



THE STORY

See the Big Picture of the Bible's Story and Message
(for iPads)

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Introducing the Story

Day after day books and articles promise answers to life's problems. The research is always top-notch. The best doctors and psychologists have discovered the key to longer, more fulfilling lives. But day after day the answers change. Today's research always seems to nullify yesterday's conclusions. While people swear by their ever-changing solutions, the Bible has not ceased to change lives for thousands of years by consistently pointing to one problem and one solution. Sin is our problem. Jesus is our solution.

Unfortunately, many fail to find the life offered in God's word because they do not embrace the whole message. Many know some stories and details in the Bible, but most struggle to truly know God, the Bible, or how those stories and details fit into the Bible's story and message. More importantly, few are able to see how the Bible relates to life today. Who is God? Why did God create people? Why does God give commandments? How do we start a relationship with God? Why should we care about any of this? Our goal is to answer these questions by considering a big picture view of the Bible in five movements.

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Many see the Bible as incomprehensible, but God's words are meant to be understood by common people (Ephesians 3:3-5). You can see the overall Bible story portrayed on the cover. God blessed mankind with the opportunity to live with him *in the garden*, but mankind's sinfulness did not allow eternal life and fellowship with God to continue. Though people normally believe they can save themselves, God gave *the Ten Commandments at Mt. Sinai* to show us all that we are sinful and deserving of death. But God showed his love for us when he sent Jesus, the sinless one, to die *on the cross* so our sins could be forgiven. From beginning to end, the Bible displays God's glory by telling the story of how he made it possible for undeserving people to have eternal life and joy with him.

The Bible is a compilation of 66 books written by approximately forty different authors who wrote over the course of 1500 years. Individually, these books contain their own important and beautiful messages for mankind. But, like a mosaic, when these 66 books are seen together, they form a larger, unified story of a glorious God who loves his people and judges his enemies. These books are united, powerful, and relevant because their words were spoken by our Creator. The Holy Spirit put God's words in the minds of authors (inspiration) who wrote exactly what God told them (2 Peter 1:20-21).

Scribes made so many copies of these books in their original languages that we have thousands of manuscripts today. Human error has caused some differences to exist between these manuscripts, but almost all of these differences are considered to be minor (i.e., spelling, articles, order of words, etc.). Modern Bibles are translated from the original languages by large committees of experts in ancient Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. The enormous amount of manuscript evidence helps these translators identify scribal errors so that we can trust the Bible is God word. The Bible truly leads us to victory over sin - the only problem that matters.

#1: Sin Brings Separation and Death (Genesis 3)

Genesis 1:1 says, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." Many wonder why God created such a beautiful universe. **Psalms 19:1-4** tells us creation declares the glory of God throughout the earth. Every massive star, beautiful sunrise, and tiny atom was created to testify to God's greatness. After God created the heavens, earth, vegetation, celestial beings, and animals, **Genesis 1:26-28** says God made males and females in his own image and told them to be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it. We could also ask why God created mankind in his image. **Isaiah 43:7** tells us God created mankind for his glory. As a picture of an owl "images" an owl, we were created in God's likeness to "image" God's holiness. We are meant to fill the world with God's likeness in holy living for his glory.

Our study begins with the first man, Adam. God created a garden in Eden and placed Adam there to work in it. God saw it was not right for man to be alone; so, God made a suitable and equal helper for Adam - Woman. She became his wife and Adam named her "Eve." Since Adam and Eve were pure, they were naked and not ashamed. Eden was perfect - both God and the tree of life were there. **Genesis 2:16-17** says God withheld only one thing from Adam and Eve. They could eat of every tree except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. In the day they ate of this tree, they would die. **1 John 3:4** says sin is breaking God's law. **Genesis 3:1-6** tells us how God's enemy, Satan, came as a serpent to deceive Eve into breaking God's law. Let's notice how Satan deceives so we are aware of his schemes.

Sin Is Tempting (Genesis 3:1-6)

Genesis 3:1-6, *"1 Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, 'Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?' 2 And the woman said to the serpent, 'We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, 3 but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" 4 But the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not surely die. 5 For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.' 6 So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate."*

You Cannot Eat of Any Tree (3:1)? Did you catch the craftiness of Satan's question in verse 1? God told Adam and Eve they could eat of every tree in the garden, except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil so they would not die. God's original statement was very generous, but Satan ignores God's generosity and twists God's words to cause Eve to dwell on the one thing God did not give her. Now, God's command sounds stingy. Satan also does this to us. God gives us a world full of blessings with simple parameters so we do not lose life with him. Satan tempts us to ignore God's blessings and focus on how limiting God's commands are. Fight discontentment by praising God for what he has given us.

You Will Not Surely Die (3:4). Do you see Satan's deceit in verse 4? Satan now deals with the consequences of sin. God said she would die, but Satan finds that notion silly. "You will not surely die!" Satan still eases our fears about sin today. God sounds very extreme when he warns us so seriously about sin. God talks about sin as if it is the end of the world, but everyone else lives how they want and they seem to be just fine. Satan tempts us to think, "It is not like sin will literally kill you!" These thoughts may seem true initially, but we will soon see how nothing could be further from reality.

Your Eyes Will Be Opened (3:5). Can you see Satan's deception in verse 5? Satan tells Eve her eyes will be opened and she will be like God, knowing good and evil. Consider two problems with this. First, Eve is already like God. She was created in God's image to glorify God's character, not to be God. Second, having one's eyes opened to know good and evil is a vague promise that is only good in theory. Satan tempts us with the same

godlike desires. Fame, fortune, power, pleasure, and knowledge all sound great. In reality, people go mad pursuing these desires and are still dissatisfied once they taste them. Sin never fulfills its promises. Notice how Adam and Eve displayed shame over their sin in **Genesis 3:7-13**.

Sin Is Shaming (Genesis 3:7-13)

Genesis 3:7-13, *"7 Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths. 8 And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. 9 But the LORD God called to the man and said to him, 'Where are you?' 10 And he said, 'I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself.' 11 He said, 'Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?' 12 The man said, 'The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate.' 13 Then the LORD God said to the woman, 'What is this that you have done?' The woman said, 'The serpent deceived me, and I ate.'"*

They Covered-up and Hid (3:7-10). How do Adam and Eve display their shame in verses 7-10? Satan's promise that their eyes would be opened came true in an unexpected way, so they sewed fig leaves together to cover up their nakedness. But their shame remained because they tried to hide from God when he came. This is a common first response to realizing our sin. We hide the evidence and silence our conscience from making us feel guilty. We act like God cannot see by avoiding prayer, God's word, and God's people. But only God can remove sin and shame. Cover-ups and avoidances are useless.

They Shifted the Blame (3:11-13). How do Adam and Eve show their shame in verses 11-13? They feel cornered and do not want God to know their guilt, so they both shift the blame. Adam blames God and Eve while Eve blames Satan. This was a mistake. Even if we are led astray by another, we must always take responsibility for our own actions. It is our own choice to sin. Shifting blame does not change that, it only increases turmoil. We will return to verses 14-15, but notice in **Genesis 3:16-19** the painful consequences of sin. Since males and females have different roles, their consequences for sin also differ.

Sin Is Painful (Genesis 3:16-24)

Genesis 3:16-19, *"16 To the woman he said, 'I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.' 17 And to Adam he said, 'Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; 18 thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. 19 By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.'"*

The Woman's Consequences (3:16). What do the woman's consequences for sin center around? Family. Women often desire to bear and raise children, but now this will be painful. Sin will also cause trouble for her marriage. Just as sin desires Cain in Genesis 4:7, Eve will sinfully desire to control Adam. Adam will sinfully respond by ruling over her (see NET translation notes). Sin already caused Adam and Eve to turn against one other: Eve took control by giving Adam the fruit and Adam blamed Eve for his sin. Adam was supposed to lead Eve and Eve was supposed to help Adam. The opposite happened. **Ephesians 5:21-33** teaches husbands and wives to overcome these sins by submitting to one another. Husbands must sacrificially and lovingly lead their wives while wives must respectfully submit to their husbands.

The Man's Consequences (3:17-19). What do the man's consequences for sin center around? Work. Men enjoy providing for their family, but sin makes this painful. Before, the garden naturally bore fruit; now the

cursed ground would bear thorns. Even worse, God says in verse 19 that Adam will toil only to produce bread that will not keep him alive. This futility exists today. We work to provide food so we do not starve. Work feels pointless because no matter how much we work to eat, we will still die. God warns in Scripture that we will not find true life in bread, but in God's word (Deuteronomy 8:3; John 6:27). We will find life when we seek sustenance in God's word. Sin's worst consequences are in **Genesis 3:22-24**.

Genesis 3:22-24, *"²² Then the LORD God said, 'Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever—' ²³ therefore the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. ²⁴ He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life."*

Driven from Eden (3:22-24). What do Adam and Eve lose here? They lose the tree of life and fellowship with God in Eden. God's presence is the only place where joy is full and where pain, sin, and death do not exist. Corruption grew outside of Eden so that sin and death increased. **Genesis 6:5-7** says people's thoughts were on wickedness continually so that God regretted creating people and decided to destroy them in a flood. God saved on Noah's family of eight in an ark, but no one else repented and God destroyed all. God is serious about judgment! Sadly, people still rebelled after the flood and congregated to make a name for themselves instead of magnifying God's name. God confused their language at Babel and dispersed them across the earth. People were enemies with God and with each other. The rest of the Bible glorifies God's grace to work his plan to let mankind return to God's presence and the tree of life. Unexpectedly, this hope is first prophesied in the serpent's curse in **Genesis 3:14-15**.

Hope for the Woman's Offspring (Genesis 3:14-15, 12:1-3)

Genesis 3:14-15, *"¹⁴ The LORD God said to the serpent, 'Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field; on your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. ¹⁵ I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.'"*

The Serpent's Curse (3:14-15). Satan had consequences for his sin too. God says he will put enmity between Satan and the woman and between her offspring and his offspring. The NET translation helps. *"And I will put hostility between you and the woman and between your offspring and her offspring; her offspring will attack your head, and you will attack her offspring's heel."* An attack to the head is superior to an attack to the heel and God prophesies here that one day the offspring of woman will bruise Satan's head. One day, the offspring of woman would be able to overcome the power of Satan and his offspring. Let's conclude by seeing how God continued to promise hope through Abraham in **Genesis 12:1-3**.

Genesis 12:1-3, *"¹ Now the LORD said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. ² And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.'"*

All Blessed through Abraham's Offspring (12:1-3). Abraham's wife was barren, but God promised to give Abraham land, make him a great nation, and to cause all families to be blessed in him. Abraham had no children at the time of the promise, but he trusted God to be faithful. Two thousand years later, God brought the savior of the world through Abraham's lineage (Matthew 1:17). In the next lesson we will turn to Exodus to learn about the purpose of the law God gave the nation that came from Abraham.

#2: The Law of Moses Exposes Sin (Exodus 20, etc.)

Though God created mankind to glorify him by imaging his righteous character, Satan deceived people into pursuing sinful pleasures. Eternal life and fellowship with God was lost, but God promised to make childless Abraham into a great nation and bless the whole world in him and his offspring. Abraham put all his faith in God's promise and faithfully followed God's direction in all things. Despite Abraham's imperfections, God counted him as righteous through his faith in **Genesis 15:6**. Even after Abraham died, God proved himself faithful when he grew Abraham's descendants, the Israelites, into 2-3 million people in 400 years. Egypt enslaved the Israelites as God had warned in **Genesis 15:13-16**, but God sent ten plagues against Egypt and parted the Red Sea by Moses' hand to redeem Israel from slavery.

Before God led Israel into Canaan, he made a covenant with them at Mt. Sinai. God makes it clear what he desired to do with Israel in **Exodus 19:4-6**. *"4 You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. 5 Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; 6 and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."* God set Israel free as a downpayment and sign of how he would bless Israel if they would keep his covenant. This covenant is also referred to as the Ten Commandments and the Law of Moses (cf. Exodus 34:28 and Joshua 8:31). If Israel would keep the Law, they would be a kingdom of priests imaging and proclaiming righteousness to the world. To more fully understand the Law's purpose, notice a portion of it in **Exodus 20:1-11**.

The Law of Moses is Given (Exodus 20:1-17)

Exodus 20:1-11, *"1 And God spoke all these words, saying, 2 I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. 3 You shall have no other gods before me. 4 You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. 5 You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, 6 but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments. 7 You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain. 8 Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. 9 Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, 10 but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. 11 For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy."*

Love the LORD Your God (20:1-11). The remaining commands focus on Israel's relationships with one another, but which relationship do these first four commandments focus on? These commands focus on Israel's relationship with God. Jesus later summarizes these four commands as "love the Lord your God" (Matthew 22:36-38, etc.). God gave Israel a huge reason to love him by delivering them from slavery. Now God commanded Israel to display their love for him multiple ways. They must have no other gods and not bow before images of created things. This is idolatry - loving and trusting creation instead of God the Creator. God also commanded Israel to not take his name in vain. God's name should be holy to us, but we make God's name common when we use his name in oaths and expletives. Even more, God's name is vain to us when we wear God's name, yet do not reflect his holiness in our living. God also commanded Israel to do no work on the Sabbath to remember how God delivered them (cf. Deuteronomy 5:12-15). For people who had been saved from slavery in Egypt, loving God in these ways would be a joy. Notice how God told them to love their fellow man in **Exodus 20:12-17**.

Exodus 20:12–17, *“¹² Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you. ¹³ You shall not murder. ¹⁴ You shall not commit adultery. ¹⁵ You shall not steal. ¹⁶ You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. ¹⁷ You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor’s.”*

Love Your Neighbor As Yourself (20:12-17). The first four commands focused on Israel's relationship with God, but what relationships do these final six commands focus on? These commands focus on relationships with other people. Jesus later summarizes these six commands as "love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:36-40, etc.). Because God faithfully loved Israel, Israel was to respond by loving one another. God commanded Israel to honor their parents. This is something children and adults do by respecting, obeying, and taking care of their parents. God also commanded Israel to not wrong one another by committing murder, adultery, theft, bearing false witness (lying), or by coveting anything of their neighbor's. The command to not covet shows the Law was to be kept with love from the heart, not in a mere external way (also, Matthew 5-7). God is not okay with us trusting money as long as we do not bow to it. God is not okay with lust as long as we do not commit adultery. True obedience to the Law is both internal and external. Let's fast-forward about 900 years to **Daniel 9:11** to see if Israel succeeded.

The Law of Moses Is Broken (Daniel 9:11; James 2:10-11, etc.)

Daniel 9:11, *“All Israel has transgressed your law and turned aside, refusing to obey your voice. And the curse and oath that are written in the Law of Moses the servant of God have been poured out upon us, because we have sinned against him.”*

Rebellion (Daniel 9:11). How does Daniel assess Israel's keeping of the Law of Moses? Daniel says Israel transgressed the Law and refused to obey God. In **Leviticus 26** God promised to dwell among and bless Israel if they obeyed, but to forsake and curse Israel if they disobeyed. Though Israel was obedient at times so that God blessed Israel, the books from Joshua to 2 Chronicles give the account of how this never lasted. Solomon in 1 Kings 8-11 is a good example of this. Just when the blessings and knowledge of God began to spread across the world through Abraham's offspring, they began to trust idols, trust their own strength, and rebel against the Law. Sin caused disunity and Israel split into two nations. The northern nation was called "Israel" and the southern nation was called "Judah." Many prophets like Isaiah and Hosea warned Israel and Judah of their sin, but they refused to listen. God left his people and destroyed Israel with the Assyrians in 722 BC and Judah with the Babylonians from 606-586 BC. Only a remnant was spared and taken into bondage. God's people were rebellious, so they received what they deserved. But notice in **James 2:10-11** another reason why Israel failed to keep the Law.

James 2:10–11, *“For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it. For he who said, ‘Do not commit adultery,’ also said, ‘Do not murder.’ If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.”*

Failure to Keep the Whole Law (James 2:10-11, etc.). According to James, how does a failure to keep the Law happen? One fails to keep the Law when one breaks just one command. Though this may seem unreasonable, we must recognize we are only righteous and innocent by any law system if we perfectly keep the entirety of that law. The same is true for the Law of Moses. Consider how Moses warned Israel of this in the Law. **Deuteronomy 6:25**, *“And it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to do all this commandment before the LORD our God, as he has commanded us.”* **Deuteronomy 27:26**, *“Cursed be anyone who does not confirm the words of this law by doing them.”* Israel failed and received the curses of the Law because they were not careful to obey all of it. But notice **Romans 3:9-12** and consider how Israel's unrighteousness is simply an example of every human's unrighteousness.

Romans 3:9–12 (HCSB), *“⁹ What then? Are we any better? Not at all! For we have previously charged that both Jews and Gentiles are all under sin, ¹⁰ as it is written: There is no one righteous, not even one. ¹¹ There is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. ¹² All have turned away; all alike have become useless. There is no one who does what is good, not even one.”*

None Is Righteous (Romans 3:9-12). According to this passage, who is righteous? No one! Israel failed and all humans continue to fail to be righteous through law because we do not perfectly keep God’s law. Which one of us has never put something else before God? Which one of us has never disobeyed our parents, lied, or coveted something belonging to our neighbor? As **Romans 3:23** says, *“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”* This is key to understand because, as **Romans 6:23** says, *“The wages of sin is death.”* God told Adam this when he warned him about the forbidden tree. God gives life and he cannot live where sin is, so sin brings death. Since *“the wages of sin is death”*, God allowed Israel to offer animal sacrifices so their sins could be forgiven. But as **Hebrews 10:1–4** says, the blood of bulls and goats cannot permanently purify the conscience of sin. God had promised to bless the world in Abraham’s offspring, but Abraham’s physical offspring obtained a curse. Would God be faithful? But God knew the Law would not bring life. In the Law itself God promised a new prophet and covenant would come (cf. **Deuteronomy 18:15–19** and **30:1-10**). The Law of Moses was always meant to be temporary.

Why Then the Law? But people often have a very natural question at this point. If God knew he would one day bring a new prophet, law, and covenant, what was the point of the Law of Moses? Consider how the apostle Paul later answers that same question in **Galatians 3:19-22** and **Romans 3:19–20**.

The Law of Moses Exposes Sin (Galatians 3:19-22; Romans 3:19-20)

Galatians 3:19–22, *“Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions... For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law. But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.”*

Romans 3:19–20, *“Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.”*

The Law Exposes Sin (Galatians 3:19-22; Romans 3:19-20). What reason does Paul give for the Law in Galatians 3? He says it was added because of transgressions and to imprison everything (everyone) under sin. What does Paul say the Law accomplishes in Romans 3? He says it causes everyone’s mouths to be stopped and all to be held accountable to God because the Law gives people knowledge of their sin. Without the Law, we think our works are righteous and that we deserve eternal life and fellowship with God. The Law shows us we are sinful and that we deserve death and separation from God.

Knowledge of Sin Causes Faith in Jesus. Why did God give the Law to imprison us under sin and give us knowledge of our sin and condemnation to death? When the Law shows us we are imprisoned to sin and death, this helps us understand that we cannot trust our works to save us because our works are evil. Therefore, the Law actually moves us to find life by trusting in Jesus. Without seeing our unfaithfulness and inability to find salvation by law-keeping (the problem), we cannot appreciate the faithfulness of Jesus and salvation by faith in him (the solution). As **Galatians 3:22** says, Scripture imprisoned us all under sin so those who believe could receive the promise by the faithfulness of Christ. This salvation from sin by faith would come in a new, future covenant that God would make with his people. In the next lesson we will turn to Isaiah and Jeremiah to discover prophecies of this new covenant and kingdom so we are prepared to understand salvation in Christ and its implications for us today.

#3: A New Covenant Promises Hope (Jeremiah 31, etc.)

Sin brought a curse upon mankind, but God made a covenant to bless the world in Abraham. Though God sought to dwell with and bless Abraham's descendants, the Israelites, but the Law of Moses proved Israel to be guilty of sin. God allowed animals to be sacrificed to take away Israel's sins, but the animal sacrifices could not permanently cleanse Israel of their sins. Worshippers under the Law had to continually and regularly offer animal sacrifices. This regular reminder of past sins did not lend to confidence before God. We are like Israel. The Law shows us that we all have disobeyed God and that we all deserve death and separation from God. This is important for us to remember since God's solution and promise of hope will mean nothing to us if we do not know we have a problem. Therefore, it is right for us to fear and to lose confidence in ourselves when we read the Law.

But how could God be faithful to his promises to Abraham when mankind is so sinful? What hope could God give to the nations? The writings of the prophets tell of this hope. Though prophets were sent to other nations, the prophets mostly prophesied to Israel and Judah before, during, and after God's punishments against them. God not only used the prophets to testify against Israel and Judah for their sins, God also used the prophets to tell Israel and Judah of a future day of salvation. One day, there would be good news. God would return to save and reign over Israel, Judah, and the world. **Jeremiah 31:31-34** is a great place to start because it prophesies of the hope God promised in a new, future covenant with his people. Jeremiah wrote about 600 years before God began fulfilling this prophecy.

The New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34)

Jeremiah 31:31-34, *"³¹ Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, ³² not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. ³³ For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ³⁴ And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."*

I Will Put My Law within Them (31:31-34). What is the first way this new covenant would be different from the old one? God says he will put his law within them and write his law on their hearts. This is a completely different result from the covenant and law Moses taught. Though some had God's law written on their hearts (Psalm 40:8), most did not know God and had diamond-hard hearts (Zechariah 7:12). But God promises a new covenant where his people would know him and obey his law from their hearts.

I Will Remember Their Sin No More (31:34). Considering verse 34, how could people with "diamond-hard" hearts come to know God and internalize his law? God says he will forgive their iniquity and remember their sins no more. If a key difference between these covenants is God's promise to forgive and forget past sins, this implies that something far greater than animal sacrifices is needed for God to justly pardon sins. But how could a just and holy God permanently forgive our many transgressions? Let's notice a key prophecy of God's future salvation through his servant in **Isaiah 52:13-53:12**.

The Suffering Servant (Isaiah 52:13-53:12)

Isaiah 52:13-15, *"¹³ Behold, my servant shall act wisely; he shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted. ¹⁴ As many were astonished at you— his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the children of mankind— ¹⁵ so shall he sprinkle many nations; kings shall shut their mouths*

because of him; for that which has not been told them they see, and that which they have not heard they understand.”

Successful, Exalted, Marred, and Sprinkling Many Nations (52:13–15). How is God’s servant described here? God’s servant will act wisely (NET: “my servant will succeed”), be lifted up, exalted, and be marred beyond human likeness - causing many to be astonished. Sprinkling with blood is how Israel was cleansed from sin (cf. Hebrews 9:13-22), but verse 15 says this servant will sprinkle many nations. This servant’s global work is also referred to in **Isaiah 49:5–6**. “And now the LORD says, he who formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob back to him; and that Israel might be gathered to him... he says: ‘It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.’” This servant will see great pain, but will be exalted and cause many nations to be sprinkled and cleansed. As we consider who this servant is, let’s continue reading in **Isaiah 53:1–6**.

Isaiah 53:1–6, “¹ Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? ² For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. ³ He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. ⁴ Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. ⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. ⁶ All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”

No Beauty, Rejected, Man of Sorrows, and Pierced for Our Sins (53:1-6). How is God’s servant described in these verses? He would have no form, majesty, or beauty to cause people to look at or desire him. In fact, Isaiah prophesies that this servant would be “despised and rejected by men” and acquainted with grief. Despite all these seeming negatives, Isaiah says in verses 4-6 this servant will carry our griefs and sorrows, be pierced for our transgressions, bring us peace with God, experience wounds that would heal us, and carry away everyone’s iniquity. Though people would kill this servant and say he was smitten by God, he would save people from their sins. Isaiah continues in **Isaiah 53:7–12**.

Isaiah 53:7–12, “⁷ He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. ⁸ By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people? ⁹ And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth. ¹⁰ Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. ¹¹ Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. ¹² Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.”

Silent, Overlooked, Innocent, Prolonged Days, Bear Iniquities (53:7-12). How is God’s servant described in these verses? There are many details, but what is most clear is that this servant’s suffering and death would be a terrible injustice. “He had done no violence and there was no deceit in his mouth.” Despite his innocence, he would go to his death silently and no one at the time would consider that his death was a sacrifice for the

sins of others. We may wonder how God could stand for this, but verse 10 says this will be God's will. Even verse 11 says the servant will be satisfied in his anguish. This is all because of what his death would accomplish. His death will be a guilt offering (vs. 10) so that the sins of many could be carried away and cause many to be accounted righteous. Not only will this servant be a guilt offering to take away sins, he will be the priest to make intercession for the transgressors.

Jesus Suffered for Sins. Who is this innocent servant who would be pierced and lifted up for our sins? Though this prophecy was written over 700 years before Jesus lived, Isaiah is clearly speaking of Jesus. Read Matthew 27 to see how clear this is. We are all like sheep who have gone astray, but Jesus lived with no sin. All of us have separated ourselves from God, but Jesus died to take away our sins and count us as righteous so we could have peace with God. This prophecy is an amazing testimony to the Bible's inspiration. There are existing manuscripts of Isaiah dating to the 2nd to 4th centuries BC - well before Jesus lived and died. Yet, this text speaks in great detail of Jesus' life and death. Even Jesus' resurrection is foretold in verse 10. "... he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days..."

Other prophecies also say Jesus would have God's Spirit upon him (Isaiah 11:2, 42:1, 48:16, 59:21, 61:1). Let's look at one of many prophecies that speak of how in this new covenant God would not only forgive sins, but would also pour out his Spirit and dwell among his people once again. Notice **Isaiah 32:9-18**.

The Spirit Poured Upon Us (Isaiah 32:9-18)

Isaiah 32:12-18, *"¹² Beat your breasts for the pleasant fields, for the fruitful vine, ¹³ for the soil of my people growing up in thorns and briars, yes, for all the joyous houses in the exultant city. ¹⁴ For the palace is forsaken, the populous city deserted; the hill and the watchtower will become dens forever, a joy of wild donkeys, a pasture of flocks; ¹⁵ until the Spirit is poured upon us from on high, and the wilderness becomes a fruitful field, and the fruitful field is deemed a forest. ¹⁶ Then justice will dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness abide in the fruitful field. ¹⁷ And the effect of righteousness will be peace, and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust forever. ¹⁸ My people will abide in a peaceful habitation, in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places."*

A Spiritual Desert (32:12-14). Noticing the imagery of verses 12-14, how does Isaiah describe the condition of Israel's land and people? They are described as a spiritual desert. Unrighteousness and corruption dwelled in Israel, so there was no place for the security of God's life-giving Spirit. God's people were removed from their land and its emptiness was a picture of Israel's spiritual emptiness.

A Spiritual Garden (32:15-18). Noticing verses 15-18, how does Isaiah say change will come about and what will that change look like? Israel would be a spiritual wasteland because of unrighteousness, but Isaiah prophesies that one day God's Spirit would return and be poured out upon the people. The result would be the transformation of the spiritual desert into a spiritual garden - reminiscent of Eden. God's Spirit would bring life and peace to his people once again. No longer would there be corruption, wickedness, distrust of God, and unrest. The people would be blessed. Righteousness, trust, and security would result. It is prophesied in **Joel 2:28-32** that Israel could know when the Spirit had been poured out by the miraculous signs that would accompany this event. We will look at this fulfillment more closely in lesson 5, but in the next lesson we will turn to the Gospel of Matthew to become familiar with Jesus - the one through whom the whole world can receive salvation.

#4: Jesus Conquers Sin and Death (Matthew 1, 4, 9, 27-28)

Israel and Judah rebelliously broke their covenant with God, so God deserted them. But God promised to make a new, different covenant with his people in the future. Though his people had hearts hardened by sin, God promised to forgive past sins and write his law on their new, fleshy hearts. **Isaiah 52:13-53:12** prophesied that this forgiveness would come through the death of God's chosen, Spirit-anointed servant. In this lesson we will read from Matthew. Matthew records the good news about Jesus Christ - God's chosen servant to bring salvation to the ends of the earth. Notice **Matthew 1:17-25**.

Jesus Is the Son of God (Matthew 1:17-25)

Matthew 1:17-25, *"¹⁷ So all the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations, and from David to the deportation to Babylon fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ fourteen generations. ¹⁸ Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. ²⁰ But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, 'Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.' ²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: ²³ 'Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel' (which means, God with us). ²⁴ When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, ²⁵ but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus."*

What does this passage teach about Jesus' identity? This passage identifies Jesus as the Christ (i.e., the Messiah, the anointed one). Jesus is also identified as the offspring of Abraham and of King David. God promised to bless the whole world in Abraham and to set one of David's descendants on his throne forever (Genesis 12:1-3; 2 Samuel 7:12-17). Jesus is the fulfillment of these promises. Most importantly, Jesus is from the Holy Spirit. **Colossians 1:16** says all things were created by Jesus. Jesus is deity in the flesh, so he would be called "Immanuel." This means "God is with us." God had left his people, but through Jesus Christ, the Son of God, God was with his people again.

Jesus Is Perfect against Temptation (Matthew 4:1-11)

Matthew 4:1-11, *"¹ Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ² And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. ³ And the tempter came and said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.' ⁴ But he answered, 'It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.' ' ⁵ Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple ⁶ and said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.' ' ⁷ Jesus said to him, 'Again it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.' ' ⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. ⁹ And he said to him, 'All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.' ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to him, 'Be gone, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.' ' ¹¹ Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him."*

What do you learn about Jesus from his battle against Satan? Jesus is impervious to Satan's deception and is a contrast to Adam and Eve and to Israel. Adam and Eve had many blessings in Eden, but did not resist Satan's temptation to eat the forbidden fruit. Israel ate manna in the desert for 40 years, yet refused to listen to God.

Jesus fasted in a desert for 40 days, saw God's word as his food, and defeated Satan. God's word is how Jesus overcame Satan. Jesus embodies God's desire for us: he is born of God's Spirit and has God's word on his heart. We can defeat Satan too if we will meditate on God's word, allowing God to write his law on our hearts and to control our lives.

Jesus Shows Mercy to Sinners (Matthew 9:9-13)

Matthew 9:9-13, *"⁹ As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, 'Follow me.' And he rose and followed him. ¹⁰ And as Jesus reclined at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples. ¹¹ And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, 'Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?' ¹² But when he heard it, he said, 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. ¹³ Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.'"*

What does this account teach you about Jesus? This passage displays Jesus' mercy for sinners. Jews hated tax collectors because they worked for the Roman Empire and were often dishonest. The Pharisees considered themselves to be righteous and they never associated with known sinners. By contrast, Jesus chose a tax collector to be his apostle and ate with tax collectors and sinners. Jesus does not call the righteous because he cannot heal those who think they are healthy. Jesus seeks out sinners because they need a physician and know it. We must have this humility to follow Jesus. The Jewish religious leaders lacked this humility and were afraid that Jesus would cause them to lose their influence, so they did not believe in Jesus and began seeking an opportunity to kill him. Jesus began to warn his followers that he would be killed and that he would rise from the dead after three days, but they did not understand. Judas, one of Jesus' twelve apostles, betrayed Jesus to the chief priests for thirty pieces of silver. Jesus was arrested, deserted by his disciples, maliciously accused by the religious leaders, and sent to Pilate the governor to be questioned and killed.

Jesus Is Crucified to Conquer Sin (Matthew 27:11-56)

¹¹ Now Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor asked him, 'Are you the King of the Jews?' Jesus said, 'You have said so.' ¹² But when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he gave no answer. ¹³ Then Pilate said to him, 'Do you not hear how many things they testify against you?' ¹⁴ But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge, so that the governor was greatly amazed.

¹⁵ Now at the feast the governor was accustomed to release for the crowd any one prisoner whom they wanted. ¹⁶ And they had then a notorious prisoner called Barabbas. ¹⁷ So when they had gathered, Pilate said to them, 'Whom do you want me to release for you: Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?' ¹⁸ For he knew that it was out of envy that they had delivered him up. ¹⁹ Besides, while he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him, 'Have nothing to do with that righteous man, for I have suffered much because of him today in a dream.' ²⁰ Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus. ²¹ The governor again said to them, 'Which of the two do you want me to release for you?' And they said, 'Barabbas.' ²² Pilate said to them, 'Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?' They all said, 'Let him be crucified!' ²³ And he said, 'Why, what evil has he done?' But they shouted all the more, 'Let him be crucified!'

²⁴ So when Pilate saw that he was gaining nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, 'I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves.' ²⁵ And all the people answered, 'His blood be on us and on our children!' ²⁶ Then he released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, delivered him to be crucified.

²⁷ Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor's headquarters, and they gathered the whole battalion before him. ²⁸ And they stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, ²⁹ and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on his head and put a reed in his right hand. And kneeling before him, they mocked him, saying, 'Hail, King of the Jews!' ³⁰ And they spit on him and took the reed and struck him on the

head. ³¹ And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him and led him away to crucify him.

³² As they went out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name. They compelled this man to carry his cross. ³³ And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull), ³⁴ they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall, but when he tasted it, he would not drink it. ³⁵ And when they had crucified him, they divided his garments among them by casting lots. ³⁶ Then they sat down and kept watch over him there. ³⁷ And over his head they put the charge against him, which read, 'This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.' ³⁸ Then two robbers were crucified with him, one on the right and one on the left. ³⁹ And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads ⁴⁰ and saying, 'You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.' ⁴¹ So also the chief priests, with the scribes and elders, mocked him, saying, ⁴² 'He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. ⁴³ He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him. For he said, 'I am the Son of God.' ' ⁴⁴ And the robbers who were crucified with him also reviled him in the same way.

⁴⁵ Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. ⁴⁶ And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, 'Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?' that is, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' ⁴⁷ And some of the bystanders, hearing it, said, 'This man is calling Elijah.' ⁴⁸ And one of them at once ran and took a sponge, filled it with sour wine, and put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink. ⁴⁹ But the others said, 'Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him' ⁵⁰ And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit.

⁵¹ And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split. ⁵² The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, ⁵³ and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many. ⁵⁴ When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, 'Truly this was the Son of God!'

⁵⁵ There were also many women there, looking on from a distance, who had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to him, ⁵⁶ among whom were Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Joseph and the mother of the sons of Zebedee."

Israel offered animal sacrifices to atone for sin, but this was not a lasting solution, for the blood of animals cannot take away sins (**Hebrews 10:4**). But Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (**John 1:29**). Jesus was innocent as Isaiah prophesied, but he let them beat, pierce, and lift him up. He allowed this because he loves us. **Philippians 2:6-8**, "⁶ ... though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."

Jesus Rose to Conquer Death (Matthew 27:57-28:15)

Matthew 27:57-28:15, "⁵⁷ When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who also was a disciple of Jesus. ⁵⁸ He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. ⁵⁹ And Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen shroud ⁶⁰ and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had cut in the rock. And he rolled a great stone to the entrance of the tomb and went away. ⁶¹ Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb.

⁶² The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate ⁶³ and said, 'Sir, we remember how that impostor said, while he was still alive, 'After three days I will rise.' ⁶⁴ Therefore order the tomb to be made secure until the third day, lest his disciples go and steal him away and tell the people, 'He has risen from the dead,' and the last fraud will be worse than the first.' ⁶⁵ Pilate said to them, 'You have a guard of soldiers. Go, make it as secure as you can.' ⁶⁶ So they went and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone and setting a guard.

28:1 Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. 2 And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. 3 His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. 4 And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men. 5 But the angel said to the women, 'Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. 6 He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. 7 Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. See, I have told you.' 8 So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. 9 And behold, Jesus met them and said, 'Greetings!' And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him. 10 Then Jesus said to them, 'Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me.'

11 While they were going, behold, some of the guard went into the city and told the chief priests all that had taken place. 12 And when they had assembled with the elders and taken counsel, they gave a sufficient sum of money to the soldiers 13 and said, 'Tell people, 'His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.' 14 And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.' 15 So they took the money and did as they were directed. And this story has been spread among the Jews to this day."

Isaiah prophesied that Jesus' days would be prolonged. Anybody can die, but resurrection requires the power of God. The Jews tried to coverup Jesus' resurrection, but their lie is recorded here. Jesus died to take away our sins, but he rose from death so we would not have to be controlled by fear of the grave. Jesus is only the firstfruits of the resurrection the Father has planned for all his children who have tasted death (1 Corinthians 15:20-23). **Philippians 2:9-11**, *"9 Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."*

Jesus Tells Disciples to Make Disciples (Matthew 28:16-20)

Matthew 27:57-28:15, *"16 Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. 17 And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. 18 And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'"*

What did Jesus command his disciples to do in this passage? Jesus commanded his disciples to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey Jesus. Though this great commission was and is dangerous to obey, Jesus promises to always be with his disciples. But the story continues. God had promised to pour out his Spirit so his life-giving presence could dwell among and sanctify his people again. John the Baptizer pointed both to this restoration and to a coming judgment when he said Jesus would baptize *"with the Holy Spirit and fire"* (**Matthew 3:11**). In the next lesson we will turn to **Acts 2** to see salvation offered as prophecies of the Spirit and of fiery judgment come back into play.

#5: The Spirit Brings Restoration and Life (Acts 2, etc.)

Sin causes us to be unholy so that God cannot dwell among and bless us, but Jesus Christ, the Son of God, put on flesh and died on the cross to take away our sins. Through Jesus' sacrifice, all can be permanently cleansed of sins so that a restored relationship with God is possible. But how can we access this forgiveness and restored relationship? The Jews committed a terrible crime by killing the Son of God. How could they be set free from this sin? Turn to **Acts 2** to see how Peter answered this question when God's Spirit was poured out on the day of Pentecost - fifty days after Jesus died.

The Apostles Speak in Different Languages (Acts 2:1-13)

Acts 2:1-13, *"¹ When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. ² And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³ And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. ⁴ And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.*

⁵ Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. ⁶ And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. ⁷ And they were amazed and astonished, saying, 'Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? ⁸ And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? ⁹ Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, ¹¹ both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.' ¹² And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, 'What does this mean?' ¹³ But others mocking said, 'They are filled with new wine.'"

What did the apostles do when they were filled with the Holy Spirit? They began to speak in tongues (i.e., different languages). Jews who spoke languages from across the world had come to Jerusalem for Pentecost. The apostles did not know these languages, but the Holy Spirit empowered them to speak these languages so everyone could hear their message. Some were amazed. Some said the apostles were drunk. Notice how Peter explains this event.

Languages Signify Arrival of the Spirit and Judgment (Acts 2:14-21)

Acts 2:14-21, *"¹⁴ But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them: 'Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. ¹⁵ For these people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. ¹⁶ But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel:*

¹⁷ 'And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; ¹⁸ even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy. ¹⁹ And I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke; ²⁰ the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day. ²¹ And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.'"

What does Peter say this miracle of language-speaking is? Peter says this miracle was given by the Spirit and signifies the fulfillment of the prophecy in **Joel 2:28-32**. Joel said people would prophesy and see visions to signify two realities. First, the promised pouring out of God's Spirit had come. Prophecies tie the Spirit being poured out with God dwelling with and bringing life to his people. God would make a new, everlasting covenant with his people and forget former sins. The second reality signified is the coming of blood, fire, and

darkness. These images in verses 19-20 are commonly used by God to describe a nation's judgment (Isaiah 13:1-13; Ezekiel 32:2-8). Judgment was coming upon the Jews for killing Jesus (Joel 2:32; Matthew 21:33-46). Despite this coming judgment, the Spirit was being poured out and all who called on the Lord's name would be saved. The old covenant, law, temple, priests, and sacrifices would be gone - finding completion in a better covenant, law, temple, priest, and sacrifice. But who caused these events? How could they call on the Lord to be saved? Notice **Acts 2:22-36**.

Jesus Is Lord and Christ (Acts 2:22-36)

Acts 2:22-36, *"²² Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know—²³ this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. ²⁴ God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. ²⁵ For David says concerning him, 'I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken; ²⁶ therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; my flesh also will dwell in hope. ²⁷ For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption. ²⁸ You have made known to me the paths of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence.'*

²⁹ Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. ³⁰ Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, ³¹ he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. ³² This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. ³³ Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. ³⁴ For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says,

'The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at my right hand, ³⁵ until I make your enemies your footstool.' '

³⁶ Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified."

God, David, the Apostles, and the Holy Spirit Testify about Jesus. Peter says Jesus is the prophesied Messiah from David's lineage whom God resurrected to reign as Lord and Christ at God's right hand, but what evidences does he give for this claim? Peter gives four evidences. First, this crowd saw the miracles God did through Jesus (vs. 22). Second, David prophesied that God would not let his Holy One see corruption (vs. 25-28), but David was not referring to himself but to the Christ because David died and was still buried (vs. 29-31). Third, the apostles are witnesses to Jesus' resurrection (vs. 32). They saw, heard, and touched Jesus (1 John 1:1-4). Fourth, they could know God raised Jesus to sit at God's right hand because Jesus poured out the miracle of language-speaking they were seeing and hearing (vs. 33).

Jesus Is Lord and Christ. Peter's case is clear. In essence, Peter is saying, "The miracles, the prophecies, our witness, and the language-speaking you are hearing all point to one fact: Jesus is Lord and Christ and he is sitting at the LORD's right hand (vs. 34-36)." John the Baptizer said Jesus would baptize with the Spirit and fire. This time of restoration and judgment had come. Jerusalem would soon be trampled for murdering God's prophets and God's Son. How would they respond? Notice **Acts 2:37-41**.

What Shall We Do? (Acts 2:37-41)

Acts 2:37-41, *"³⁷ Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?' ³⁸ And Peter said to them, 'Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.' ⁴⁰ And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, 'Save*

yourselves from this crooked generation.’ ⁴¹ So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.”

Repent (2:37-38). When the crowd asked what they should do, what did Peter first command them to do? Peter commanded them to repent. Repentance is a complete turning of our mind and lifestyle from sin. Sin brings dissatisfaction and death, but it requires serious commitment to stop willfully disobeying God. We should pause to ask ourselves if we are willing to stop willfully sinning and start living for Jesus.

Be Baptized (2:37-39). What was Peter’s second command? Peter commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Baptism is immersion in water “for the forgiveness of your sins.” Our works are sinful, so we can only be saved by putting faith in God to remove our sins. **Colossians 2:11-13** says baptism is how we put faith in God’s power to forgive us and raise us from spiritual death. Just as Jesus was buried and rose, our old person of guilt, shame, and fear is buried so we can rise to live a new life (Rom. 6:1-11). At baptism, Peter also said “you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” God promised to send his Spirit to dwell with us and give us life (Ezek. 36:26-27, 37:1-14). Receiving the promised Spirit is now possible for us. This is not something we feel physically; rather, the Spirit is gifted to believers at baptism so spiritual transformation and life result inside us (Jn. 7:37-39). The Spirit also sets Christians apart since he builds us together as a dwelling place for God (Ezek. 37:26-28; 2 Cor. 6:16-7:1; Eph. 2:22).

A New Life (2:40-41). Sin has corrupted us, but we can have a new life in Christ. We must put off our old self, be renewed in our minds, and put on the new self, created after the likeness of God (Eph. 4:20-24). The crowd’s response to Peter’s message was huge: three thousand were baptized that day and added to God’s group of saved people! Jesus is the only way to true life and joy in a relationship with God. Do you trust Jesus? Are you repenting of your sins? Have you been immersed in water so your sins may be forgiven? Notice the new life, fellowship, and purpose God’s grace brings to Christians in **Acts 2:42-47**.

The Fellowship of Believers (Acts 2:42-47, etc.)

Acts 2:42-47, “⁴² And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. ⁴³ And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. ⁴⁴ And all who believed were together and had all things in common. ⁴⁵ And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶ And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.”

Devoted to the Fellowship (Acts 2:42-47). How did these Christians devote themselves to the fellowship as examples to us? Christians in the fellowship devote themselves together to the apostles’ teaching in the Bible. Christians in fellowship are devoted to pray together and to remember Christ together in the Lord’s Supper on the first day of the week (“breaking of bread”; cf. Matthew 26:26-29; Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 11:17-34). Christians in fellowship share their possessions, time, food, and homes with one another (vs. 44-46). Most importantly, disciples share the gospel with others (vs. 47).

Gentiles in the Fellowship (Acts 10). Many Jews persecuted Christians, but the Jewish Christians scattered and preached Jesus wherever they went (Acts 8:1-4). Even the Gentiles began repenting. In **Acts 10:44-48**, the Holy Spirit fell on believing Gentiles and gave them the same miracle of different languages. This signified that restoration and life was also available to Gentiles by faith. All Christ-followers from all nations are part of the same body (Eph. 1:9-10, 2:11-3:13). Since creation, people have been enemies with God and enemies with one another. Previously, people selfishly gathered at Babel to make a name for themselves, so God confused their languages and scattered them. In Acts, the Spirit broke down the language barrier so God’s

scattered people could hear the gospel that would unite them to magnify God's name. By adding people from all nations to Christ's body, God is killing the hostility and reconciling people to himself and to one another (Eph. 2:11-22). When God transforms us to serve him and love one another, he is glorified (Eph. 3:6-13). But our story is not over. One day, Christ will appear from heaven to judge both the living and the dead. Notice **Revelation 20:11-21:8**.

The Judgment (Revelation 20:11-21:8)

Revelation 20:11–21:8, *"¹¹ Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. ¹² And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. ¹³ And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. ¹⁴ Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. ¹⁵ And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.*

^{21:1} Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. ⁴ He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.'

⁵ And he who was seated on the throne said, 'Behold, I am making all things new.' Also he said, 'Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.' ⁶ And he said to me, 'It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment. ⁷ The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son. ⁸ But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.' "

The Judgment (Revelation 20:11-21:8). One day, the dead will be raised and we will all appear before Christ so each one can be judged for what they did in the body - whether good or evil (2 Cor. 5:10). Those who cling to their evil will be thrown into the lake of fire. Those who repent and follow Christ will be raised to a resurrection of life (Jn. 5:28-29). All things will be made new. Our lowly bodies will be transformed to be like Christ's glorious body (Phil. 3:20-21). Our perishable bodies will put on the imperishable so we can inherit God's kingdom (1 Cor. 15:50-55). Mourning, crying, pain, and death will cease in the glory of God's presence. Trials, temptations, and persecutions will come in this life, but **Revelation 12:7-11** illustrates how we as God's children can defeat Satan, the serpent, when we continue to trust Jesus' blood and not love our lives - even in the face of death.

Summary & Conclusion. God created us and gave us everything, but we have all turned against him. We deserve death and separation from God, but God sacrificed his Son to free us from death and bring us back to him. Jesus our King has conquered death and invites all to enjoy eternal life with him. When we turn away from our sin, trust Jesus as the Son of God who rose from the dead, and are baptized, our sins will be forgiven and we will be given the gift of the Holy Spirit. If we faithfully look to Jesus and imitate him, we will be transformed back into God's likeness. Through God's Spirit, Christians become temples for God and shine as lights in darkness. Take hold of salvation. Tell others. Give God the glory.

Jesus Is the Only Way

John 3:18, 36 teach that condemnation and wrath remain on us unless we believe in the Son.

John 14:6 teaches that Jesus is the Way and people can only come to the Father through Jesus.

Acts 4:8-12 teaches that salvation can come through no one but Jesus.

1 Timothy 2:5 teaches that just as there is one God, there is only one mediator between God and man.

Baptism

1 Peter 3:21 teaches us that baptism saves us and is how we appeal to God for a clean conscience.

Matthew 28:18–20 shows us Jesus told his disciples to make disciples through baptism and teaching.

Acts 19:1–6 shows us that people can be re-baptized through the Ephesian disciples' example.

Acts 22:6–16 shows us that baptism truly washes away our sins through Paul's example.

Colossians 2:11–13 teaches that baptism is how we put faith in God's work, not our works.

Romans 6:1–8 teaches that our sinful body is buried when we are baptized into Christ's death.

Jesus' Resurrection

Jesus' Brothers. John makes it clear in **John 7:5** that Jesus' brothers did not believe in him. However, Luke also makes it very clear in **Acts 1:14** that this changed after the resurrection. Furthermore, Jesus' brothers, James and Jude, both wrote inspired letters in our Bibles today. James even became a leader in the church at Jerusalem. Why did they believe? **1 Corinthians 15:7** says Jesus appeared to James after his resurrection and the resurrection is the ultimate proof that Jesus is from God as he claimed.

Paul's Changed Life. Unbelieving historians fully admit Paul was a historical person who wrote many of the letters in the New Testament. Paul was trained from youth in the Law of Moses, became a Pharisee, and was responsible for both the imprisonment and death of Christians (Acts 8:1-3, 22:3-5; Philippians 3:4-6). Yet, Luke records Paul's testimony in Acts: Jesus appeared to Paul on the road to Damascus. This changed everything. Paul turned from persecuting Christians to making Christians. Paul knew what he saw, so he deserted his previous life. As Paul says in **Philippians 3:7**, *"But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ."* If Jesus did not appear to Paul, why did Paul's life change so dramatically?

The Empty Tomb. The gospel of Jesus' resurrection began in Jerusalem and spread from Jerusalem, but many in Jerusalem did not believe and did not want this message to spread. If Jesus did not raise from the dead as the apostles claimed, why did these enemies in Jerusalem not retrieve Jesus' body to disprove the apostles? If Jesus' body was in the tomb, the gospel would not have spread anywhere.

Motivations of the Apostles. Many say the apostles stole Jesus' body and lied about his resurrection. This would make sense if Jesus' disciples gained something by spreading a lie - like Muhammad's followers who gained riches and power. However, Jesus' apostles were killed for preaching Jesus' resurrection. If the apostles were lying, they would have recanted once death was threatened. But they were witnesses. As Peter said, *"... we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard"* (Acts 4:20).

Resurrection or Apparition? Some will allow that the apostles thought they saw Jesus after his resurrection, but they were delusional and saw an apparition of Jesus. This would explain the apostles' willingness to die for the gospel, but this argument fails because it demands the existence of mass visionary experiences. After his resurrection, Jesus showed himself to groups small and large. Two people do not see the same apparition or vision at once, let alone 500 people. Regardless, if we claim the apostles saw an apparition, we must still answer the question, "Where is the body?"