

## **A’ 3:17–18 Final warning and farewell**

At the end of his letter, Peter gives a final warning about these false teachers and wishes increased wisdom and knowledge for the people.

# 1 John

## Background

The first letter from John was written around the time between 85–95 a.d. This is the same John who was Jesus’ “beloved disciple”, who also wrote the Gospel of John and Revelation. The letter has two main themes: combating false teaching (most likely early Gnosticism), and assurance of salvation.

## Outline

1. **1:1–4** Introduction
2. **1:5–2:11** Matching words and actions
  1. **1:5–10** Light and darkness
  2. **2:1–6** Sin and redemption
  3. **2:7–11** An old/new command
3. **2:12–17** Advice from a “father” to his “children”
4. **2:18–3:12** Deceivers
  1. **2:18–25** Antichrists
  2. **2:26–3:12** How children of God stand against them
5. **3:13–15** Hatred and murder
6. **3:16–5:5** True love
  1. **3:16–19a** Love in action
  2. **3:19b–24a** Confidence before God
  3. **3:24b–4:6** Test the spirits
  4. **4:7–11** To love God is to love people
  5. **4:12–18** Perfect love
  6. **4:19–5:5** Fake love
7. **5:6–12** Three witnesses
8. **5:13–15** Assurance of salvation
9. **5:16–18** Praying for other believers

## 10. **5:19–21** The True One versus false ones

### **1:1–4 Introduction**

John has a different way of expressing himself than most of the other New Testament writers. He seems to be more abstract, philosophical, and poetic. We see this in the very first verse, where he describes Jesus as “that which was from the beginning, which we have heard and seen and touched”. This is evidence from personal testimony. Although he’s writing to believers, there is no harm in continually giving reasons for our faith. Further, Jesus is described as having come from the Father— not beneath him or apart from him. And the purpose of testimony and evidence (apologetics) is to convince people that Jesus is God who died for our sins and rose again.

### **1:5–2:11 Matching words and actions**

Now John focuses on practicing what we preach. Such preaching is not the traditional oratory on Sunday mornings, but rather what is known as evangelizing— a command for every one of us, not just a few.

### **1:5–10 Light and darkness**

Since God is light, then to live in darkness yet claim to be saved is a lie. And to say we don’t sin is another lie. On the surface this seems contradictory; how can anyone claim to be saved since we all sin? The answer is that there’s a difference between living in sin and occasional lapses.

### **2:1–6 Sin and redemption**

The purpose of writing encouraging letters to believers is not to keep them saved, but to keep them from falling into sin. But even if we fall, Jesus is there to pick us up. He is our Defense Attorney against Satan, and he never loses.

Notice who it is that Jesus takes sin away from: the whole world. Is John teaching Universalism, that everyone will go to heaven? Absolutely not. Jesus removed the barrier between God and man which was put up due to Adam's rebellion, making salvation by faith possible. One person cannot force reconciliation with another, but they can offer it, and this is what God did through Jesus. So though God took the sin barrier away, each person must decide whether or not to accept the offer to reconcile. Thus our destiny in either heaven or hell is not determined by sin, but by faith. Sin has to do with wages earned (Rom. 6:23), but salvation has to do with faith, which is not a work (Rom. 4:5, 5:6-7, 11:6, Eph. 2:8-9).

So when John says Jesus takes away our sin, he's referring to it on two levels: the sin barrier of all mankind which Jesus removed, and the individual sins believers commit that cause us to lose rewards. These rewards can be regained through repentance, but we must be more motivated by restoring our closeness with God than with rewards. It's all about the relationship.

Is John advocating salvation by works, as James has been accused also? Not at all. John is not telling us to judge each other's salvation, but to judge our own. He is telling us to look in the mirror and ask ourselves how we can justify wallowing in any sin while claiming to be saved. This is yet another good reason for him to keep talking about salvation, since not all who think they're saved are truly saved. Instead, as we see in verses 5-6, works are a visible indication of maturity. A disciple is supposed to act like their master.

## **2:7–11 An old/new command**

Our behavior is summed up in a command which John describes as both old and new: Love your neighbor. We cannot both love and hate a person, so if we despise anyone, we do not have the love of God in us, and we should therefore take a good look at our spiritual condition. Again, this is not a weapon with which we should beat other believers over the head, but a mirror.

## **2:12–17 Advice from a “father” to his “children”**

Here we see John was poetic about the reasons for this letter. Some people try to extract doctrine out of this passage, as if only young men are strong and can overcome the evil one. It's just poetry.

Not loving the world doesn't mean not ever enjoying anything, but simply not giving it priority over our relationship with Jesus or our real home in heaven. This is especially important as we near the Lord's return.

## **2:18–3:12 Deceivers**

### **2:18–25 Antichrists**

Some take this passage to mean that there is no person we can call The Antichrist, since John mentions many antichrists. But the fact that an individual is mentioned means there are both. The Greek from which we get *antichrist* means not only one who opposes Christ but who also impersonates him; this will be a fake Christ. In the meantime, there are many fake Christs with limited followings, which is itself one of the signs of the end. But from other scriptures we can be sure that there will be an ultimate and final Antichrist.

Such impostors can't remain for long among mature disciples. John makes it clear that these people were never saved. Some add "as if" to the verse, changing it to "the fact that they left makes it just as if they were never saved." John does not say "as if", but states as a fact that those who leave were never saved in the first place. And remember the context of false teachers; it is these who are called "antichrists".

Notice that John says he's not writing to get the people saved but to remind them to practice what they preach. Anyone who denies that Jesus is the Christ is "the antichrist". Again, as John had just said, "just as you heard that a fake Christ is coming, now also many such fakes have come". There is one Antichrist to come, but in the meantime there are many, and a given antichrist can be identified by whether they deny that Jesus is the Christ.

To have the Son is to also have the Father; they are one. Later John will elaborate on this, adding that whoever doesn't have the Son also doesn't have the Father. Many false religions try to only keep one or the other, but John makes it clear that we must have both— which includes Jews. Some say they need not be evangelized because they worship the One True God, but remember what Peter said on Pentecost (Acts 2)? The Jews had to accept their Messiah. That's where the line is drawn now, for all people.

Again John tells us that he's writing all this to keep us aware of false teachers. Jesus can return suddenly at any time, and we need to be sure we're saved and growing to maturity, so that we will not be embarrassed when he comes.

## **2:26–3:12 How children of God stand against them**

All who are saved are born/adopted as God's children. Not servants or enemies, but children. Because of this, we will someday be made like him and see him as he really is. We are to set our hope on him,



not on us, and we must not give up this hope. Keeping it helps to purify us.

To sin is to break God's law. This of course is not the Old Testament law, but the law John wrote about earlier: Love your neighbor. Since love does no harm to its neighbor (Rom. 13:10) and sin does, then sin breaks this law. If we continue to live in sin then we have never known Jesus.

Satan has done nothing but sin, but Jesus destroyed his work. In light of that, it should be clear that to continue following in Satan's footsteps indicates one who is not saved. Since we can't see the heart as God does, outward behavior is all we have to go on.

Does this violate scriptures about people being saved but having no works? Not at all. There's a vast difference between doing nothing and living in sin. Yes, it's a sin to fail to do right (James 4:17), but such people aren't committing evil acts like murder. Satan doesn't sit around and do nothing! But instead of seeing how little good we can do, we should see how much good we can do, out of love for God and people.

## **3:13–15 Hatred and murder**

We can expect the world to hate us for Whose we are, but not other believers. So again, anyone claiming to belong to Jesus must not hate people. Instead, love for people is expressed in Jesus' laying down his life for us. Although most of us will never be required to do that, there is much we will be expected to do, such as sharing our material goods and showing compassion.

## **3:16–5:5 True love**

### **3:16–19a Love in action**

It's better to never say "I love you" and do loving acts, than to say the words but never back them up with action.

### **3:19b–24a Confidence before God**

The conscience is not terribly reliable among lost people, but among believers it should help us stay the course. If we keep believing and keep loving, our conscience will be clear. But it's God's power and the indwelling Holy Spirit that keep our faith for us (1 Peter 1:3-5); he gives us the ability to obey this command to keep believing.

### **3:24b–4:6 Test the spirits**

This is one of the most important but most ignored verses in scripture: Test the spirits. One test is to see if a teaching agrees that Jesus came from God in human form. The Gnostics were teaching against this in John's day, and they're still teaching it today. Other religions such as Islam deny that Jesus was God and that he was crucified for our sins. So those who are trying to say we worship the same God as Islam are speaking blasphemy. Many Christians are so afraid of rejecting what comes from God as did the Pharisees, that they refuse to question anyone claiming to be of God and speaking the name of Jesus. But we're not to be gullible, since it's as wrong to accept the fake as it is to reject the genuine. We must test the spirits, and we must know how to tell true from false. So discernment is like an open window with a screen; it lets in the fresh air but keeps out the bugs.

We believers are said to have had the victory over false teachers. It's in the past tense, and it's all because the One who is in us is greater than the one who is in the world. To say that we're capable of being lost is to say the Spirit in us is powerless against Satan.

Instead, this Spirit is “the spirit of truth” who guards us against “the spirit of deception”. All we have to do is listen carefully.

### **4:7–11 To love God is to love people**

Again John emphasizes the need for believers to put love into practice. Perhaps it was a problem to the people he was writing to. He appeals to the love God showed to us in sending Jesus to save us. He loved us first, while we were still sinners (Rom. 5:8). Jesus referred to this when he said “If you only love those who love you, what credit is that to you? After all, the wicked only love those who love them.” (Luke 6:32). But God loved humanity while we were still his enemies, so we too must try to express love to people.

But note that love is not always gentle and nurturing. God says that he rebukes and disciplines those he loves (Rev. 3:19). And it’s certainly not loving toward the victim if we do nothing to oppose the criminal. Love “always protects” (1 Cor. 13), and sometimes this requires strong opposition to evildoers.

### **4:12–18 Perfect love**

Even though we haven’t actually seen God, his love lives in us if we show it to others. God’s love isn’t anything to be feared, since he will never throw us away. But he will discipline us if we stray, so it’s only sensible to strive to practice love.

### **4:19–5:5 Fake love**

As if to give us a hint that this is important, John repeats his statements about the impossibility of loving God yet hating people. After all, if we can’t love people we can see, then how can we love God whom we can’t see? Faith in God is our only means of victory over the sinful world, specifically faith in Jesus as the Christ.

## **5:6–12 Three witnesses**

What's all this about "water and blood"? One theory is that John is combating a Gnostic heresy that Jesus was only divine when the Holy Spirit came upon him at his baptism, and that it left him before his death. They believed this because they could not accept God in the flesh. Jesus was a mere man to them, who only had the divine presence for a limited time. So when John says "water and blood" he refers to the fact that Jesus was not only divine at his baptism, but all the way through his death.

Another view is that water refers to Jesus' physical birth (as in the context of his conversation with Nicodemus) while blood refers to his physical death. That would make John's meaning to be that Jesus was physically born and physically died. He further bolsters this testimony with that of the Holy Spirit for a third witness. This view makes better sense in light of the more general Gnostic teaching that Jesus was never human at all, but only appeared to be. And this follows his statement about the saved being those who believe this.

So we have God's own testimony that Jesus is his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son does not have life. That again supports the statement that it is our faith in Jesus that saves us, not repentance from sin or doing good works.

## **5:13–15 Assurance of salvation**

In verse 13 John says that he writes these things "to you so you can understand that you have eternal life, you who put your trust in the Name of the God-Man." Believers can rest assured that eternal life is already ours. John is giving this assurance to people who are already saved. So if someone is not sure they're saved, we can't declare them lost, but instead we should take the example of scripture and reassure them. If they have believed that Jesus is God

in the flesh who died for our sins and rose again, they already have possession of eternal life.

Some may object, “This teaches a license to sin and gives people a false sense of security.” But that’s not true; liberty is not license, and our confidence is not false. Rather, it’s assured because it’s in Jesus, not in ourselves. We should make every effort to silence those who falsely teach that salvation can be lost, which robs believers of their confidence. As Paul taught, we have died to sin. And if we’re truly reconciled with God, we will naturally want to please him.

Is the statement about asking anything of God a blank check that any Christian can cash? Hardly. John is just saying that if we ask anything according to God’s will, we’ll get it. How do we know what things are according to God’s will? By whether or not he grants them. One might then wonder what the purpose is of praying, but there may be things God would have granted had we asked for them.

## **5:16–18 Praying for other believers**

What is the “sin that leads to death”? In Paul’s writings, and also in the account of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5), we see that God will go so far as to punish his own people with premature death for continued disobedience or for lying to the Holy Spirit. It’s possible that this lying to the Spirit is the particular sin John is talking about. But notice that we’re told not to pray about it. There are apparently some things God doesn’t want us to try to change his mind about.

## **5:19–21 The True One versus false ones**

At the end, John repeats some points and then makes a quick warning against idols. It seems somewhat out of place but it really

isn't. John has been warning against false teachings and teachers who were leading people astray. Such turning away from the one true God toward other so-called gods is idolatry. John spent a great deal of effort to divide light from darkness, truth from error, Christ from Antichrist, so his last statement is simply a command to stay alert.

## 2 John

### Background

The second letter from John was written around the same time as the first, between 85–95 a.d. This is a more personal letter and just briefly touches on the topic of Gnosticism, which believed that God could never indwell human flesh.

### Outline

1. **1:1** Greeting
2. **1:2–6** Praise, and a new command revisited
3. **1:7–11** Watch out for deceivers
4. **1:12–13** Final greetings

### 1:1 Greeting

John introduces himself as “the Elder” (Gk. *presbuteros*), who writes to “the chosen master”. The Greek word typically translated as “lady” and sometimes transliterated as a proper name, is *kuria*. According to the Strong’s listing for that word, it comes from the base word *kurion* which carries the following meanings and forms:

- 2959 Kuria... Cyria, a Christian woman: – lady
- 2960 kuriakos... belonging to the Lord (Jehovah or Jesus): – Master’s
- 2961 kurieuo... to rule: –have dominion over, lord, be lord of, exercise lordship over
- 2962 kurios... supreme in authority, i.e. (as noun) controller; by implication, Master (as a respectful ): – God, Lord, master, Sir

- 2963 kuriotes... mastery, i.e. (concretely and collectively) rulers:  
– dominion, government
- 2964 kuroo... to make authoritative, i.e. ratify: – confirm

Notice that all forms of the word are given the same range of meanings— lord, master, ruler, authority— but the feminine form alone is not assigned any of those terms. The only places the feminine form is found are here in this letter, in verses 1 and 5. The scholarly commentaries seem split on this, and they argue against each other's positions. There is also one that argues against John's likelihood of addressing anyone as "master" by virtue of Jesus being called "the Master", but the logic in that is very weak. After all, believers are called "holy ones" and so is Jesus, and some believers are called "masters" (e.g. Eph. 6:1).

We turn to the simplest interpretation in the midst of many theories, that being that John is addressing a woman who has leadership of a community of believers ("children"). Most translations agree that this concerns a community of believers in some way. If John is just writing to a family he knows, why did he not address it to the man? And why was this letter considered holy scripture and preserved with all the other scriptures? The simplest view would be that since the early believers considered it holy scripture, then it must concern the community of believers at large, making this woman the leader of that group. Linguistically and historically, there is no reason to treat the feminine form here any differently than the masculine form. Prejudice is the only explanation.

## **1:2–6 Praise, and a new command revisited**

John is happy that at least some of the people are living a life of truth, and he repeats his "old/new" law from the first letter: Love your neighbor. Again he points out the need for action and not just words.



## **1:7–11 Watch out for deceivers**

False teaching was a big problem even in the earliest Christian communities, and John again takes aim at the Gnostics who deny that Jesus came in the flesh. He encourages the people not to lose their hard-earned rewards by backsliding.

Now we see a rule putting restrictions on hospitality and who we allow into our meetings: Anyone who doesn't bring the teachings of the apostles is not to be welcomed. If we welcome them anyway, we are held accountable for participating in their false teachings. Churches today ignore this warning, letting in anybody teaching anything, "because they might get saved." But the community of believers is to go out into the world, not let the world in among us.

## **1:12–13 Final greetings**

We probably wish John had written more on these matters instead of talking with the people only in person. But if God had wanted those words preserved, they would have been. John then signs off with greetings from the "chosen sister" he is fellowshipping with at the time he wrote the letter.

# 3 John

## Background

The third letter from John was written around the same time as the other two, between 85–95 a.d. It's another personal letter, but this time the topic is a particular false teacher.

## Outline

1. **1:1–4** Greeting and Praise
2. **1:5–8** Instructions about helping others
3. **1:9–10** Proud Diotrephes
4. **1:11–12** Good Demetrius
5. **1:13–14** Final greetings

## 1:1–4 Greeting and Praise

As with the second letter, John introduces himself as “the Elder”, but this time he writes to an individual named Gaius. He has a good reputation of being honest and faithful among people he doesn't even know well.

## 1:5–8 Instructions about helping others

John instructs Gaius to support the people and share in their work. He tells him to send out some believers for an unnamed purpose. As with Paul, we understand this to refer to making provision for them, meaning not sending them out empty-handed. They gave up their possessions and livelihood in many cases and so had nothing.

## **1:9–10 Proud Diotrophes**

Like Paul, when John encounters a teacher who is deliberately and knowingly leading people astray or abusing them, he names them publicly. Someone called Diotrophes is domineering and not recognizing the authority of the apostles. He gossips against them and even throws people out of the fellowship if they don't do everything his way.

Sadly, this is a common problem today. There are many preachers who are proud and egocentric. They beat the sheep in their care and demand blind obedience, even excommunicating any who don't follow their 'vision'. An example was the Purpose Driven fad. Many reported being shown the door for resisting or asking questions, and some say that this was official policy.

Another expression of this pride is concerning women believers. Many who oppose women's full equality have come to the point of calling those who support it unbelievers and heretics. They refuse to let women exercise their God-given gifts for the benefit of the whole congregation, and they throw out any who teach otherwise. It's truly a case of those who "love to be in charge" domineering over those they consider beneath them.

## **1:11–12 Good Demetrius**

So Gaius is to be sure not to imitate such evil people but only good. In contrast to Diotrophes is one named Demetrius, someone everyone speaks well of.

## **1:13–14 Final greetings**

Like the second letter, John cuts it short so he can say more in person.

# Jude

## Background

The letter from Jude was written around 65 a.d., though there is a fairly wide range of possible dates. Scholars seem to agree that this was a half-brother of Jesus, just as James was.

## Outline

1. 1:1–2 Greetings
2. 1:3–4 The problem of false teachers
3. 1:5–13 A lesson not learned
4. 1:14–16 Enoch's prophecy
5. 1:17–23 Turning away from falsehood
6. 1:24–25 Praise

## 1:1–2 Greetings

Another “slave of Jesus” is Jude, who identifies himself as the brother of James. There was an apostle named Jude, but this one does not identify himself as an apostle. He doesn't say who his intended audience is, beyond their being believers, whom he describes as being “called by Jesus.”

## 1:3–4 The problem of false teachers

Jude's intentions were to just chat about salvation, but Gnosticism was rising up and infiltrating the young congregations. Notice that we are to “contend for the faith.” Many today teach that this is wrong,

unloving, negative, and so on. But there is no way to take this as a vague and gentle 'sharing' of what we believe. It's a strong defense and counter-attack against falsehood. And it's The Faith we are to contend for, not our personal convictions beyond salvation. It's The Faith "that was handed over to the holy ones." That faith is what is recorded in the pages of the New Testament, that Jesus is God in the flesh who paid for our sins and rose from the dead. We dare not be weak or unsure about this, nor fail to oppose any other teaching. The community of believers has been infiltrated by sneaky false teachers, but such are doomed. And we can recognize them by their immorality and disrespect toward God.

## **1:5–13 A lesson not learned**

This passage gives us a rare glimpse into the realm of angels. The "angels who did not stay in their positions but left their home" (i.e., "fallen angels") were thrown into an eternal gloomy prison to await Judgement Day. The statement that follows tells us that these angels were the ones who "were extremely promiscuous" as told in Gen. 6:1-8. The phrase "different flesh" is not defined but probably refers to the fact that angels were intermarrying with humans. It's possible that the stories we've all heard about alleged space aliens abducting people and doing experiments on them related to reproduction, are really either the remaining fallen angels or possibly demons (the hybrid children of the illicit unions) that are trying the same thing. Their destiny is "eternal gloomy darkness".

Jude ties the false teachers he's writing about to these fallen angels. These people are like animals, dismissing the supernatural as a myth and mocking all who believe in it. Yet not even the archangel Michael would mock Satan. This incident of them arguing over the body of Moses is not recorded in scripture. For that reason some believe the letter should not be in the Bible, but Jude is simply referring to an event in history, not promoting any false teaching.

Again, these false teachers are like wild animals who act only on instinct. They are an embarrassment at the “fellowship meals” in the assemblies, treating them only as occasions for gluttony and not remembering or respecting Jesus at all.

## **1:14–16 Enoch’s prophecy**

Jude mentions Enoch as making a prophecy about such evil people. Does this mean we should accept as scripture the Book of Enoch? Not at all. For one thing, there is no record of any other prophecies from Enoch. For another, there are many forgeries of the book. And for yet another, none of them are from anywhere near the time of Enoch. The Jews faithfully preserved the words of all prophets of God, so the absence of any ancient Book of Enoch should tell us something. If the letter of Jude can be called into question just for quoting it, then certainly the Book of Enoch should not even be considered.

So though there are some intriguing things in the Book of Enoch, and it may indeed be historically accurate, the point in quoting Enoch is that he predicted the final judgment of such evil people, who do nothing but complain and boast and fool people with flattery.

## **1:17–23 Turning away from falsehood**

Here Jude refers to apostles, implying that he is not one of them. They foretold the coming of scoffers and deceivers who would cause divisions in the community of believers. But in the face of that, we must be vigilant in prayer and in following the Holy Spirit. We must show mercy to those who are confused, plead with those who are backsliding, and thereby “snatch the lost from the fire.”

## **1:24–25 Praise**

Jude closes with yet another of many similar statements found elsewhere in scripture: Jesus is able to guard us and bring us safely into God's presence. He will again be recognized for the majesty he had before the ages.

# Revelation

## Background

The Revelation to John was written around 95 a.d. by the apostle John while exiled on the isle of Patmos at the order of the Roman emperor Domitian. It includes over 300 indirect quotes from more than half the Old Testament, primarily Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and Psalms. One list can be seen at [this PDF](#).

There is a particular correlation between Revelation and the prophecy of Daniel 9:24–27, commonly referred to as the Seventy Weeks prophecy. In hindsight we know that these 'weeks' or 'sevens' are groups of years, so if one of them remains it must last seven literal years, not literal weeks or days. The Messiah was "cut off" after the 69th week, interrupting the prophetic clock so that the Gentiles could be saved (see Acts 15:15–17, Rom. 11:11–25).

Regarding that 70th week, we're told that its beginning is marked by the confirmation (or renewal, enactment, enforcement) of a seven-year contract or treaty by the "prince that shall come" between Israel and "many", but halfway through he will violate it and the Jewish temple. So when this occurs in Revelation, we know it's the halfway point of the seven-year period. And we know Revelation is that 70th week because it has not yet happened, and Revelation reaches to the end of human history.

Another connection between the two prophetic writings is the matter of their being "sealed" or not; Daniel is told to seal up the prophecy (Dan. 12:9), while John is told not to seal it (Rev. 22:10), so Revelation must be the unsealing of Daniel's prophecy. And in Dan. 12:11 we're given a very familiar expression of time to readers of Revelation: 1,290 days. This is about 3-1/2 years, half of the seven,



and is the span between the abolishment of the sacrifices/Abomination of Desolation and the end of the prophecy. So the seven years are divided in two, and we can know the halfway point in Revelation by that event.

But if Revelation is the unsealing of Daniel's prophecy, which only concerns Israel and not the "church", then why is it sent to the "churches" and not the people of Israel? There are several points to consider:

1. Israel had rejected the Messiah and its temple had been destroyed at least twenty years earlier.
2. Christians are charged with knowing when the time of our departure is near, but not to be fooled into thinking we have missed it (ref. 2 Thes. 2:3).
3. The prophecy includes the glorious future awaiting us and is thus a great source of hope.
4. It serves as a counter-argument to the claim that Israel has been abandoned and replaced by the Body of Christ (ref. Rom. 11:1), or that the Body of Christ has been absorbed into Israel (Heb. 7:11–12).

At the end of this document is a very simplified possible chronology.

## Outline

1. **1:1–1:20** Prologue
  1. **1:1–1:11** Greeting, scope, and setting
  2. **1:12–1:20** Description of Jesus, and John's responsibility
2. **2:1–3:22** The seven letters
  1. **2:1–2:7** (1) To Ephesus (lost love)
  2. **2:8–2:11** (2) To Smyrna (fearless)
  3. **2:12–2:17** (3) To Pergamos (immoral)
  4. **2:18–2:29** (4) To Thyatira (falsehood)
  5. **3:1–3:6** (5) To Sardis (dead)

6. **3:7–3:13** (6) To Philadelphia (escape)
7. **3:14–3:22** (7) To Laodicea (indifferent)
3. **4:1–5:14** The throne in heaven
  1. **4:1–4:1** After these things
  2. **4:2–4:6** General description
  3. **4:6–4:8** Four animals
  4. **4:9–4:11** Animals and elders
  5. **5:1–5:14** The Lamb is worthy
4. **6:1–8:5** The seven seals
  1. **6:1–6:2** (1) White horse (kingdom of Antichrist)
  2. **6:3–6:4** (2) Red horse (war)
  3. **6:5–6:6** (3) Black horse (economic collapse)
  4. **6:7–6:8** (4) Green horse (1/4 population killed)
  5. **6:9–6:11** (5) Martyrs at the altar (persecution)
  6. **6:12–6:17** (6) Disasters, anticipation of doom
  7. **7:1–7:8** No wind, 144,000 Jews sealed
  8. **7:9–7:17** The multitude from the Great Tribulation
  9. **8:1–8:5** (7) Silence (preparing to sound the trumpets)
5. **8:6–14:20** The seven trumpets
  1. **8:6–8:7** (1) Hail, fire, 1/3 earth burned
  2. **8:8–8:9** (2) Blazing mountain, 1/3 sea destroyed
  3. **8:10–8:11** (3) Burning star Wormwood, 1/3 rivers embittered
  4. **8:12–8:13** (4) Heavenly bodies' light reduced by 1/3
  5. **9:1–9:12** (5) First woe: Locusts from the Abyss torment enemies of God for five months
  6. **9:13–9:21** (6) Second woe: Four angels, 200 million soldiers, 1/3 population killed
  7. **10:1–10:11** The angel and the little scroll
  8. **11:1–11:14** Temple measurements and Two Witnesses
  9. **11:15–14:20** (7) Third woe:
    1. **11:15–11:19** Praise in heaven, temple opened
    2. **12:1–12:18** The woman and the dragon
    3. **13:1–13:18** The first and second beasts
    4. **14:1–14:5** The Lamb and 144,000 on Zion
    5. **14:6–14:13** Warnings about the beast and Babylon

6. **14:14–14:20** Sharp sickles harvest earth
6. **15:1–16:21** The seven bowls
  1. **15:1–16:1** Preparation
  2. **16:2–16:2** (1) Terrible ulcers
  3. **16:3–16:3** (2) The sea becomes blood and everything in it dies
  4. **16:4–16:7** (3) The rivers become blood
  5. **16:8–16:9** (4) The sun scorches people
  6. **16:10–16:11** (5) Darkness over the beast's kingdom
  7. **16:12–16:15** (6) Dry Euphrates and unclean spirits
  8. **16:16–16:21** (7) The Battle of Armageddon
7. **17:1–20:10** The end of the world as we know it
  1. **17:1–17:18** The harlot on the beast
  2. **18:1–18:24** Babylon falls
  3. **19:1–19:10** Praise in heaven
  4. **19:11–19:16** Jesus on white horse, armies of heaven
  5. **19:17–19:21** Final battle of the Great Tribulation
  6. **20:1–20:6** The thousand years
  7. **20:7–20:10** The final rebellion
  8. **20:11–20:15** The final judgments
8. **21:1–22:5** Everything is new
  1. **21:1–21:8** Sky and earth
  2. **21:9–22:5** Jerusalem
9. **22:6–22:21** Epilogue

## **1:1–1:20 Prologue**

“Revelation” and “apocalypse” are the Latin and transliterated renderings of the Greek word meaning “unveiling”, or in this context we might say “unsealing”. It’s unclear whether the angel sent by God is Jesus or second angel, but it’s clear that the ultimate source of the prophecy is Jesus. Because of common illiteracy, it was necessary for the words to be read aloud by the few who could. So John or Jesus is promising blessings to the reader who does not add or remove words, and the listener who takes them to heart.

## **1:1–1:11 Greeting, scope, and setting**

The prophecy is to be sent to seven actual, historical churches in the Roman province of Asia, the area we now know as Turkey. These were certainly not the only churches or even the most prominent of them; conspicuous by its absence is the one in Jerusalem for example. So this may be a hint that there is more to these letters than simply to address immediate problems or challenges. Certainly the number seven is significant, seeing that it denotes perfection or completeness in the Bible. If so, then perhaps the prophetic significance is that this represents the completion of the church age.

## **1:12–1:20 Description of Jesus, and John’s responsibility**

All three Persons of the Trinity are cited as the author of the prophecy, along with the promise of Jesus’ appearing. The phrase “alpha, omega, and the God who is, was, and is coming” makes it clear that he is God. This is important to compare with the earlier words that seem to make the Father above him.

John then explains the setting: He has been exiled on the isle of Patmos off the coast of the province where the seven churches were, due to faithfulness to the Gospel. It was the Lord's Day, an expression presumed to refer to the first day of the week, our Sunday. (This expression is different from others such as 2 Thes. 2:2 about the Day of the Lord.) While he does not specify what "in the Spirit" means, it was in this state that he heard the voice ordering him to write down what he is about to see and send copies to the seven churches.

His description is clearly of Jesus ("the Living One who died"), and every detail is written in superlatives. Whether the individual qualities have symbolic meaning is not clear in this passage, but they may have significance in the detailed greetings to individual churches later. But Jesus explains the meaning of some of the things in the vision (churches and their messengers), so the likelihood of symbolic meaning is certainly high.

## **2:1–3:22 The seven letters**

We should keep in mind that not just the individual letters were sent to each church, but all the letters and the entire prophecy. So each church would know about the instructions to the others, though each had specific instructions that applied only to them.

There are different views on what or whether these churches also indicated something about the 'church age'. Certainly these were historical, literal churches, though some do try make them entirely symbolic in spite of evidence that they actually existed. Among those who accept them as actual churches, some believe the sequence indicates a progression of church history, while others believe they simply correspond to various conditions the churches of any given time might experience. But given the fact that none of the terminology used for churches is seen on earth again after the letters, it seems plausible to deduce that they symbolize something

about the entire duration of “church history” in some way. Yet we must note that since all these churches existed at the same time in the first century, and since the historical progression theory requires quite a bit of force-fitting, what these letters signify beyond the immediate and literal can apply to any given churches in any given time. That is, there is no clear progression, as if we can determine the lateness of the prophetic hour by the character of the Christian world in general.

But what does it mean that these letters are sent not to the churches but to their messengers? We are not told here or anywhere else in scripture, so all theories are pure speculation. Origen believed them to be guardian angels, while Epiphanius believed them to be bishops. The problem for Epiphanius’ view is that no human was ever called a messenger anywhere else in the Letters. Likewise, the problem for Origen is that no Letter ever mentions or hints at such non-human guardians. So with that in mind, and given the context here, we should consider that they might refer to literal human messengers who would be sent to each church to deliver their letter. We should note that in the specific wording for each, Jesus never speaks to the messenger but to all the people.

We also note that the parting statement in the seven letters is the phrase, “Let those with ears pay attention to what the Spirit’ is saying to the churches”. Jesus used this phrase in Mark 4’s parable of the sower and went on to tie it to Isaiah 6:9-10. He also used it in Mat. 11:15 after discussing who John the Baptist was. So it seems to be a expression of the culture and time to pay close attention to an important principle that requires effort to grasp.

Another repeated phrase is “those who conquer”. While most would agree that the specific promises in each letter are aspects of the general promise to all saved people, we cannot conclude that this injunction to “conquer” is a requirement to be saved, as it would contradict the clear scriptural principle of salvation by faith alone

rather than works. Instead, noting the context of reprimand in all but two cases, we can understand this need to “conquer” as being tied to whatever is wrong; that is, to correcting a fault. In those two exceptions, the intent seems to be to keep what has already been attained and thus avoid the pitfalls others have fallen into.

## 2:1–2:7 To Ephesus

In this letter Jesus emphasizes his being the one in charge of the churches. And as will be his habit, he begins with praise for what the people are doing right. Specifically, these people practice discernment and don’t blindly accept any claims by would-be authorities. But their fault is that they have fallen from the level of devotion or love they started with. Some interpret “the devotion you had at first” as referring to fellowship meals, but the word here is singular; it would make little sense to criticize people for letting go of their first fellowship meal.

Then Jesus adds another positive observation: They “despise what the Nicolaitans do, just as much as I”. Who are these Nicolaitans? Hippolytus of Rome, Irenaeus, and others claimed there was a deacon by that name who led people to live in wild indulgence, including eating food offered to idols and wife swapping. But the name itself means “to conquer the people”, and given the context and the fact that their deeds are separated from those of Balaam in the letter to Pergamos, it could refer to those who seek to impose illegitimate authority over the church. According to [Albert Barnes](#), the view of Hippolytus *et al* essentially creates a redundancy with Rev. 2:15, and there is no reason in the context to doubt that it refers to an actual group of people called by that name. In that same article, Cyrus Scofield specifies that it refers to the earliest form of a priestly order, or clergy. Noted historian Philip Schaff, in his [Histoy of the Christian Church](#) (sec. 42, Clergy and Laity), corroborates the early rise of hierarchy as well.

Finally, Jesus promises that “those who conquer will eat from the Tree of Life in the Paradise of God”. Certainly all the saved will do so, but the implication here seems to be that it’s the saved who will “conquer” the faults Jesus just defined, since salvation is not a foe to be conquered but a gift to be received, because Jesus is the true Conquerer; see Rom. 8:37.

## **2:8–2:11 To Smyrna**

In this letter Jesus emphasizes his being the one who died and lives and is eternal. He sees their troubles and hardships, and the slander they endure from false Jews. But who are these false Jews? It may refer to ethnicity, but the bulk of scripture would seem to favor the view that they are those Jews who have rejected their Messiah and are thus in rebellion against God, in spite of their ethnicity. Or, at the very least, they have abandoned the laws of Moses in favor of the Talmud and other rabbinical traditions which contradict Moses. The latter view would fit well with the prophetic concept of Israel in their land in unbelief, since the presumption is that those who still follow Moses are real Jews. We might also note that while Jesus lambasted the Pharisees for their “traditions”, the disciple Nathaniel was called “a genuine Israelite”.

Though the people of Smyrna are not reprimanded, they are told they will be persecuted by the devil (False Accuser), an obvious connection to the false Jews and the ultimate source of their falsehood. The “ten days” are not defined but probably refer to more than ten literal solar days here. Some, such as [W. A. Spurgen](#), believe it refers to ten persecutions to be experienced by believers through church history. But others (same reference) take it to mean a relatively short period of time, and we might note the contrast with Daniel’s weeks for years. A parallel might possibly be drawn as well with the era of papal persecution of various Christian groups such as the Anabaptists. The secular historical record shows that the believers in Smyrna did suffer, as reported by Ignatius (same



reference), but it's difficult to say whether it lasted ten distinct periods of time.

Now we see the connection with Jesus' opening statement about the one who rose from the dead: The people of Smyrna were to expect some martyrdom, but they could be sure this death is not the end. So the final statement to them is connected as well: They will not be harmed by the Second Death, which as the remainder of the prophecy will make clear, refers to eternal separation from God.

## **2:12–2:17 To Pergamos**

This letter begins with a curious statement, that the people are “where Satan’s throne is”. According to Harry Ironside in [Babylonian Religion](#), this likely refers to the Babylonian adepts and priests who fled from there to Pergamos. Whatever else it may mean, we can see why Jesus would introduce himself as the one with the sharp, double-edged broadsword. Their faithfulness in spite of this strong evil against them is particularly noteworthy, because they have already suffered martyrdom and still remained faithful.

In spite of that, they share a fault with the church in Ephesus: They have loose morals, and they follow the Nicolaitans. Here is where there would be a redundancy if the two referred to the same kind of sin. This is also where the “double edge” of that broadsword comes into play: The same sword that fights for them against Satan can also fight against them for their own sins. Persecution does not afford them the right to get away with sin— a lesson each of us as individuals should learn so that we make no excuses for our own sins.

The end statement referring to hidden manna and a white pebble with a secret name on it can be seen to refer to the power to endure as well as a verdict of innocence should they conquer the listed

faults. Satan as their accuser would thus be shown to have lost his case to have them convicted.

## **2:18–2:29 To Thyatira**

Here Jesus describes himself as the one who is both divine and human, who sees what the people have been going through and the effort they've put out. Though this was a small church near Pergamos and was not mentioned in any account of missionary activity in the scriptures, we should note that the convert Lydia was from Thyatira and is the most likely reason this church existed.

But then we come to the infamous name Jezebel, first seen in 1 Kings as the wife of Ahab. That Jezebel was certainly not a worshiper of God, but what scripture condemned her for was persecuting the prophets of God. She is often held up as the epitome of a manipulative and overbearing wife to a non-assertive husband, but her faults in scripture make no statement directed at such faults; rather, it's concerned with her treatment of the prophets and her enticements to immorality. So whenever someone cites Jezebel as the model of an unsubmissive wife, they are inventing a Jezebel unknown in scripture.

Here we see the focus on enticement to immorality, which likely means Jezebel was not the real name of the woman being discussed concerning the people of Thyatira. If this church had in fact been initiated by the woman Lydia, the woman Jezebel would serve as a stark contrast. Like the original Jezebel, this woman is encouraging immoral behavior and the worship of false gods. Yet it isn't just she who is being threatened, but also anyone who has followed her; they are responsible for their participation in her sins and cannot offer any excuses to escape her punishment.

In the face of such pressures, Jesus only tells the few who have stayed clean to hold on. And to those who do, Jesus will give

command over the Gentiles. The emphasis here does not seem to be on who is being ruled but that these who overcome will be rewarded in a manner appropriate for their suffering. Like Jesus, they will “shepherd with a rod of iron” which means that any threats to the ‘flock’ will be met with decisive and deadly force, in contrast to the time Jesus has given Jezebel to change her ways. As for the “morning star”, it’s one of the titles Jesus uses for himself, and probably is another way of emphasizing the co-rule of these who stay pure.

### **3:1–3:6 To Sardis**

Jesus describes himself to the church in Sardis as the one with the seven stars and spirits of God. Seven is widely held to be the number of divinity and perfection, which is about to be contrasted with the sorry state of the people there. They are blind to this poor condition, being at the brink of figurative death while believing themselves to be the very picture of health and vitality. They are to hurry and preserve what little remains of their former condition as a viable church at their beginning. They are not given time to change their ways as was Jezebel, but a very minimal opportunity whose duration will end without warning.

Yet even here there are a few who are not at fault, and they will wear the clothing of purity. They will also be honored with special mention before God and his angels as conquerers.

### **3:7–3:13 To Philadelphia**

This one of the two churches not reprimanded for anything is greeted by the one who opens doors for those without the power to do so themselves. They have been shut out by false believers who really belong to the “synagogue of Satan”, but such people will be

forced to abase themselves before their former victims, who will be honored by Jesus as his beloved people.

The phrase about keeping/guarding them out of the hour of trial that the whole world was about to go through is one which had no immediate and literal fulfillment in history. There has never been a worldwide persecution of Christians, and the phrase “the whole inhabited world” leaves no room for a regional or local event. But whatever it refers to, these people will be kept out of it completely; the Greek grammar clearly states “out of”, not “through or during”. It’s the world which is to be tested, not the Body of Christ which has already experienced testing throughout its history. This also connects with Daniel’s prophecy regarding the purpose of the 70 weeks; see Dan. 9:24.

The people are thus to be prepared for their sudden removal from the world. For those who do prepare, the promise is given that they will never leave the most secure place anyone could be: the temple of God in heaven. They will bear the names of God and of Jesus, as well as the New Jerusalem.

## **3:14–3:22 To Laodicea**

In this final letter, Jesus describes himself as the one to be trusted and the very Creator Himself (ref. Col. 1:15–16). So for the people to be indifferent to him and the Gospel is utterly repulsive, to the point that it nauseates him. Their self-image of being rich and complete is the exact opposite of reality, so they are strongly advised to come to him for the remedies to their pitiful condition. Above all, they must trade their sickening apathy for strong desire. Jesus has not been silent during this time but has kept knocking on the door; they had shut him out completely. Though the majority have paid no attention, the few who do will enjoy the close relationship that indifference cannot have. They will also be granted the right to sit on the very throne of the Creator.

## 4:1–5:14 The throne in heaven

John has been seeing and hearing everything to this point at his location on Patmos, but for the remainder he will be taken to heaven “in spirit”.

### 4:1 After these things

Since there is nothing in the text to indicate a bodily transportation, and since we know John remained in his mortal body afterwards, we cannot cite it as an example of a literal “rapture” event. However, we should note that this spiritual change of venue happened only after the letters to the churches were completed, and that the “open door” has a parallel in the letter to the church at Philadelphia. The passage begins with “after these things”, which refers to all that had taken place up to this point. If the letters as a whole refer to the entire history of Christianity, and since the churches are never portrayed on the earth after this point, then there is strong support for this change of venue at the end of the letters to symbolize events which only happen after that history is ended. So while this change of venue is not a *literal* Rapture, it’s certainly a *type*.

The Rapture (or Departure) refers to the belief that followers of Jesus will be “snatched away” or “caught up” to heaven (the Latin rendering of the Greek is where we get the word Rapture). The more direct references are found in 1 Cor. 15:50–58, 1 Thess. 4:13–5:11, and 2 Thess. 2:1–12. Among those who take this literally, there is much controversy over the timing. The most common beliefs are known as pre-trib, mid-trib, and post-trib. Another view called pre-wrath aims to take portions of all the others and arrive at a fourth conclusion. The key points in this debate are not only timing but what it depends upon: the definition of the wrath of God, whether believers would be kept safe through it or taken out of it, the

principle of imminence, and whether there are righteous mortals left to repopulate the earth after all the judgments are completed.

The pre-trib view argues that no specific signs or conditions are required to signal the Departure. It's possible that God does not want Satan to know when the Departure will happen, which would explain why Satan seems to keep trying to have a world government ready at all times, and why there are so many false prophecies about the end of the world. So the lack of prerequisites and the hiding of this event from Satan logically lead to the conclusion that the Departure is before even the first seal judgment begins. This does not require that the 70th week of Daniel begins immediately; it may very well not begin until the 6th seal or 1st trumpet. This would also mean that pre-trib believers are not necessarily mistaken in reading "the signs of the times", but that such signs do not apply to the Departure itself. Yet by extension, seeing signs of the 70th week of Daniel surely indicates that the preceding Departure must be even nearer. The great error of many holding this view is date-setting based upon those signs. It should be obvious, then, that the pre-trib view is incompatible with any others, since they have clear events to watch for.

The mid-trib view holds that the Departure must come at either the 6th seal (but see detailed discussion in the section about the multitude from the Great Tribulation) or 7th trumpet, depending on which one is believed to mark the midpoint of Daniel's 70th week. Its proponents argue that the followers of Jesus are promised "tribulation", yet the pre-trib view does not deny this. It shares with pre-trib the belief that the Body of Christ is exempt from the wrath of God, but it defines that wrath as limited to the last half of the 7 years.

The post-trib view holds that only the "Day of the Lord" at the very end of the bowl judgments is the wrath of God, thus only lasting part of a literal solar day. So they believe that Jesus will bring his people up to meet him on his way down to the earth to defeat the

Beast/Antichrist. Yet they also believe that the Body of Christ is protected during the 70th week, which seems to be a direct contradiction of the great numbers of martyrs coming out of it. It also leaves no mortals on earth to repopulate it during the Millennium.

The pre-wrath view holds that Jesus' statement, "those days will be cut short" (Mat. 24:22), allows a blending of the other views. The reign of the Antichrist is cut far short of its prophesied 3-1/2 years by the removal of the Body of Christ, and then after the 3-1/2 years Jesus returns with all the elect to begin the Millennium. Thus the world is repopulated by those who come to faith after the Departure.

This Commentary is written from the pre-trib perspective, holding that the definitions and durations of terms such as "the Day of the Lord" and "the wrath of God" cannot be limited to the extreme precision required by the other views.

## **4:2–4:6 The Twenty-Four Elders**

The scene in heaven is, if nothing else, indescribably glorious. Everything there, as well as God Himself, is compared to priceless gems and the brightest lights. One could of course look for symbolic meaning in every detail, and no doubt such meaning exists. But we're not given all the meanings and must be content with waiting for the answers till we see them ourselves. The possible exception would be the two stones mentioned— jasper and carnelian— since they match the first and last stones of the tribes of Israel and were worn on the priestly garments to represent all Israel.

Probably the most significant aspect of the scene, aside from God on the central throne, is the identity of twenty-four elders surrounding him. Some say they represent the righteous of all ages, while others say they represent only the believers of the "church age", and a minority believe them to be angels. But all agree that

they represent someone or something else rather than that there are literal elders around the throne of God.

Twenty-four is of course a significant number in the scriptures; this was the number of priestly orders under the old law for example. It's also double the very prominent number twelve, corresponding at least to the tribes of Israel as well as the inner circle of Jesus' disciples while on earth. We are also told that these elders wear white clothing and golden crowns. White clothing symbolizes purity and righteousness, and throughout the prophecy we will be told that white stands for "the righteous actions of the holy people". The Greek word for the crowns refers to the type worn by victors rather than royalty. So these elders certainly represent human beings who have conquered and done righteous things. Yet they're not described as martyrs.

But perhaps the most significant detail is that they say to the Lamb, "You bought us for God by means of your blood" (5:9). Only humans could say this. According to [biblestudytools.com](http://biblestudytools.com), manuscript study strongly indicates that the elders include themselves in the company of the redeemed. But the four creatures are also singing this song, and it's likely they who refer to the redeemed as "them" in response to the song of the elders. So these elders represent at least all Christians prior to the judgments. It would seem from 1 Thes. 4:16 that the righteous prior to the 'church age' will not be resurrected until later, since it specifies those who died as believers in Jesus.

## **4:6–4:8 Four animals**

Also surrounding the throne are four animals or "living things". Their meaning is not given, so again we can only speculate. Some say that since the Holy Spirit is represented by seven lampstands, so also these animals represent something about the attributes of God. Others say that they represent the way the tribes of Judah (lion), Ephraim (ox), Reuben (man), and Dan (eagle) would pitch their tents



around the Tabernacle. Still others say that they have some connection to the prophecies of Daniel and Ezekiel as symbolic of certain angels. These last two would also indicate that the focus is on Israel rather than Christianity, further bolstering the view that all of Revelation beyond the seven letters is post-'church age'.

## **4:9–4:11 Animals and elders**

Whatever or whoever these entities represent, their purpose in heaven seems to be simply to honor and worship God. But it's only the elders who have crowns to throw at his feet, so they probably do not represent the same entity. And as we'll see, it's only the animals that call forth the four horses of the first four seals.

## **5:1–5:14 The Lamb is worthy**

Now begins the preparation for the actual judgments. God holds a scroll written on both sides and sealed in seven places, such that the seals must be broken in sequence. It may be that the "strong angel" demanding to know who is worthy to break the seals is none other than the angel (possibly Gabriel as identified in ch. 9) who had given Daniel the Seventy Weeks prophecy and told him to seal it. John's emotional reaction to the absence of any such worthy individual is not explained, but it certainly illustrates the great importance of the scroll, which some think may be the 'title deed' to the earth that was given to the serpent in Eden.

Then of course the Lamb, obviously Jesus due to having been killed in sacrifice and symbolically portrayed as divine by the seven horns and eyes, is shown as the one worthy to break the seals. Though one might expect to see him in heaven as the Lion of Judah, it's the sacrifice that brought worthiness; the time for taking back the kingdoms of the world is not yet. Those who had been worshiping

God on the throne now fall before the Lamb as further support for this being Jesus who is both divine and human.

## **6:1–8:2 The seven seals**

To this point, everything has transpired in heaven, but now we begin to see the results of heavenly activity on the earth. Yet does the opening of the first seal signify the beginning of the seventieth week? All we know for certain is when the middle of that week has been reached, as noted in the Background. But we're given no timeline for the sequence of events leading up to that point, which will not be until the seventh trumpet. Even if we know that all Christians are brought to heaven before the seals are opened, we do not know that there will be an immediate confirmation of the seven-year treaty at that moment, and nothing at all is said about this treaty in the entire prophecy.

So it's impossible to say whether the events the seals cause are part of that final seven years. At the same time, however, we must note the very close similarity between the seals and Jesus' discourse in Mat. 24, while also remembering that those words were spoken to Jews before the cross. This leads to the possible conclusion that the seals constitute a kind of overview of the seven years. But the problem is in the details; for example, the proportions of destruction are not the same ( $\frac{1}{4}$  for the seals but  $\frac{1}{3}$  for the trumpets).

Some say that all the judgments, including the seals, must happen in the second half of the seven years. Yet because the Two Witnesses are killed by the Beast during the sixth trumpet, and since they had been active for 3-1/2 years, we can deduce that this period of time was during the first half of the seventieth week, so they began with the confirmation of the seven-year treaty. Then it seems a stretch to think that none of the disasters caused by the witnesses were part of the judgments of God. So it seems reasonable to conclude that the seventieth week begins at least with the trumpets.

But what if that seventieth week does not start with the seals? It's possible that the seals are during a time between the Rapture and the seventieth week wherein many lesser-known end-times prophecies take place, such as the battles of Psalm 83 and Ezekiel 38-39. And it may be that this time is what Jesus called "the beginning of labor pains", and that the Tribulation cannot begin until the entire scroll is unsealed.

Another consideration is that if the seals and trumpets comprise the first half, why the imbalance of having 2/3 of the judgments in one half and 1/3 in the other? Yet another is whether any given set of judgments takes up an entire 3-1/2 year period or only transpires during a small portion of that time. And still another is whether people could possibly survive at least 3-1/2 years under such horrendous conditions. Many questions arise from the judgments to come.

## **6:1–6:2 (1) White horse**

As one of the four animals calls forth this horse and rider, we need to ponder whether these horses and riders represent people or are personifications of other entities. This one is often said to represent the Antichrist/Beast, but the problem is that none of the other horses are mapped to individuals. It would seem more consistent to view this one as representing the kingdom or government of the Beast, or simply ideological conquest.

"Bow" (Greek *toxon*) is a means of shooting arrows, not any kind of ornamental ribbon or even a halo. The Greek Old Testament doesn't render this word as anything but a weapon of war (see Zechariah 9), except for the rainbow after the Flood. Note also that this bow is held in the rider's hand, not worn like a sash. Similarly, the crown (Greek *stephanos*) on the rider's head is not the diadem of royalty but the wreath of a victor or conquerer. The white color of the horse often represents purity throughout Revelation, but it also symbolized

indifference or peace to the Greeks of the time. Considering all of this as well as the fact that it's the Lamb opening the seals rather than riding the horse, it seems clear that this seal's horse and rider do not represent Christ and his followers, who were never told to conquer the world but only to evangelize it. Otherwise we would have to say that the Christian community has been without power or weapons.

## **6:3–6:4 (2) Red horse**

The “fiery” (Greek *purros*) horse, if red, symbolized death to the Greeks; if literally made of fire, it would symbolize that which consumes and destroys. From the statements there about the large sword and people slaughtering each other, it seems clear that this seal denotes all-out war. The fact that this follows immediately after the white horse lends further weight to the interpretation that this has nothing to do with Christ or his people. So we can interpret the white horse and rider as denoting a conquest that is not open war, such as political intrigue, espionage, and organized crime. Also note that these horses and riders are the ones executing the judgments, not suffering them, so they cannot represent the suffering of Christ or his followers.

## **6:5–6:6 (3) Black horse**

The black horse can symbolize mourning, but given the statement about scarcity of necessities it more likely represents economic disaster. If the first horse represented a weakening of society, and the second the open destruction of infrastructure, this interpretation of economic ruin seems to follow logically.

## **6:7–6:8 (4) Green horse**

The fourth horse is green (Greek *chloros*), and in ancient Greece it symbolized fear. But it's ridden by Death and Hades, again the natural results of the preceeding seals. Note that these are given power to kill one fourth (not one third as in a later judgment) of the world's population by not only war but also its typical aftermath.

## **6:9–6:11 (5) Martyrs at the altar**

The earthly disaster for this seal is implied: Followers of Jesus are being singled out for execution. It shows the martyrs under or at the base of the altar, probably to symbolize that they were a special kind of sacrifice or offering, since their blood was literally poured out to God. Notice that they ask God to avenge their blood, and that the people who killed them are still alive on the earth. These are recent victims, since the murderers still living would not be liable for all the martyrs of history. Also note that they're told to wait patiently for more to be martyred, indicating that this point in the judgments cannot be the end. Later we will be told of others who are martyred specifically by beheading (Rev. 20:4).

## **6:12–6:17 (6) Disasters and fear**

The preceding seals seem like things the earth has endured before, but this one crosses the line into the terrifying; it's reminiscent of the magicians of Pharaoh's court being able to duplicate the first few plagues and signs from Moses but then recognizing "the finger of God". The description could be of a meteor shower and/or other cosmic disasters, some of which could possibly trigger earthquakes and volcanoes, which in turn could darken the sun and moon. John is simply describing what he sees without explanation, but any earthquake large enough to move all the mountains and islands is unprecedented. It cannot be a normal eclipse, since it would be physically impossible for both the sun and moon to be obscured at the same time.

Regarding the people hiding in caves and crevices, it's interesting to consider the reports of many underground bunkers, not only from the cold war but new ones as well. Speculation is that government leaders around the world are expecting a disaster of this magnitude, which is unprecedented in recorded history. At any rate, the people know why it's happening and don't deny the existence or identity of the God they're hiding from. Perhaps the long-standing demand of many atheists for God to prove his existence will have finally been met.

## **7:1–7:8 No wind, 144,000 Jews sealed**

After this obvious wakeup call from God, all the winds on earth are kept still while God seals 144,000 Hebrews, 12,000 from each of the 12 tribes. The angels holding back the wind are ordered to delay their impending assault by another angel who comes from the east. Note that these Hebrews are sealed on their foreheads, which will identify them during the plague of locusts at the fifth trumpet.

## **7:9–7:17 The multitude from the Great Tribulation**

After the sealing, John is shown a crowd of non-Hebrews ("the nations") in heaven, wearing the white robes of righteous acts. But this time he's told who they are: believers who come out of the Great Tribulation. Does the multitude's sudden appearance in heaven indicate that they just arrived there, meaning they were just 'raptured'? We can note that in these seal judgments nothing is said about Jerusalem or Israel, and this group is identified as non-Jewish. Yet we must remember that the church is composed of both Jew and Gentile; in fact, such distinctions aren't even made within it (Gal. 3.28). We can also note that though the four horses and riders also suddenly appeared, no one thinks that they had just arrived; likewise

for other entities to come. So we cannot say when this multitude arrived in heaven, and we cannot identify them as the church. But we can connect them to the statements of Paul (Rom. 11:25) and James (Acts 15:14) about “the full number of Gentiles” who were to “come in” before God would “return and rebuild David’s fallen tent”.

In addition, these people were in a process of coming out of the Great Tribulation; the Greek word rendered “coming” (*erchomenoi*) is a present participle. The present passive participle modifies “the ones/they” and so is under the nominative absolute category; ref. “those conquering” (*nikOn*) in Rev. 3:21. It’s therefore not “temporal”, that is, it does not indicate time but instead simply identifies the group’s origination. It would be as much within the bounds of sound translation principle to render the phrase, “These are the ones who will be coming out of the Great Tribulation” as that they “have come” out of it.

Regarding a similar issue in Rev. 3:10 (“I will guard you out of the hour of trial that is about to come upon the whole inhabited world”), the difference is the present participle; both speak of being “out” of something, but only this instance indicates a continuing process. So the most precise rendering would be, “These are the ones that come out of the Great Tribulation”. Though there are many contextual considerations to make in determining the temporal meaning (see [Learn NT Greek](#), excellent resource for Greek grammar), a strong case can be made for the continuing sense of the word. That is, the group was still being added to, not already completed, as also was the case for the martyred souls under the altar.

So we’re not compelled to argue that the Rapture must happen at the sixth seal, even though it’s only at that point when “the wrath of God” is acknowledged (6:15-17), and it’s that wrath which Christians are not to go through (1 Thes. 1:10, 5:9). Not only is the acknowledgement of people not the divine definition of the wrath of God, but they say it had arrived, not was about to arrive. And since

the Lamb opens the seals, and the Lamb is God, then even the seals are part of the wrath of God. Consider the following summary:

1. The church does not go through the Great Tribulation, as even the mid-trib view would agree.
2. The multitude is described by the angel as “those coming out of the Great Tribulation” (Rev. 7:13-14), emphasizing their origin.
3. The Great Tribulation is held by all but the post-trib view as certainly not any of the seal judgments, yet the 6th (not the 7th) is when the multitude is shown.
4. We are forced to conclude from this that the multitude cannot be the church.

Therefore, it seems likely that the sixth seal is the outside limit for the Rapture, in which case all the remaining judgments happen afterwards. Theories claiming that the seals happened over the course of history are too much of a stretch to even consider, being on a par with theories that the millennium has already commenced and Satan is already bound. As for the inside limit wherein the Rapture precedes the first seal, there’s no reason why it can’t, even if the wrath of God doesn’t technically begin until the sixth seal. Also, it can be argued that it’s not just the sixth that brings the wrath, but all the seals as a group, especially since they’re direct judgments from God.

Now if it’s asserted that Jesus’ ministry lasted 3-1/2 years and comprised the first half of Daniel’s 70th week, the seals did not happen at all during that time so they would have to be part of the second half. That is, all three sets of 7 judgments would have to be crammed into the space of 3-1/2 years, which seems practically impossible considering all that must take place, and especially considering that not all the end-time prophecies are contained in Daniel and Revelation alone.

So from the grammatical, contextual, and logical clues we’ve studied, the multitude is composed of Gentiles from the Great



Tribulation. One noted characteristic of all three sets of judgments (as well as the Old Testament) is the separation of Jew and Gentile, such that this Gentile-only group would fit the post-“church age” era. So the only conclusion left to draw is that they’re arriving in heaven during the bowl judgments. Given that the crowd appears after a massive worldwide earthquake, perhaps they were taken out at that time, though the group was not completed then.

But notice that they’re said to come out of the Great Tribulation specifically, meaning the second half by nearly unanimous agreement, in spite of the fact that they appear during the sixth seal. Yet it’s only after this that the 144,000 Jews are sealed (presumably to be protected from judgments to come), and they appear on Mt. Zion with the Lamb in ch. 14 just before the bowl judgments, which almost everyone agrees are at least part of the Great Tribulation. But surely the nearly seven-chapter span between the sealing of the 144,000 and the beginning of the bowl judgments is significant.

At this point we face a chronological dilemma. There is a clear sequence (first, second, after this, etc.), yet the points at which various things occur or entities appear seems conflicting. Even if we cram all three sets of judgments into the final 3-1/2 years, which would be required to put the multitude in both the seal judgments and the Great Tribulation, we still have to account for such things as the 3-1/2 year ministry of the Two Witnesses (ch. 11) that ends at the sixth trumpet— which precedes the bowls. Now we would have to push the bowls out past the Great Tribulation, which few would agree to since it’s the one thing almost everyone says defines that time. So not even putting all the judgments in the Great Tribulation solves the problem. In addition, there is no need for these witnesses while the Body of Christ is in the world, since that’s our mission for this age (Acts 1:8). This means that the Two Witnesses will not appear till we’re gone, so the only way to solve the problem is to assume a gap between the Rapture and the Tribulation. Yet if this is so— and it must be if the witnesses finish before the bowl judgments begin— then we’re conflicting with the “sixth seal Rapture” theory.

## **8:1–8:5 (7) Silence, then preparing to sound the trumpets**

We will see that the seventh of each of the first two sets of judgments marks the beginning of the next set. Here of course the next to come are the trumpets. Whether the trumpets are said to be contained by the seventh seal or follow it, the sequence is clear: the seven seals precede the first trumpet.

It begins with an unusual but short-lived silence, which is not repeated with the sounding of the seventh trumpet. So there is something different here, something that marks the trumpets and bowls apart from the seals. It could possibly indicate that the treaty marking the beginning of the Tribulation has been enacted, but we're given nothing in the text to explain it.

Then John sees an angel first place a censer on the altar, containing the prayers of the holy people. But this same censer is then used to get fire from the altar and hurl it onto the earth, causing many disasters. Is there a connection between the prayers and the disasters, as if the prayers were for vengeance as we have already seen from the souls at the base of the altar? We aren't told.

## **8:6–14:20 The seven trumpets**

Spanning nearly seven chapters, clearly the trumpet judgments are significant. However, rather than conclude that the trumpets comprise a larger amount of time than the other sets, we must consider the occasional flashback or parenthesis as being background or explanation or reminder to help explain what's to come. The overall character or theme of this set of judgments seems to be 1/3, and like the seals, the first four are different from the rest; the first four concern nature, while the rest concern humanity.

## **8:6–8:7 (1) Hail, fire, 1/3 earth burned**

Hail, fire, and blood are thrown onto the earth and burn up a third of the green plants, reminiscent of the disaster of Exodus 9:18–26. The difference is the blood, and no explanation is given for its inclusion.

## **8:8–8:9 (2) Blazing mountain, 1/3 sea destroyed**

The burning mountain that turns a third of the sea to blood and kills a third of marine life could be a meteor. But whatever it is, it also disintegrates ships.

## **8:10–8:11 (3) Burning star Wormwood, 1/3 rivers embittered**

It's called a star but could be any heavenly body. Yet there is no explanation for such a body making the streams and springs bitter and apparently poisonous. And if we interpret it as man-made, we wonder what country would poison its own water along with that of the rest of the world. Some of course would propose an alien weapon or ship, but were that the case we'd expect to see some reference here to demons or Satan.

## **8:12–8:13 (4) Heavenly bodies' light reduced by 1/3**

There is no cause given for the darkening of the heavenly bodies, but it accompanies the warning of an eagle about the remaining trumpets. To this point the sources of food and water and light have been crippled, and just when people think things are as bad as they

can be, God will turn his rage on the people themselves. He had promised that the seasons and harvests would continue to the end (Gen. 8:22), and now the end has come.

## **9:1–9:12 (5) First woe: Locusts from the Abyss**

The Abyss is a bottomless pit. According to Luke 8:31 it's the prison of demons, and possibly also the fallen angels if it's the same place as Tartarus (2 Peter 2:4).

Angels are sometimes referred to as stars in scripture, and since this one that had fallen from the sky/heaven is personified, we can safely assume that's the case here as well. This is the point where demonic forces are unleashed on mankind, since they come up from the Abyss and not the earth's surface as literal locusts would.

Their description could indicate flying machines of some kind, but their demonic character is undeniable. Further support for this is that their leader is Abaddon (Destroyer). We have to be careful not to assume that the angel who opened the shaft is this leader, but since it's fallen but did not just now fall, it's quite possibly a reference to Satan. However, certainly Satan would have released his angels a long time ago if he had charge of the prison earlier, but on the other hand the key is not handed over until this point.

This is also a rare occasion when we're given a duration: five months. And the hopelessness of relief or escape, even through death, is surely a foretaste of eternal separation from God. The torment is only on those not having the seal of God on their foreheads (that is, everyone except the 144,000 sealed at the sixth seal). Still, the worst is yet to come.

## **9:13–9:21 (6) Second woe: Four angels, 200 million soldiers, 1/3 people killed**

Now we see another group of four, this time angels who had been stationed (by force, so they're evil) at the river Euphrates for this precise point in history. Though the locusts could only torment, these can kill and are permitted to take out 1/3 of the human population (the earlier 1/4 + this 1/3 combines to reduce it by about half). They command an army of two hundred million, which could indicate the combined armies of the Orient, or possibly a demon army. John goes into great detail here in describing the horses and riders. Of course they could be literal horses, but just as easily this could be a description of modern weapons and armor.

And still the people refuse to change their minds about God. Though it's Satan and his forces that have tormented them and field vast armies spewing death, people still prefer to suffer rather than humble themselves before God. They prefer as their king the one who has caused all the suffering of the world for thousands of years, rather than the one who has limited his activities so people could freely choose. The choice was never between people's autonomy and serving a master, but between one master and another. They have been deluded into thinking that Satan would allow them to indulge themselves forever, when in fact he would torment them as shown in this prophecy.

## **10:1–10:11 The angel and the little scroll**

Chapters ten and eleven describe events between the second and third "woes". Though in some respects this angel seems to be Jesus Himself, in other respects this is not the case; for example, he swears an oath to God. The "little scroll" is not identified but also doesn't appear to be the same as the scroll with the seven seals. That John should eat the scroll, and that it tastes good but upsets

his stomach, is surely symbolic of something, but we're not told explicitly what this is. However, since it's John who is told to prophesy when he eats it, and since there is no opportunity for John to participate in any of the events to come, it probably refers to his continued mission in his natural life after the prophecy has been completely given.

## **11:1–11:14 Temple measurements and Two Witnesses**

Another task given to John at this point is to measure the temple of God, which had been destroyed on earth and thus must be one that would be rebuilt sometime early in the seventieth week. (The prophet Ezekiel was told to measure a presently non-existent temple as well; see Ezk. 40-48.) It's possible that the building of this temple will be part of the treaty with Israel, and we can rule out the temple in heaven because this one will be in the holy city (Jerusalem) which was to be trampled by Gentiles for forty-two months (3-1/2 years). Since Daniel had been told that the violation of the temple and worship of the Beast mark the midpoint of the seventieth week, and since this trampling was to last 3-1/2 years, we have further support for it being built at the beginning of the seven years. After all, the worship of the God of Israel would never be permitted after the Beast declares himself God in that temple.

Then we're introduced to the famous and controversial Two Witnesses. Most of the current focus is on their identity, but the text doesn't bother to identify them. The important fact is the duration of their prophetic activities, that being the very familiar 3-1/2 years. And since this is mentioned in the same place as the measurement of the temple, we can connect this period of time to that temple, meaning both the temple and the activity of the Two Witnesses coincide during the first half of the seventieth week.

The activities of these Two Witnesses are to wreak havoc on anyone who threatens them with harm, to have power over nature, and to give testimony to God. Their being equated with olive trees and lampstands has an echo in Zechariah 4, where the two images refer to the power and Spirit of God as executed by Joshua the High Priest and Zerubbabel the king. Some of their activities also resemble those of the prophet Elijah, including the 3-1/2 years of drought, and the plagues of Moses.

The biggest question these two raise is, Why here and now? Why are these two duration-specified events only brought up as part of the sixth trumpet? A clue might be that it was only at the fifth trumpet that the Abyss was opened, and immediately after the Two Witnesses are mentioned we're told that the Beast ascending from the Abyss kills them. And since the Beast is presumed by many to be the now Satan-possessed world leader who signed the treaty 3-1/2 years ago, then the midpoint of the seventieth week when the Beast declares himself God is shortly after the Two Witnesses are killed— yet another support for their ministry having begun at the start of that week of years. We can add as well the fact that the world is still functioning enough so that people can celebrate their death by exchanging gifts for 3-1/2 days (there's that number again), yet another reason to place their activities in the first half of the seventieth week.

But the gloating is short-lived because the Two Witnesses rise from death and are taken up into heaven while their enemies watch. And lest the Beast try to spin all this into him being Christ who sends the two he might say are the Beast and the False Prophet into the Lake of Fire (a great deception if he could get away with it), God destroys a tenth of Jerusalem and seven thousand people with a severe earthquake. The message is clearly perceived and causes the survivors to finally give honor to the God of heaven. There is also an obvious parallel with the cloud in which the two are taken up, and the one in which Jesus was taken up at his ascension (Acts 1:9).

Yet even then, the most severe judgments of all are about to begin, and if this marks the second half of the seventieth week (Dan. 9:27), we can refer to it as the Time of Jacob's Trouble (Jeremiah 30:4–7, Daniel 12:1, Mat. 24:15–22), or traditionally, The Great Tribulation. As we'll see in Rev. 13:5 (same as we did in this passage when the temple was measured), the duration of this time is forty-two months or 3-1/2 years.

## **11:15–14:20 (7) Third woe:**

Many things are covered in this final trumpet and third “woe”. The timing of these events is not at all clear, though parts have a strong symbolic link to the distant past.

## **11:15–11:19 Praise in heaven, temple opened**

At the sounding of the final trumpet, praise breaks out in heaven, because with the completion of the impending final set of judgments will come the kingdom of God to earth. Along with the reward of the holy people of God will come the ruin of those who have ruined the earth. No explanation is given for why the temple is opened to expose the Ark of the Covenant, but we can note that it happens at the onset of the final judgments.

## **12:1–12:18 The woman and the dragon**

These two topics are identified as “signs in heaven”. The first has obvious similarity to that of the dreams of Joseph (Gen. 37:9–11) and is in great contrast to the woman to be discussed later, Babylon the Great. Some say that this sign refers to a particular astronomical alignment, when the constellation Virgo has the sun near her head and the moon near her feet. If a comet moves up to where it appears to be like a tear coming from her eye, it would be as if she



is crying out with the agony of childbirth. Then if it moves up to the top of her head it may appear to be like a crown. This has happened in the past and may also happen in the future, but so far no significant events have accompanied it.

We should also note that not everything in the imagery matches the past. If the child is Jesus, which seems obvious from the description, we know he was not immediately snatched up to heaven the moment he was born. And we also know that neither Israel nor Mary was carried on eagle's wings into a place in the desert and protected for 1,260 days (3-1/2 years).

However, we have a precedent in Daniel for even a single sentence in a prophecy having a great amount of time elapse from one part to another, in the seventy weeks prophecy. (Of course some views such as Preterism reject this and therefore place all seventy weeks in the past, but there are critical problems with this view which are outside the scope of this writing.) It would seem that such a situation faces us here, since both the similarities and differences to past events are undeniable. And as we saw with the Two Witnesses, the point in this seventieth week at which this image is presented probably has significance.

There is a place at the south end of the Dead Sea called Petra, an ancient city carved out of the canyon walls and rediscovered in 1812. (Actual footage of the outside of part of Petra was shown in the movie *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*). A nice article about the city can be found at [this source](#). Many believe this is the place the woman will be taken to in order to be sheltered from the wrath of God for the second half of the seventieth week. But regardless of the location, the woman apparently represents godly people from Israel, and this may be the final fulfillment of Mat. 24:15–25.

As for the dragon, this is clearly representative of Satan. The gap in time would then be between the birth of Jesus and the war in heaven between the dragon and the archangel Michael (ref. Jude

1:9, Dan. 10:13, 20–21, 11:1, 12:1), since the words between the two events are literally “and it came to pass”. So at this point in the seventieth week, Satan is forever barred from access to the throne of God to accuse the followers of Jesus.

This prompts the warning to those still on earth, that the devil will add his own great rage to everything else going on. He tries to pursue the woman (Israel fleeing to safety) but fails, then turns in a great rage to go after “the rest of her offspring”, presumably either the unfaithful Jews or Gentiles who belong to Jesus.

## **13:1–13:18 The first and second beasts**

Now we’re given detailed accounts of the Beasts. Though the first Beast was mentioned earlier as killing the Two Witnesses, it’s only after the woman escapes to the desert that we’re given much information about it. The symbolism is clearly related to that found in Dan. 7:7–8, Rev. 12:3 and 17:3,7 and serves to identify it as an empire, yet this includes its emperor as well. We know from Daniel that this Beast must be connected to “the prince that shall come”, whose people were historically the Romans; under the Roman Titus they obliterated “the city and the sanctuary” in 70 a.d. We will discover more ties with ancient Rome in chapter 17 and should also consider the possibility of the rebirth of Rome as an antitype of the rebirth of Israel.

Notice that it’s one of the heads of the Beast that’s apparently dealt a mortal wound and then healed; this would seem to refer not to the whole empire but to a leader, a person. This leader is then worshiped by the whole world and clearly aligns himself with, and is empowered by, Satan. The wound could be the Beast’s claim to being Christ since he had appeared to die and rise again. If so, many are deceived into worshiping him and help to hunt down anyone he opposes. And again we’re told that this empire will rule for forty-two months or 3-1/2 years.

Then we're told of a second Beast, given power and authority by the first. Its symbolism is apparently of religious deception, and it forces people to worship the first Beast. This is why the second Beast is also called the False Prophet, though that title is not given in the text until later. We should note that it's this second Beast, not the first, who makes everyone accept an inscription on their forehead or right hand, one that undoubtedly signifies loyalty to the first Beast. As such, it cannot be forced on anyone but must be accepted voluntarily— though the price of rejection will be death. (As a side note, it's quite ironic that the same people who have always denounced God for this 'sadistic choice' will eagerly line up to accept the same choice from Satan.) Without such a pledge of loyalty, no one will be allowed to buy or sell.

Much endless speculation could be presented as to the meaning of the number 666. We do know that in that time and culture the letters of the alphabet were used to represent numbers, but all efforts at finding a fool-proof method to determine the precise name or meaning have proved fruitless. At the simplest level we can note that if seven is the number of divine perfection, the three sixes might represent the failure of Satan to achieve equality with God. But then one wonders why the Beast would want to etch the symbol of that failure on all his subjects.

## **14:1–14:5 The Lamb and 144,000 on Zion**

We were introduced to the 144,000 under the sixth seal, but now these people are in heaven. Their being called a “harvest” would suggest that they were all martyred. But what is the significance of their being single, celibate males? The word for “unmarried” is almost exclusively used for females. If part of the significance of the 12,000 from each tribe is a reference to a military force, it should be noted that one requirement for Israelite soldiers going into battle was sexual purity (Deut. 23:9-10, 1 Sam. 21:5, 2 Sam. 11:11). This is consistent with the overall purity theme in Revelation. As for the

phrase about not being “polluted with women”, it simply means that they were not promiscuous, since marriage does not “pollute” anyone. Some might otherwise jump to the conclusion that there is something inherently vile and poisonous about all women, as many false religions teach.

## **14:6–14:13 Warnings about the beast and Babylon**

Now it appears that we’re about to rejoin the sequence of judgment as an angel flies around spreading the Gospel and urging people to fear God and honor him as the one and only Creator. But this one is followed by another who announces the fall of a previously unmentioned entity, Babylon the Great. But instead of elaborating on this, the passage moves immediately on to a third angel with final warnings against worshiping the Beast and accepting the inscription. Notice the fate of those who don’t heed that warning: Their eternal, conscious suffering is undeniable with the words “there is no relief day or night for those...”. This is of course the exact opposite of eternal life, and if one is endless then so must be the other (ref. Mat. 25:46).

## **14:14–14:20 Sharp sickles harvest earth**

At this point we have clearly picked up the sequence of the seventieth week, since “the time has come to reap the harvest of the earth”. That this harvest is described as “shriveled” or long overdue for harvesting would seem to indicate its lateness. Then there’s another harvest of “ripe” grapes, but we’re not told if these are in fact two separate harvests, and if so, what the first one means as opposed to the second. The meaning of at least the second harvest is quite clear: an epic bloodbath outside of “the city”, largely held to refer to Jerusalem.

## **15:1–16:21 The seven bowls**

The bowl judgments are described by John as huge and perplexing, a notable difference from the preceding signs. They are the worst of the worst and serve to fully complete the wrath of God.

### **15:1–16:1 Preparation**

Before the bowl judgments begin, John is shown something like a sea made of glass mixed with fire. We're not told what this signifies, but the focus seems to be on the people standing next to it, who had conquered the Beast and now hold glassy harps. They sing "the song of Moses", another possible allusion to the plagues of Egypt. Or it could refer to the one Moses wrote down in Deut. 32, which seems to have closer parallels to the events of Revelation.

The sequence is clear with the familiar phrase "after these things", and following the song the temple in heaven is opened again. Seven more angels come out of it, and they hold the bowls of the last disasters to be poured out on the earth. The bowls are given to them by one of the four animals, though again we're not told what meaning this may have. And though the temple is opened, it's filled with smoke so that no one can see inside until the disasters are completed.

### **16:2–16:2 (1) Terrible ulcers**

As with the selective plagues of Egypt, only those people with the inscription of the Beast break out in terrible, disgusting sores when this bowl is poured out. We're not told why this particular disaster distinguishes between the people of God and the people of the Beast, while the others are indiscriminate.

## **16:3–16:3 (2) The sea becomes blood and everything in it dies**

As just mentioned, the second bowl affects everyone because it's poured out on the sea, killing everything in it.

## **16:4–16:7 (3) The rivers become blood**

Still generally paralleling the less intense trumpet judgments, the third bowl affects freshwater sources. As this completes the turning of all earth's water to blood, we're told that this is payback from God for spilling the blood of his people. Clearly, vengeance is not incompatible with love, because it shows love and justice to the victims.

## **16:8–16:9 (4) The sun scorches people**

This bowl causes the sun to suddenly become much more intense. The people react by cursing God because he had control over this disaster, much as many do today. They blame God for not using his power to stop evil from happening, but ignore their own evil actions against people who belong to God, and they fail to use what power they have to stand against the evil done to them. They also want God to do two mutually-exclusive things: leave them alone, and micromanage them so nothing bad happens. The free will of human beings and the evil of Satan must, for reasons we're not told, run their course. But when they do, all scores will be settled.

## **16:10–16:11 (5) Darkness over the beast's kingdom**

The scorching sun was apparently its last gasp; the lights have been dimmed before, but now they go completely out. Remember this when reading about the remaining bowls.

## **16:12–16:15 (6) Dry Euphrates and unclean spirits**

The rivers had already been turned to blood, but now this particular famous river dries up completely. As an antitype of the passage of Israel through a dry path in the Red Sea, the hordes of the east now cross the dry Euphrates riverbed in preparation for the most famous battle of all. That these hordes are driven by evil is symbolized by the appearance of frogs as unclean spirits from the mouths of the Beast, the False Prophet, and the Dragon, who are responsible for this battle.

## **16:16–16:21 (7) The Battle of Armageddon**

After a parenthetical warning for people of God to stay sharp, the Battle of Armageddon is staged. But apparently before it can start, the final bowl is poured out into the air, the significance of which we're not told. It causes "the mother of all earthquakes", causing every island and mountain to disappear, as well as causing all the cities of the Gentiles to collapse. We're not given the identity of "the great city" that is split into thirds, but the two likely candidates would be Jerusalem and Babylon. As it seems unlikely that this would happen to Jerusalem, then it's likely Babylon, especially since it's cited by name as the supreme object of God's wrath.

But before we get a detailed account of the fall of Babylon, and remembering the darkness over all the Beast's kingdom, we're told that hailstones weighing a hundred pounds start falling from the sky.

Not only can people not see them coming, there's also no place left to hide. But even this is not enough to knock sense into them.

## **17:1–20:10 The end of the world as we know it**

The judgments and disasters are complete, but a few other loose ends remain before human history is officially and completely ended, including the thousand year reign of Christ on earth.

## **17:1–17:18 The harlot on the beast**

This is where we meet “the other woman”, the Great Harlot. This seems to be a look back, at least for her part in the seventieth week, while her inglorious demise happens probably at the midpoint. This chapter seems to describe the religious or ecclesiastical aspect of Babylon, while the next seems to describe the political and commercial aspect. It's only an entity that once belonged to God who is ever described in scripture as a harlot, and we have only two to choose from: Israel and the Bride of Christ. Since the former is the victim in this seventieth week and was already represented by the woman with child, we're left with the apostate 'church in name only'.

First we're told that she “sits on many waters”, a common Biblical reference to rule over many nations. Her rule is said to have been attained through promiscuity, selling her 'favors' for money and power. But John is only told these things, and next he will be taken “in spirit” to see her for himself.

John describes a woman riding a red beast covered with vile names and having seven heads and ten horns. These now-familiar terms tell us that this is the empire of the Beast, though the color seems to convey additional information. So the woman has been using this



empire for her own ends, steering and controlling it, though also dependent upon it. But if she represents religion, she must have been active in the first half of the week, since at the midpoint the Beast demands all worship for himself. Shortly after this we will see how the Beast throws her off.

She has become filthy rich, looking and acting the part of queen of the world. And she has in her hand “a golden chalice filled with the disgusting filth of her promiscuity” as proof of her vile behavior. So she’s properly labeled “Mother of Harlots and Everything Disgusting”.

On top of all this, she is drunk— with the blood of the holy people, a sight that completely shocks John. We might ask why, since he had been familiar with persecution, until we remember that this woman represents the utterly corrupt ‘church’. How could she have come to this, and cannibalized her own people? But like everything else the Beast touches, she was set up as the impostor of all that is good and pure.

But here we’re not left to speculate; the angel explains these two entities. We need to keep this in mind, because many try to allegorize the explanation. The woman and the beast are the symbols, but what the angel says next is the authoritative explanation for what they mean, so there is no justification for allegorizing them.

First is the beast or empire. It’s this empire which had existed before John’s time but not during, yet it would rise again to take part in this prophecy’s fulfillment. So we know that the kingdom of the Beast is not a new entity but an old one, as mentioned earlier regarding being the antitype of reborn Israel. Now at this point we would rightly conclude that this empire is Babylon and not Rome, since Rome was in power in John’s day. And we know from history as well as scripture that Babylon was both a political and a religious empire, and was at its peak in the time of Daniel.

But we also know that Babylon therefore could not be guilty of the blood of people belonging to Jesus, since they did not exist until well after Babylon had fallen from power as a world empire— though its religion lived on in many forms. So at this point we must conclude that this beast is the revived empire of Babylon. Yet even though these details to come are not to be allegorized, they're clues nonetheless and need to be carefully studied. That is, one does not interpret a symbol with another symbol but with something real and definite.

Note first of all that though the seven heads are on the beast and not the woman, they represent some connection between her and the beast: seven mountains or hills. But tempting as it may be to immediately connect this with Rome as 'the city on seven hills', the angel tells us that these hills stand not for literal hills but for kings. And like the three stages of the empire, these kings follow a sequence: five had already fallen before John's time, one was his contemporary (as opposed to the beast's "is not now"), and the other was to come and then be followed by an eighth. So what king was in power as an empire in John's day? None other than the Caesar of Rome.

So the beast itself is the Babylonian empire, while the heads are a line of kings spanning the Babylonian and Roman empires, which will turn out to be the first and the last. Yet here we're also told that the beast itself is the eighth king, who will throw off the woman at last. This means that the line between emperor and empire is not so easily distinguished.

Now we must look for seven, and only seven, great world powers, and what we find is this: Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, and Greece had fallen, Rome was, and Rome and then Babylon was to come. But the woman will have "ridden" them all, so she can be none other than religion which opposes and wishes to supplant the worship of the one true God. She is all false religion, not one

particular religion, though all of them have the same root. Religion has always been the glue that kept vast empires together.

To summarize then, we would expect the first half of the seventieth week to be the reign of the revived Roman Empire, and the second half the reign of the Beast/Babylon Empire. As Daniel saw in the vision of the statue, the revived Roman Empire will be weak and short-lived. But all the masks of false religion will be torn off when the eighth king takes power and Satan openly demands direct worship.

Now on to the ten horns. They too are kings, but kings that had not yet come as opposed to the long historical line of the 7/8 kings. They will reign only a short time with the Beast, because they will hand him their power.

Now back to the woman. The waters she sat upon represent multitudes of people all over the world; false religion is everywhere, no matter what the government may be. But the ten kings and the Beast will finally be rid of her at last, exposing her for what she is and making sure she is really and truly dead forever. But this is all done by decree of God, who often uses evil to be its own executioner. No more hiding or pretending; the line between God and Satan will be clear and obvious when the Beast declares himself God.

But before we leave chapter 18 we're given another identifying characteristic of the woman: She is "that great city that has sovereignty over the kings of the earth." So while she certainly is representative of all false religion, she is also to be headquartered in a city that acts like a nation/state. Babylon clearly fits the description, but with its intertwining with Rome, so also does the Vatican. And remember that we cannot allegorize "city" since it's part of the answer to the symbol of the woman.

## 18:1–18:24 Babylon falls

Once again we see the phrase “after these things”, so we know we’re moving on in sequence from what has come before. The religious system Babylon was destroyed at the midpoint of the week, but now we’re at the end and political Babylon must be destroyed as well. This is proclaimed by a angel with great authority, and it confirms in no uncertain terms which Babylon this is. This one, like the other, has also been promiscuous, but instead of being drunk with the blood of holy people she has made the kings of the earth drunk with her indulgences. Though the two are really one, they’re like evil twins.

As the Babylon that has reigned for the second half of the week, she has used her power and wealth to oppress the nations, and now she must be paid back double portions of what she has dished out. Just before she is, the few who still worship God are to get away from her so they don’t share in her punishment. She will fall in one day, enduring everything she thought would never happen to her. And what happens is all about indulgent luxury, including human trafficking. Many are unaware that the slave trade is going strong even now, even in western countries, and this is not normal employment but literal slavery.

From the detailed description of the laments from various people in this chapter, we can see that such a literal city does not presently exist. There are some that come close, to be sure; the Vatican (see Mystery Babylon [here](#)) has unfathomable wealth in the form of precious metals and art, and though a city, it’s treated like any nation. But its influence is still mostly hidden and passing itself off as poor and humble, while this Babylon is brazen and obvious. So we can expect that after the Departure/Rapture there will be time for this situation to change. The current economic system is already teetering on the brink of collapse, and talk of fully implementing a New World Order is in full swing.

## **19:1–19:10 Praise in heaven**

After another “after these things”, attention turns back to heaven, where ‘the mother of all parties’ is getting started. People don’t only shout about how happy they are to be there, but also praise God for exacting revenge upon the Great Harlot as well. The tables have been turned at last. Now begins the reign of righteousness and the healing of the earth. But first there’s a cosmic wedding to celebrate, and happy invited guests. One might wonder who the guests are as opposed to the Bride, but this is not a problem for those who see the Body of Christ as a unique entity rather than the righteous of all time. John of course is overwhelmed by all this and falls down to worship the angel who showed it to him. But this is not to be done, even to a angel, since only God deserves worship.

## **19:11–19:16 Jesus on white horse, armies of heaven**

Then John sees the sky or heaven open up and a white horse appear. The rider is clearly Jesus, and he is followed by “the armies of heaven”, who are not identified. This is the actual Second Coming of Christ, since rather than meeting his people in the air to take them to heaven, he brings them with him to the earth.

Zechariah 14:3–4 specifies that he will set his foot on the Mount of Olives, which will then split in two, moving half the mountain north and half south for a considerable distance. In Mat. 24:27–31 Jesus says that people will see him descend from heaven in the clouds, bringing his chosen ones from one end of heaven to the other— not from the earth. The living will mourn if they were evil, and be overjoyed if they were good. These good people, still in mortal bodies, will then repopulate the earth for the thousand years to come.

## **19:17–19:21 Final battle of the Great Tribulation**

Now comes the final gasp of the kingdom of the Beast. In spite of the spectacle of Jesus and the heavenly armies returning to earth, and in spite of the humiliating defeat of all Jesus' enemies, the heart of evil knows only hate and rebellion. First there's an invitation much different from the one to the wedding of the Lamb: The flying scavengers of the earth are summoned to a great macabre feast. Then the armies of the Beast, assembled to apparently die to the last soldier, are given their wish without a fight. The Beast and False Prophet are seized and thrown alive into the Lake of Fire, and the armies are killed by the sword proceeding from Jesus' mouth.

## **20:1–20:6 The thousand years**

The Millennium (Latin for 'thousand years') begins with the imprisonment of Satan in the Abyss. Then the kingdom of Jesus is established, with judges who had been beheaded for refusing to worship the Beast or take the inscription; this is their position for the full duration of the thousand years. This is called The First Resurrection, but note that the scope of this phrase must be limited to the seventieth week of Daniel since we were already told of the Bride, the Guests, and the armies of heaven. In this context it would then seem reasonable to see it as referring to the first of those who came to God outside of the 'church age'. Those who had died in Christ were part of his resurrection and had already received their immortal bodies.

Since this passage identifies the people being resurrected as those who had been beheaded for not worshiping the Beast or taking the Beast's inscription at the midpoint of the Tribulation, then no one who died earlier, or by some other method than beheading, will take part in this First Resurrection. Also, these people only reign with

Christ for the Millennium rather than for eternity. Further, the passage contrasts this resurrection of the Tribulation saints with the resurrection of all the rest of the dead from all ages of history, at the White Throne Judgment in Rev. 20:11-15. Though it isn't named as such, this is the Second Resurrection.

Neither of these two resurrections pertain to the Body of Christ. As Paul stated clearly in 1 Thes. 4:17, not all Christians will experience death, so not all Christians will ever be resurrected; a person must die in order to rise. And if it's then argued that our resurrection is in Christ, then how many resurrections are there for those who die during the Tribulation and are raised again at the end of it? How many times can the dead rise without dying again? We must conclude that the first resurrection in this context refers only to people who came to faith during the second half of the Tribulation and were martyred by beheading.

Another passage often overlooked on this matter is the scenario provided by Jesus in Mat. 25:31. This is the well-known judgment of the "sheep and goats" which clearly happens when he returns to earth after the Tribulation and sits on his throne to judge the survivors. We have already noted that this is not the final judgment of all the dead. Another reason it's not the judgment of the church is that salvation is by faith alone (Eph. 2:8-9), and the post-Tribulation Rapture view agrees that the church has been given immortality by this time. So we must conclude that this is a judgment of the still-mortal survivors of the Tribulation.

There are two groups of people before the separation of sheep from goat even begins: the ones to be judged, and "the least of my brothers and sisters", But who are "the least"? It's possible that they could be the church, but it's also possible that these are the Jews who fled to the place of safety when they witnessed the Abomination of Desolation (Rev. 12:6, 14). They're not the ones being judged, since God kept them safe for the entire duration of the Great

Tribulation, “out of the serpent’s reach”. Their safety is proof of their being righteous.

Regardless of the identity of “the least”, the indisputable fact is that there will be righteous mortals repopulating the world after Christians have been immortalized and raptured. And since this is true, then there is no necessary reason for the saints of the Tribulation to be part of the church.

## **20:7–20:10 The final rebellion**

After a thousand years without war or suffering, one might expect people to accept the fact that the kingdom of God is a good thing. But Satan is released and immediately misleads people from all over the world into one final, desperate act of rebellion. Foolishly they surround Jerusalem, but before they can say “lock and load” God brings down fire from heaven and they’re all consumed. At long last Satan is thrown into the Lake of Fire to join the Beast and False Prophet, all to be tortured forever. If the events of the seventieth week prove nothing else, it’s that eternity will not be long enough to get the enemies of God to change their minds.

## **20:11–20:15 The final judgments**

Now we reach the point widely known as Judgment Day, and among Christians as The Great White Throne judgment. All the dead stand before the throne to be judged according to what they had done as mortals. Some contend that there are no degrees of suffering for the unrighteous dead, but if that were true there would be no point at all in judging them according to their deeds. Their eternal destination was sealed the moment they died, so the only purpose of judgment would be to determine the appropriate level of suffering according to how they had lived. And after they’re all judged, even Death and



Hades are dispensed with, since there will never be a need for them again.

## **21:1–22:5 Everything is new**

Since the words “sky” and “heaven” are the same Greek word, we don’t know whether our entire realm will be replaced or only the earth and its atmosphere. But who cares? Everything mortal, corruptible, or in any way associated with the old world of sin will be gone forever.

## **21:1–21:8 Sky and earth**

At the end of the thousand years and beginning of eternity future, the earth and sky/heaven (certainly not heaven as the abode of God though) are replaced. But there is more to this new arrangement than heaven and earth. The first specific item we’re told about is the New Jerusalem that had been decked out “like a bride dressed for her groom”, descending from the sky/heaven, but it doesn’t say it touches the earth. Given its enormous size, it may be suspended in the sky, unless the new Earth is much larger than the present Earth.

But before being given more detail about this city, we see the familiar phrases about “the alpha and the omega, the start and the finish”— terms applied to both the Father and the Son and indicative of Jesus’ divinity and full equality with the Father from eternity past to eternity future. We’re also given a token list of the characteristics of those who will never enter this intimate relationship with God, and should pay attention to the fact that cowardice is as revolting to God as murder and promiscuity.

## **21:9–22:5 Jerusalem**

Now one of the angels who had poured out the bowl judgments has a much nicer task to perform: to show John the New Jerusalem. Again John is taken away “in spirit”, this time to a huge mountain. This was his vantage point for what he had briefly told us in the opening paragraph of this passage. We notice here that this city is described also as “the bride, the wife of the Lamb”, just as the saved of the ‘church age’ are. So while one might presume that the New Jerusalem is only for Jews, this passage seems to indicate that it’s for the church. As we’ll see next, it meets the criterion given in Eph. 2:14 of having no divider between Jew and Gentile.

Of course we can hardly imagine the sight John beheld as he tried with mere words to describe it. He lists many precious gems and gold so pure that it’s transparent, but we’re not told of the significance of the various gemstones. And like everything else from God, the description of this city is done in superlatives. Of particular note are the gates, each of which is made of a single pearl (the basis of the popular phrase, “the pearly gates”), and each named after a tribe of Israel.

But of equal significance is the fact that the twelve foundations are named after the twelve disciples of Jesus. They were all Jews, but also the literal foundation of the Body of Christ. This is the picture of the unified body of Eph. 2:14. The city was measured by the angel using human measurements of John’s time. Whether a cube or a pyramid shape, it’s almost 1400 miles in length and width, and the same height. However, nothing in the passage states that the city will actually touch the surface of the earth. And there is no need for a temple, a lamp, or a sun, since God and Jesus are there.

But note that the nations will bring their majesty and wealth into the city, and that those who live in sin will not be granted entrance. From the description of the River of Life, we can deduce that there is some pathway or connection between the throne of God and the city. But the Tree of Life in the center of the city is said to be for the healing of the nations, which along with all the other clues would

seem to indicate that this pertains to the beginning of the Millennium rather than the end. However, it also says, “the Curse will be no more”, which could not be true during the Millennium since some people will die (Isaiah 65:20).

## 22:6–22:21 Epilogue

In closing the Revelation, the angel says that all this will happen “suddenly”, not “soon”. As has been said before and will be said again, when Jesus comes it will be unexpected and quick. And in case anyone says, as many do, that the study of future prophecy is a waste of time or even harmful in some way, Jesus promises blessings to those who take the words to heart and cling to them.

Apparently John is too overwhelmed to remember not to worship the angel (the opposite of our human tendency to shoot the messenger!) and has to be reminded once again to worship only God. But as noted in the Background, here again John is told not to seal up the prophecy, and the reason is that its time is “near”. Compared to the time of Daniel, anything this side of Jesus’ first coming is certainly near, so we cannot presume that it meant “near to the lifetime of John”, especially since in hindsight we know that this prophecy has not been fulfilled. If all is allegory, or all is past, then none of the blessings apply to us today for studying it, and we’re robbed of our hope of Jesus coming for us “in the clouds”. Neither is there any purpose in the many details given over the course of the prophecy; an allegory about good and evil hardly needs this degree of detail.

Then Jesus speaks directly, reminding people that the purpose of his sudden return will be to give everyone what they deserve, and repeating that everyone not purified will be excluded from all the blessings. He also repeats the fact that he is the First and Last, and adds that he is both the root and family line of David. This is his self-identification as God, man, and the Messiah of Israel.

Finally, there is a solemn warning to not tamper with the words of this prophecy (which many take out of context to apply to the entire Bible, though of course it should go without saying that tampering

with that would bring God's displeasure as well). And with John, all who "long for his appearing" (2 Tim. 4:8) say, "Come, Lord Jesus!". Let no one say we're uncaring for the lost when we, like a true Bride, long to see our Groom. Instead, let us use this glorious future for the saved as motivation to spread the Gospel that would grant to the unsaved access with us to the New Jerusalem.

## Simplified Chronology

The outline below provides a possible general sequence of events of Revelation. It should also be pointed out that we cannot presume that the sequence of any set of judgments is evenly spaced or takes up the entire 3-1/2 years; they could be sporadic or be all at the beginning or end. Another excellent study on Revelation is one from 1919 by Clarence Larkin at [Sacred Texts](#) (standard disclaimer applies).

1. The 'church age', ended by the Departure/Rapture
2. The seal judgments, possibly the "beginning of sorrows" of Mat. 24 and the battles of Ps. 83 and Ezk. 38, after which the people of Judea burn the weapons of their enemies for 7 years
  1. White horse: kingdom of Antichrist
  2. Red horse: war
  3. Black horse: economic collapse, scarcity
  4. Green horse: 1/4 world population dies
  5. Persecution: martyrs under the altar in heaven
  6. Earth and sky disasters
  7. 144k sealed, 1/2 hour of silence, 2 Witnesses begin 3-1/2 year ministry, 7-yr. treaty confirmed
3. The 70th Week of Daniel:
  1. First half (trumpets), revived Roman Empire and religious/fake church Babylon, possibly the 10 kings:
    1. Hail, fire, 1/3 earth burned
    2. Blazing mountain, 1/3 sea ruined
    3. Burning star Wormwood, 1/3 rivers made poisonous

4. Light from space reduced by 1/3
5. First woe: Apollyon-led locusts from Abyss torment people for 5 months
6. Second woe: 200 million troops, 2 Witnesses killed by Beast from Abyss, then rise
7. Third woe: Satan pursues Israelis fleeing to safety, then Satan thrown out of heaven, earth is harvested
2. Midpoint of the 7 years:
  1. Beast from sea given Satanic power, Satan and Beast worshiped
  2. Beast from land (False Prophet) orders Mark of Beast
  3. 144,000 with Lamb on Zion
  4. religious Babylon exposed and destroyed
3. Second half, Beast/Babylon Empire and military/industrial/Satanic Babylon:
  1. the bowl judgments
    1. Terrible ulcers
    2. Sea becomes blood and everything in it dies
    3. Rivers become blood
    4. Sun scorches people
    5. Darkness over kingdom of Beast
    6. Euphrates dries up, unclean spirits
    7. Armies assemble for Battle of Armageddon
  2. Jesus comes to earth, defeats all enemies but Satan
  3. Satan locked in the Abyss
4. The Millennium
5. Satan released and sent to Lake of Fire
6. New heavens/earth, New Jerusalem
7. Eternity

## **Alternate Scenario: Beasts and Sequences**

There are three distinct sources for the beasts:

1. from the Abyss (9:11, 11:7, 17:3-12), aka Abaddon/Apollyon

- red
  - ridden by harlot
  - king of locusts
  - slanderous names
  - seven heads and ten horns
  - "eighth king that comes from the seven"
2. from the sea (13:1-8), aka "first beast"
- leopard with bear's paws and lion's mouth
  - seven heads and ten horns
  - slanderous name on each head
  - a crown on each horn
  - one head with apparently mortal wound
  - mouth speaking slander
  - rule for 42 months
  - conquer saints and rule all nations
  - worshiped by whole world
3. from the land (13:11-18), aka "false prophet" (16:13, 19:20)
- two lamb's horns
  - speaks like a dragon
  - given authority of first beast
  - forces world to worship first beast
  - does miracles, causes idol to speak, executes all who refuse to worship it
  - deceives everyone
  - demands all to accept mark of first beast
  - number 666 given for first beast

A fourth entity, called the Dragon, is clearly Satan (20:2), also called the Devil and the Ancient Serpent.

But is the "first beast" the same as the one from the Abyss, even though they appear to have two different origins? The similarities are obvious; the only major difference, beside the mention of color in one case, is the point of origin. Can we then equate the Abyss with the sea? The first time we encounter the first beast is in Revelation 9:11, at the 5th trumpet, when the locusts come out of it after the

angel opens its shaft. The king of the locusts is Abaddon/Apollyon, yet the beast from the Abyss is not mentioned again until 17:3-12 as the beast ridden by the harlot. And at that point, the angel tells John that this beast had not yet ascended from the Abyss. Yet this first beast seems to be the one that kills the Two Witnesses at the 6th trumpet, in 11:7. The key here is that rather than John witnessing the ascendance of the Beast from the Abyss at this point, the angel is telling him about it as future to John's time. So the "not yet" is not a chronological problem here.

John writes things in the order he is shown them, but this is not necessarily the order in which they will take place. Is there a way to know when a sequence is being interrupted or paused to present background or concurrent events? The most common connecting words are "and, then, next" and "with/after these things". The latter is found only 8 times in Revelation:

- 1:19 write down... what was, is, and will happen after these things (just prior to 7 letters)
- 4:1 after these things I saw, and look! (just after 7 letters)
- 7:9 after these things I saw, and look! (after 144k sealed)
- 9:12 still two woes coming after these things (between 5th/6th trumpets)
- 15:5 and after these things I saw the temple opened (before 1st bowl)
- 18:1 after these things I saw another angel (between harlot described and Babylon destroyed)
- 19:1 after these things I heard the sound of a huge crowd (after Babylon destroyed)
- 20:3 after these things Satan must be released (after Millennium)

Certainly such words indicate sequence, but with the exception of the first one, they still refer to when John saw them rather than necessarily when they would actually happen.



After the 7 letters, John is shown heaven's throne and various entities. This includes a group of 24 elders who sing about having been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb, so they cannot be pre-Christian saints, yet they're in heaven before the seals are opened. And since nothing in terms of judgment has begun, this cannot be considered out of sequence. John is brought to heaven, he sees the elders, and after that the Lamb begins to open the seals.

The first possible out-of-sequence passage is 7:1-8:5, where the wind is held back, the 144,000 are sealed, and John sees the multitude from the Great Tribulation, which by all accounts is at least the trumpet judgments rather than the seals. From every other scripture describing the Great Tribulation, it's the 3-1/2 year span wherein the final judgments against mankind are unleashed. Some include the trumpet judgments in this, while others hold that only the bowl judgments qualify. Yet we see the multitude at the 6th seal, and there is no indication that they're martyrs.

The only event resulting from opening the 7th seal, besides the preparation to sound the trumpets, is a half-hour of silence in heaven. Does silence mean no further judgments during the first half of the Tribulation? Some say yes, since "hour" is sometimes used in scripture to speak of the final judgments, such that 1/2 hour would mean half the 7 years. Rev. 17:12 says that ten kings will receive power for "one hour" along with the Beast, which may or may not span the entire 42 months of his rule, which would be half of "the hour of trial", yet it says one rather than one-half.

So also is "day" used to refer to the same time of judgments, and Mat. 24:36 uses both "day and hour" together. "Hour" is also used to refer to a three-hour span of the day (third hour, ninth hour, etc.). Jesus also used "hour" to mean the entire span of his public ministry in John 2:4, which is held by some to be 3-1/2 years, though details in the gospel accounts seem to indicate a shorter time. 1 John 2:18 states that "the last hour" had already come. Rev. 3:10 shows a church being exempt from "the hour of trial to come upon the whole

inhabited world". Yet Rev. 9:15 says that four angels were kept for a particular "hour" inside of that "hour of trial".

So there seems to be no solid basis for the claim that this "half an hour" of silence must refer to the first half of the seven years. And the silence is in heaven, not on earth. However, Revelation never states that the three sets of judgments are evenly spaced. Yet what Jesus described in the Olivet Discourse as preceding the Great Tribulation has much in common with the seal judgments, and no indication of duration is given for any of them.

Could the seals, trumpets, and bowls each take 1/3 of the 7 years? Rev. 11:3 states that the Two Witnesses will be active for 1,260 days ( $360 \times 3.5$ ), and that this ends in 11:7 when the beast from the Abyss kills them. This is told to John after the 6th trumpet caused the 200 million troops to kill 1/3 of the world's population. But there seems to be a slight break or change in 10:1, when the angel with the little scroll has John measure the temple of God, and the Two Witnesses are introduced.

It's during this possible interlude or out-of-sequence passage that the beast from the Abyss kills them. So are they really killed between the 6th and 7th trumpets, since Abaddon/Apollyon had ascended from the Abyss already? Or does this not happen until 17:8, after the 7th bowl? It seems highly improbable that this beast would not appear until all the judgments have passed, and we do know that it first came from the Abyss at the 5th trumpet.

This being the case, then, it seems that the passage about the woman riding the beast is out of sequence, but the passage where the Two Witnesses are killed is in sequence. Thus the Two Witnesses had to have begun their task 3-1/2 years earlier, which means they're not active during the bowl judgments.

Now the question comes, where in Revelation is the midpoint of Daniel's 70th week, which is to be when the "prince" violates the

covenant, desecrates the temple, and declares himself God? Revelation says nothing about this, but can we not say that the point at which the beast is worshiped must mean he has declared himself God? We see that such worship occurs in 13:8,12. As a side note, it's after this that we see the 144,000 on Mt. Zion. And right after this is when the angel announces, "Fear God and give him honor, because the hour of his judgment has come" (14:7), which of course is after the trumpets have passed and the bowls are about to begin.

Yet if the 7th trumpet marks the midpoint, then the bowls are the sole judgments of the 2nd half. But these judgments make life almost impossible, seeing that the 2nd bowl destroys all the oceans and rivers. And if we put them all near the end, then the first two or three years of the reign of the beast experience no judgments from God. Still, we must also consider the fact that the people of Jerusalem are told to flee to a protected area when they see the temple desecrated, which in Rev. 12:14 is specified as "a time, times, and half a time". There is no point in having them run to safety and stay there for 3-1/2 years, if for the bulk of those years there will be no judgments from God. This is part of the vision of "the woman clothed with the sun" as part of, or following, the 7th trumpet. So between this and the death of the Two Witnesses, we have two reasons to mark the 7th trumpet as the midpoint of the tribulation, yet there seems little reason for the people to flee if the bowl judgments will not begin until one or two years later.

So it would seem that we're simply unable to find the precise midpoint of the Tribulation, a marker reserved for those who will experience it. We also cannot know with precision where in all this the remaining Old Testament prophecies besides Daniel will take place, such as the battles of Psalm 83 and Ezekiel 38. The latter involves a period of 7 years when the people in the vicinity of Jerusalem use the weapons of their enemies as fuel, part of which time they also spend burying their enemies' bodies. Such activities seem most unlikely during the bowl judgments, so those battles must have begun at least 7 years earlier.

There is also the matter of how much time might be needed to elicit the wailing and grief exhibited by the world's merchants when Babylon falls. In addition, the gift-exchanging when the Two Witnesses are killed likewise seems unlikely any later than the 7th trumpet. One might argue that such things could take place in a pause between judgments, but certainly not once the bowls begin.