

A photograph of a dense forest with tall, thin trees. The ground is covered in fallen leaves and branches. A large, dark cross-shaped shadow is cast on the ground in the center of the image.

SEEING THE FOREST FOR THE TREES

DR. VIC TORRES

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God's Promises Revealed

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DEDICATION

To the Lord Jesus Christ
and the wife of my youth, Dee.
Proverbs 5:18

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PREFACE

The Bible is consistent, understandable and trustworthy. The purpose of this book is to give context or background to reading and studying the Bible. It is not meant to be exhaustive in scope nor is it meant to be a substitute for reading the Bible. Hopefully, it will provoke your interest and cause you to investigate further into the most important book ever written.

The Bible was never meant to be understood solely by intellectual means because it is a spiritual book and the most important elements need to be spiritually evaluated. By spiritual we don't mean in the pious sense of outward religion or rote memorization of Scripture verses, but through an honest dialogue with our heavenly Father and the working of His Holy Spirit. The Bible is the most effective way that God is able to "speak" to us about His love and His healing for our souls.

"Seeing the Forest for the Trees" is meant to help us get to the real issue of what is most important in the Bible and that real issue is *redemption*. A Biblical definition for redemption is the restoration of a lost humanity back to a personal, open, loving relationship with our Heavenly Father through the completed works of Jesus Christ and through the agency of the Holy Spirit.

My personal hope for you is that as you read this book you will find it informative, interesting, and most of all that it will provide an "anchor" for your soul. That anchor being faith in Jesus Christ and seeing that He really is... "the way, the truth, and the life".

PART ONE Overview

“Get Knowledge”

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge...”

Proverbs 1:7

1 Introduction

Learning How to See the Forest for the Trees

The phrase, “can’t see the forest for the trees” is often used to mean that it is easy to get caught up in all of the details of an issue and miss the “big picture”. It would be like trying to assemble a 5000-piece jig-saw puzzle without knowing what the finished puzzle should look like. Many people wouldn’t even want to try to put a puzzle like that together; they would see it as an exercise in futility. This is often how many see the Bible; the complexity of details obscures the purpose of the Bible and therefore it doesn’t seem to make sense. The “trees” are so plentiful that the forest, or the purpose of the Bible, is missed.

The reading level of most Bibles is for grades 7-12, depending on the translation, and is therefore easy to read. While the Bible may be easy to read, it can be a difficult book to understand because there is so much in the Bible that is unfamiliar and culturally foreign to most people.

There is so much in the Bible to consider. For instance, there are 2 major parts of the Bible- the Old Testament and the New Testament with a total of 66 books. The Old Testament is made up of 39 books and the New Testament has 27 books. Learning the names of the books and the sequence in which they are found is a challenge all by itself. Then each of the books are broken up into chapters and then the chapters are broken up into verses. You can begin to see all of the “trees” so to speak.

On top of all of these details is the fact that each book is set in a time and place unfamiliar to our times and culture. Added to all those details are the obscure names of hundreds of characters from different eras and lands. When

you look at all of the details that can be found in the Bible, it is no wonder that so many give up reading it by the time they get to the book of Leviticus, the third book of the Old Testament.

The logical place to begin studying the Bible, as with any book, is at the beginning, but before we begin, we must have the end in mind. For instance, when we pick out a book for personal reading we tend to pick out a certain genre. It might be a non-fiction, mystery, romance, or a biography. What we choose determines what we expect to find in the story. The same thing is true of the Bible. We must ask ourselves what is the predominant message of the Bible in its entirety? It is so easy to lose sight of the message because of all the details found in the Bible.

So, what kind of book is the Bible? Why are we reading it? What do we hope to get out of it? Some would say that the Bible is about the history of man's beginnings. Others would say that the Bible is about wisdom or a guide for living. Still others would say that the Bible is spiritual in nature. While the Bible is all of these things, it is first and foremost a *God inspired* book regarding His plan of *redemption or salvation* for mankind. Redemption from God's perspective means to save from sin, to recover a lost relationship, to exchange blessings for curses, to pay off a debt, or to fulfill an obligation. From a human perspective redemption means eternal security.

Human tendency is to look for what you expect to find. If you look only for history, you will only see history. If you look for a guide to life, you will find that. What you get out of the Bible is colored by your expectations. If you have no idea of the purpose of the Bible, then the Bible will probably not make any sense at all. Many people give-up on reading the most important book in the world simply because they don't know what they are looking for.

The Bible is consistent, understandable and trustworthy. It is, without doubt, the most influential book in history. The

Bible has been translated into virtually every language known and found in every country of the world. For much of the world's population the Bible has been the most important wellspring of moral truths. The Bible is the foundation of the 3 most significant religions in the world today: Christianity, Judaism, and Islam.

2 The Bible

In order to have any confidence in the Bible, we need to know something about it, especially from a general or overview perspective. After all it is the source of what we know about God, His plan for us and how we need to respond to Him.

This book will not be taking a "Survey" view of the Bible, examining each book as to authorship, times of the writings, the Christ of the book or chapter by chapter break down. This important information is available in most Study Bibles. Our approach will be to take an overview of the Bible, to take a step back, as it were, and try to understand why the Bible was inspired by God and written down by men. The purpose of this book is not to make us theologians or Bible scholars, but to reveal our human nature and, in spite of that human nature, God's great love for us. God did not create the Bible for theologians and Bible scholars, but it was created for the average person, like you and me. You don't need a degree or seminary training to understand the Bible; the spiritual nature of the Bible makes it accessible to everyone.

There are a number of practical understandings that we need to have in order to eliminate the frustration, some people feel, in reading the Bible.

The first is called "Canon Perspective". How was the Bible put together and organized? For example, as a Christian, are we under the Old Testament, the New Testament, or both?

The second perspective is the "Historical Perspective". While the Bible is much more than a historical book having

an understanding of the flow of history is very helpful to having a context for the events portrayed in the Bible.

The third perspective is the "Message Perspective". What was the purpose of God in making the Bible available to us? This is the most important intention of the Bible, there is a message- a message of redemption, a message of reclaiming and restoring a relationship with God which was lost and now can be found through the pages of the Bible.

3 Canon Perspective

The word canon is defined as those books recognized as inspired of God. The word canon comes from the Greek which means literally a straight rod or bar; a measuring rule as a ruler used by masons and carpenters; a standard for testing straightness. As Believers we accept, by faith, that the Bible is inspired (God breathed) by God. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Tim 3:16).

The Bible is "closed" which means that the Bible is complete; nothing can be added or taken away. There have been a number of councils from AD 170 to AD 397 that have decided what books to include in the Bible, but these councils never had the power to cause books to be inspired; they simply recognized that which God inspired at the moment the books were written.

The Christian Bible is composed of two parts; the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament canon contains 39 books; the New Testament canon contains 27 books. The Old Testament deals primarily with the relationship between God and the nation of Israel. The books of the Old Testament Bible were placed in order according to the type of literature:

1. *5 Books of the Law or Torah (Pentateuch, Gk. for "The Scrolls")*: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. The Pentateuch deals primarily with the creation of Israel and God establishing a covenant relationship with Israel. The writing of these books has been ascribed to Moses. It holds supreme rank in Judaism and the

Old Testament canon in respect and holiness. The Hebrew-speaking Jewish community referred to these five books as "The Law," "Torah," or "The Law of Moses."

2. *12 Historical Books*: Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, 2 Kings, 1 Chronicles, 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther. The historical books record Israel's history, its victories and successes, along with its defeats and failures. These books share a prophetic view of history describing how the obedience or disobedience of God's people is directly tied to the blessings and curses of the Covenant.
3. *5 Wisdom Books*: Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon. The poetic books give us a more intimate look at God's relationship with Israel and His passion for Israel to worship and obey Him. Unlike classical and modern poetry, Hebrew poetry is noted for its parallelism or the balance of ideas in phrases. To the Hebrews, wisdom included skill in living and the powers of observation. It also included the capacity of human intellect and the application of knowledge and experience to daily life. All of this came from a viewpoint that was firmly rooted in "the fear of the Lord," which is "the beginning of wisdom".
4. *The Prophets*: The prophetic books are God's call to Israel to repent from its idolatry and unfaithfulness and to return to a relationship of obedience and spiritual fidelity. The term "Major" is used to denote the size of the book not its importance, the "Minor" prophets are smaller works in size.
 - a. *5 Major Prophets Books*: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, and Daniel. The Old Testament prophet tended to be revealed during times of crisis. God used the prophets

to provide direction and wisdom during times of calamity. They were also used by God to remind the people of their covenantal promises.

- b. *12 Minor Prophets Books*: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. The relevance of biblical prophecy is not only the information revealed to the audience about the circumstances being faced in their time or in a time to come, but also what the message reveals about the nature of God. Prophecy in the Bible is part of God's self-revelation by which we come to know God through what he has done in the past and what He plans to do in the future.

The Old Testament – 39 Books

- 1. The Law, Torah, Pentateuch
Genesis – Deuteronomy; Five Books
- 2. Historical Books
Joshua – Esther; Twelve Books
- 3. Wisdom Books
Job - Song of Solomon; Five Books
- 4. Major Prophets
Isaiah – Daniel; Five Books
- 5. Minor Prophets
Hosea – Malachi; Twelve Books

The Jews only recognize the Old Testament, but of course they do not call it the Old Testament, they call it the *Tanakh*. The Tanakh contains 24 books, but have the same content as the Christian version of the Old Testament. While containing the same content, the Hebrew Bible is divided differently. All 12 Minor Prophets books are combined into one book. The following pairs of Historical books are

combined into one book each: 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, 1 & 2 Chronicles and Nehemiah & Ezra. The total comes out to 24.

As the Old Testament was the "handbook" so to speak for the Jews, the New Testament is the handbook for the Christian and the Church. The New Testament contains 27 books and they are also arranged into types of literature:

1. *The Gospels*: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. The first four books of the New Testament are called the Gospels. The word "gospel" means "good news." These books tell us the good news of the coming of Christ to save man from his sins. The four Gospels also give us the accounts of the birth, life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Gospels also reveal how Jesus was the promised Messiah of the Old Testament and lay the foundation for the teaching of the rest of the New Testament. The authors of the Gospels are the same as the title of each book.
2. *The Book of Acts*: This book was written by Luke and records the deeds of Jesus' apostles- the men Jesus sent out into the world to proclaim the Gospel of salvation. The book of Acts tells us of the beginning of the church and its rapid growth in the first century A.D. The book of Acts also tells us about the ministries of the Apostles Peter and Paul, the many miracles they performed and how people became Christians in the early church.
3. *The Epistles*: In the Greek language the word "epistle" means "letter." There are 21 epistles in the New Testament. The epistles of the New Testament can be divided into two groups: The Epistles of Paul and the General Epistles. The apostle Paul wrote 13 of the 21 epistles.
 - a. *The Epistles of Paul* are letters written to specific churches giving official Christian doctrine and the

practice associated with that doctrine. Paul wrote Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon. Some believe Paul also wrote the book of Hebrews.

- b. *The General Epistles* compliment the Pauline Epistles with additional teaching and application. They are as follows: James, 1 and 2 Peter, 1, 2 and 3 John, and Jude.
- 4. *The Book of Revelation* is a prophetic book that reveals the events that will occur in the *End Times*.

The New Testament – 27 books

- 1. Gospels, Matthew – John; 4 books
- 2. Historical book, Acts; 1 book
- 3. Epistles, Romans – 3 John; 21 books
- 4. Prophetic book, Revelation; 1 book

As the Old Testament applies to the Jews, the New Testament applies to Christians. In the words of the writer of the book of Hebrews, the Old Testament is the shadow, the New Testament is the reality. Much of the Old Testament contains prophetic types and statements pointing to the coming of a better covenant based upon a better promise, all found in Jesus Christ.

4 Historical Perspective

From a historical point of view when reading the Old Testament, we must ask ourselves, what period of Israel's history are we looking at? Since God is all about people, it would be wise to look at the characters of the Bible to figure out the historical timeline. Since there are hundreds, if not thousands, of characters in the Bible, we will look at key individuals only as they relate to the timeline. Even by looking at only key names there will be many names, but realize that there is great meaning in biblical names and God works through the names of real people. Keep in mind that the more familiar we become with certain key names and the relationships between the characters, the more the Bible will make sense.

The following narrative will provide a very general overview of the Old Testament with a focus of developing a timeline. Some details will be presented later in this book. There are distinct periods of time associated with specific Bible characters such as:

The Progenitors of the people of Israel.

Who were the ancestors that led to a person God calls **Israel**? Yes, Israel is a person from whom the Nation of Israel would one day be established. We find the answer to this question and more in the Book of Genesis.

The very first characters in the Bible are **Adam** and **Eve**. They had three sons- Cain, Abel, and **Seth**. Seth's blood line, after many generations, leads to a righteous man named **Noah**. Noah had three sons- **Shem**, Japheth and Ham. Shem's blood line, again after many generations, leads to a man of faith named **Abram**. God would change

Abram's name to Abraham and so we will see both names for the same person.

Abraham is the first of the three patriarchs (fathers) of a people who will become known as Israel- Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Abraham had two sons- Ishmael and **Isaac**. Isaac was called by God the "Son of Promise". Isaac had two sons, Esau and **Jacob**. God changed Jacob's name to **Israel**! Technically, the Israelites are all the descendants of Jacob otherwise known as Israel.

Israel (Jacob) had 12 sons who are the progenitors of the **12 tribes of Israel**. They are: Rueben, Simeon, Levi, **Judah**, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph, and Benjamin. Manasseh and Ephraim were sons of Joseph and occupied the land that was set aside for Joseph, therefore we will often see their names included with the 12 tribes. The key individual in this list of names is Judah because God made a promise that the Messiah (Gk. Christ) would come from the Tribe of Judah.

The terms Israelite, Jew, and Hebrew are often used interchangeably, but technically there are important differences. The name **Hebrew** is applied to anyone who is a descendant of Abraham because he spoke the Semitic language called Hebrew. The term **Israelite** refers to any descendant from the 12 sons of Israel (Jacob); whereas the term **Jew** (Yehudi) is derived from the name Judah, therefore the term Jew is used for a descendent of Judah. Technically all Israelites and Jews are Hebrews and while Jews are Israelites, not all Israelites are Jews.

The Book of Genesis concludes with the life of Joseph, one of the 12 sons of Israel and his importance comes from the fact that God used Joseph to bring Israel (12 sons) to the next stage of the timeline.

Progenitors of Israel

1. Adam & Eve
2. Seth

3. Noah
4. Shem
5. Abram (Abraham)
6. Isaac
7. Jacob (Israel)
8. 12 Sons or Tribes

The 12 tribes of Israel in Egypt.

The Book of Exodus now follows the history of the Israelites in Egypt, their enslavement, and their miraculous deliverance. Through miraculous circumstances the 70 people who make up the 12 sons of Israel and their families are graciously accepted into Egypt as a result of Joseph rescuing Egypt from a crippling famine. With the passage of time (400 years) Israel is enslaved and treated harshly by a series of new Pharaohs. The Israelites, whose population had grown from 70 to 600,000 male adults, between 1.5 - 2 million people with wives and children, are now viewed as a threat to Egypt's economy and security.

In the Israelites' darkest moments, God raised up a man by the name of **Moses**. He was from the tribe of Levi, the priestly class. God used Moses to deliver the Israelites from Egypt to a land promised by God to Abraham, a land flowing with "milk and honey". Pharaoh's reluctance to let the people go resulted in God using Moses to unleash 10 plagues upon Egypt. The 10 plagues are a direct assault against the Egyptian gods who are powerless against the God of the Israelites.

The final plague is the plague of the *death of all firstborn*. This plague took the life of every firstborn child and animal in the land. The only remedy was for each family who, believed and trusted God for deliverance, to participate in what is now known as the Passover. The Passover required each family to share in a meal and to apply the blood of a lamb on the post and lintels of the doorway. The "Destroyer" seeking the firstborn would then "pass over"

those homes protected by the blood of the lamb. It was, and still is, the blood of the lamb that would redeem and deliver.

Pharaoh finally relented and let the people go only to change his mind after the Israelites had departed. Pharaoh summoned his army and began to pursue the Israelites. The climax of this stage of the timeline occurred when the Israelites found themselves facing the impassable Red Sea with the armies of Pharaoh at their backs. God used Moses to perform another miracle in “parting” the Red Sea so that all of the Israelites could pass through on dry ground. When the Egyptians tried to follow, the Red Sea closed up on them and they were drowned. By *trusting* in God, the Israelites were delivered from slavery and death, set free to embrace a new life in a new land they could call their own.

The 12 tribes of Israel in the Desert.

The Books of Exodus and Numbers describes the “wanderings” of the Israelites in the wilderness. As a matter of fact, to the Jews, the Book of Numbers is called the Book of Wanderings. The issue of “trusting God”, or faith in God, is critical to a relationship with God. Hebrews 11:6 states that “without faith it is impossible to please God”. Faith is not simply “I believe”, but faith is believing and then doing from the heart what God requires. As we will see, this issue of trust or faith in God is what turned an 11-day journey into 40-years of wandering in the wilderness for the 12 tribes of Israel.

God instructed Moses to choose one man from each tribe and to send them on a mission to “spy-out” or reconnoiter the land they had been promised. The land was called Canaan, roughly the same area as Israel today. The 12 men spent 40 days gathering information about the land and the people who occupied it. When they returned, 10 of the men gave a negative report. The 10 reported that the land was truly a land “flowing with milk and honey”, an expression

meaning that it was a fertile and productive land for farming and raising sheep. They also reported that the inhabitants of the land were fierce and terrifying! They recommended that they *not* go into the promised land. Only two spies, **Joshua** and **Caleb**, gave a positive result based upon their trust in God's ability to follow through on His promise.

The negativity and fear, brought on by the 10, spread throughout the Israelite camp. God, in His sovereignty, chose to send the people on a journey in the wilderness and withhold the promised land for 40 years. It was not until a new generation of Israelites came into being that God fulfilled His promise.

During the 40 years in the wilderness, God revealed His moral law in the form of written tablets called the 10 Commandments. God also provided oral traditions of laws that covered their government, social interactions and religious practices. The oral teachings later became part of Jewish writings known as the Talmud.

The 12 tribes occupy the Promised Land.

After 40 years in the wilderness, the 12 Tribes of Israel were ready to enter into the promised land. Only Moses, Joshua, and Caleb are left from the original Exodus from Egypt. Moses had been prohibited by God from crossing the Jordan River, but God allowed him to see the land of Canaan from Pisgah, before he died. Joshua became the new leader and led the Israelites across the Jordan River into Canaan. It is in the Book of Joshua that we find the details of the victories, defeats, and eventual settlement in the land of Canaan. The lesson that the Book of Joshua emphasizes is that victory against the enemy comes as a result of faith and obedience to God.

Following Joshua's passing, the tribes of Israel are led by a series of **12 judges** or deliverers. The Israelites would go through cycles of living under the blessings of God, then abandoning God and finding themselves under oppression

from neighboring nations. The Book of Judges details this cycle of blessings through obedience, and oppression as a result of disobedience. The theme of Judges can be found in the phrase, “they did what was right in their own eyes”. Put another way, the people then as well as now, can always find a way to rationalize or justify what they want to do even if it means disobeying God. When the people were far from God, He would raise up a deliverer or a judge, to defeat their enemies, and bring them to repentance and restoration.

United Kingdom of Israel.

Up to this point in history, Israel never had a king like the other nations surrounding them because God was their King! The people began to clamor for a king so that they would be like the other nations. Wanting an earthly king in essence meant they were rejecting the Lordship of God. The books of 1 & 2 Samuel and 1 & 2 Kings describes the transition from the leadership of judges to the leadership of kings. The most prominent kings in establishing Israel as a nation were Kings Saul, David, and Solomon. These three kings were responsible for establishing Israel as a great nation.

The judge-priest **Eli** led the Israelites and was instrumental in acknowledging the last judge, the prophet **Samuel**. God used Samuel to anoint and confirm **Saul**, the son of Kish from the tribe of Benjamin, as Israel’s first king. As result of a major character flaw, Saul disqualified himself from being king over Israel. While Saul had all the external attributes of a king and leader he did not have the single character attribute that was essential to God. He did not do all that God asked him to do. Instead, he was influenced by circumstances and the people around him, choosing to do what pleased the people rather than God.

The next king was **David**, the son of Jesse, a shepherd boy. David was chosen by God not because of his looks or

stature but because he loved God. God said of David, "He is a man after my own heart, in that he will do all that I ask him to do" (Acts 13:22). David was passionate about serving God. A very important point here is that David was from the tribe of *Judah*- The very tribe from which the promised Messiah (Gk. Christ) would come.

Saul was still king when David slew the champion of the Philistines, Goliath. David became a victorious leader in Israel's army and was beloved by the people of Israel. As you can imagine this set up all kinds of tension between King Saul and David, but David would not come against his King. Upon the passing of King Saul, David became King. David had a son with his wife Bathsheba; his name was **Solomon**. He ruled Israel after the death of King David.

Divided Kingdom of Israel, Exile and Return.

The second half of the book, 2 Kings, describes the sequence of kings following King Solomon. The end of King Solomon's rule represents the beginning of the decline of the United Kingdom of Israel. After Solomon's death, his son, **Rehoboam**, assumed the reign over the United Kingdom. In short order he soon met resistance from **Jeroboam**, a servant of the House of Solomon. Ten of the tribes sided with Jeroboam. Only the tribes of Judah and Benjamin stood behind Rehoboam. Greatly outnumbered, they fled to Jerusalem in the south. Thus, began the period known as the *Divided Kingdom*- Judah in the south with the Temple and Jerusalem as its capital; Israel in the north with Samaria as its capital. When King Jeroboam barred the Levites, the priests, from worship in Israel, many of them fled to Judah in the south. In short order, the northern state of Israel fell into idol worship and turned their backs on God. The 18 kings following Jeroboam are described as primarily evil kings.

Judah, in the long term, did not fare any better than Israel and spiraled into decline. In the line of 19 kings that

followed Rehoboam some are described as good but many were evil.

Throughout the Bible we see a pattern: obey God and be blessed; disobey God and you will be oppressed by your enemies. Both Israel and Judah are weakened by the division and continual warfare between each other as well as surrounding nations. By 722 BC, Israel in the north is conquered by the Assyrians and the population taken into exile, which was a common practice. The 10 tribes of the northern kingdom, Israel, were never to return to the promised land. They became known as the "lost tribes of Israel". By 586 BC, Judah was conquered by the Babylonians and also taken into exile, but God would not forget His promise. Judah would one-day return to the promised land.

The books of Ezra and Nehemiah recount the return of Judah from their Babylonian exile, which would begin to take place 70 years after their exile. The Major and Minor Prophets are the prophetic voices warning Israel and Judah of their foolishness in disobeying God and the consequences of their actions. The prophets also speak a message of hope in the restoration of a remnant nation that is recorded in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah.

The 400 Silent years.

Four hundred year elapses between the restoration of the remnant of Judah to the land of Israel and the New Testament period. This period of time is called silent because no prophet of God speaks during this time.

After 400 years of silence John the Baptist, a prophet, came preaching in the wilderness of Judea and started to prophecy about the coming of the "*Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world*". He was, of course, referring to the person of Jesus Christ.

Israel as a Nation

1. Israel in Egypt
2. Israel in the Wilderness
3. Israel in Canaan
4. The United Kingdom
5. The Divided Kingdom
6. The Exile Period
7. Return from Exile
8. 400 Silent years

We have covered about 4000 years of biblical history, from Adam and Eve through the New Testament period. This includes about 2000 years of Israel's history from Abraham up to the birth of Jesus Christ. While our overview just touches the surface of times, characters, places, and deep teachings found in the Old Testament, the timeline presented will help provide a context for our look at the promises of God or covenants.

5 Message Perspective

This book is written for Christians to help see the simplicity and the unity of God's plan for mankind. As Christians, it is vitally important for us to understand that the Bible was given to us by God and the books of the Bible have been assembled to present in very clear terms:

1. God's *plan for mankind* through which mankind would find that it is impossible to please God by his own efforts or *works*.
2. The means by which God would fulfill His *redemptive* work for mankind. The word redemption is one of those words which is filled

with so much meaning; it means to save from sin, recover that which was lost, to provide an exchange, pay-off the debt, and fulfill the requirements.

3. The beginning of understanding the Bible as a whole is to look at key events as a series of promises or *covenants* initiated by God.

God has created a moral universe with certain moral laws in effect. Like the physical laws of nature, gravity for instance, they cannot be violated without consequence. What goes up must come down! The most precise and condensed moral law of the Bible is summed up in the words of Jesus, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:37-39). This encapsulation of the moral law is based upon the 10 commandments found in Exodus 20:1-17, and Deuteronomy 5:4-21.

The Bible contains more than moral truths. More importantly, it also contains God's plan for the redemption of mankind. This theme of redemption is why God inspired the 40 writers of the Bible to weave an account of His dealings with mankind; with the ultimate goal of providing a plan of salvation through Jesus Christ.

Often the approach to reading and studying the Bible is done without much thought about understanding the theme or overall message of the Bible. As we have said, the Bible is much more than a history book revealing the creation of the world or the forming of a nation called Israel (The Old Testament), or of the establishment of the Christian church (The New Testament). The Bible is a revelation of God's heart to see the restoration of a broken relationship with His creation, mankind. More than anything else the Bible is a book of *God's promises*. The most important promises to

understand are the promises God makes called *covenants*, of which there are eight. The infinite value of the Bible is revealed when we understand that we live in the last of these eight covenants called the *New Covenant*.

Understand that reading or studying the Bible is like reading a good book. Everything that happens in the story is presented to bring the reader to the culminating climax at the end of the book. The purpose of the Old Testament is to understand what Jesus *purchased* and made available to mankind, at the Cross of Calvary, which is found in the New Testament. In other words, the climax of the Old Testament is the New Testament!

You will notice that we have been using the word understand rather than know. There is a vast difference between knowledge and understanding. Most people, in the beginning, approach the Bible from a knowledge perspective. Let me get as many facts and information and then it will make sense. While knowledge or data is important, knowledge is just the beginning. Knowledge should lead to understanding and understanding is the gateway to wisdom.

6 Knowledge – Understanding - Wisdom

“Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good” (Genesis 1:31). God has created a moral (good) universe. This fact is very important for us to see and understand. God created a world that was perfect and complete in every way. That perfection was not only found in the physical world, but extended to the relational realm and spiritual realm as well. Every part of nature was in perfect harmony and there was a moral order. Nothing was corrupted by sin. Sin is simply disobedience as a result of disbelief.

From the beginning, God established universal laws of right and wrong which He has decreed. His laws have not changed with changing times or cultures. Because God made everything, including mankind, He knows best how we are to function successfully within the world that He created. He has revealed these life instructions to us through the Holy Spirit-inspired writings of His servants over a period of 1500 years. These have been preserved in the form of the Holy Scriptures or Holy Bible.

God’s Full Blessings

It is only when we live according to God’s laws and instructions (revealed in the Bible) that we can receive His full blessings (Genesis 1:22, 28). When we do the right things with the right motives, we are blessed by God within the system He has established. If we do the wrong things (or even the right things but with the wrong motives) then we cannot be blessed by God (Proverbs 13:15). God will

only bless according to the laws and order that He has established.

Though sin has corrupted the world we live in, “right and wrong” as revealed in God’s Word have not changed (Deuteronomy 13:18; Isaiah 5:20). There are serious consequences when we *willfully* do what is right in our own eyes contrary to God’s will (Proverbs 12:15; 21:2). Disobedience to God is sin because disobedience is, in effect, unbelief or lack of trust in Him.

As Christians, we must strive to know God’s Word and to discern His heart. We must seek to obey His Word and learn to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit *which will always agree with the Word of God*. Living in such a way allows us to walk in right relationship with God and to glorify and please Him. Living by God’s standards requires that we apply God’s wisdom to our lives – beyond just knowing or *hearing* His Word, but by *doing* His Word.

“The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, and He delights in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down; for the Lord upholds him with His hand” (Psalm 37:23, 24). King David of the Bible was described as a “man after God’s heart” (Acts 13:22). David was willing and obedient to try to do all that was right in God’s eyes. Though David did sin against God at times, and suffered the consequences, David was also quick to repent and to get his heart and life right again before the Lord. David is an example of a man who had godly wisdom.

Wisdom from the Bible

The Bible teaches that there is a process to gaining wisdom. We learn this truth in the “Wisdom Books” of the Bible (Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Songs of Solomon). The steps to gaining wisdom are most often described as:

1. Get knowledge.
2. Gain understanding.

3. Obtain wisdom.

The terms knowledge, understanding and wisdom are sometimes used interchangeably, but are different from one another in subtle but important ways.

Knowledge – The Building Blocks of Wisdom

Knowledge represents a person's acquired truths or facts about life. This can happen through personal experience or thought, or gleaning from the experience of others. The greatest truths that a person can possess with the mind or learn through experience are, of course, truths about God: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all those who do His commandments" (Ps 111:10). "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction" (Prov 1:7). The words "fear of" used in these verses is best understood as "awesome respect of".

True knowledge about God cannot be gained by human reason alone. It is only fully acquired as God shows Himself to man through His Bible, aided by the Holy Spirit.

The Process of Gaining Knowledge

Most of us begin our life as Christians with virtually no knowledge of the Bible. We have no background to build upon, so gaining knowledge requires a great amount of work. This is further complicated because we also have many things to *unlearn*; wrong understandings, bad habits, worldly mindsets, and views.

Slowly but surely, as we study God's Word, we accumulate facts and information: the names of the books of the Bible, Bible characters, biblical events and stories. We are collecting the *building material* needed to begin to build a structure that will help us to stand firm in this life (Matthew 7:24-27).

As born-again believers, we also have the assistance of a great Helper. We have the Holy Spirit dwelling within us,

who reveals truth about God as we study the Bible. Prior to becoming Christians, we read the Bible only with our natural minds. Now as believers we are also spiritual, and we have been given the mind of Christ. "But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one. For 'who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct Him?' But we have the mind of Christ" (1 Corinthians 2:14-16).

The Holy Spirit enlightens our eyes and mind to passages in the Scriptures that are relevant to our situation and circumstances. As we read and reread we begin to see and understand Scripture passages that we may not have noticed before. We recognize the life and power that accompanies the Word of God. Our passion for God and His Word begins to burn with greater fervor. Jesus said, "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you" (John 14:26).

Rhema and Logos

It is common to refer to the Bible as "The Word". The New Testament of the Bible was originally written in the Greek language. In translating the Greek into English there were two Greek words, *logos* and *rhema*, that were translated into the one word "word". This means that when we see the word "word" it could be either *logos* or *rhema*. The word *logos* mean "written word", or an expression of thought. The word *rhema* means "spoken word", or a word uttered in speech or writing. Both *rhema* and *logos* are used throughout the New Testament.

The significance of the word *rhema* is that it applies to a single Scripture verse, scriptural principle or truth— one that is quickened to our mind by the Holy Spirit in our time of

need. It is as if the Holy Spirit is “speaking” to us an answer to a question, or providing direction or guidance.

The Bible reveals that its own words are living and able to discern both the thoughts of our mind and the motives of our heart. “For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12).

God is able to speak to us clearly through the Bible. God can speak to us about general principles for life (*logos*) and He can speak to us about personal matters or circumstances (*rhema*). That is why it is vitally important for us to daily read the *logos* (written) Word. It is from this daily reading of the *logos* that God can give to us His *rhema* (personal or spoken) word. The *rhema* of God will always line up with and agree with the words and principles found in the *logos* (written) Word of God.

Understanding – The Mortar of Wisdom

“Understanding” represents the desire to use the knowledge we have of God to know and serve Him.

1. “Give me understanding, and I shall keep Your law; Indeed, I shall observe it with my whole heart” (Ps 119:34).
2. “Through Your precepts I get understanding; therefore, I hate every false way” (Ps 119:104).

As we continue to accumulate information (knowledge), we begin to see connections between the collection of facts, dates, characters, and stories. The Holy Spirit is actively at work *illuminating* (Ps 119:105) or enlightening our understanding (Eph 1:18).

As we study and pray, the Holy Spirit begins to teach us the concepts or principles of God’s Word. This will help to connect our fragments of knowledge together into a cohesive structure. When this begins to occur, the

Scriptures will make much more sense to us. We will gain a much fuller understanding of the Truth. This “personal revelation” is what helps the Bible, in all of its parts, to fit together and make spiritual sense.

Personal Revelation

There is an example from the Bible of a personal revelation that Peter the apostle had (read Matthew 16:13-19). Peter had been with Jesus, heard His teachings, and His wondrous works and miracles. He possessed all kinds of information and knowledge about Jesus but still did not see Jesus for who He really was.

However, on this occasion, Jesus asked His disciples a question, “who do people say that I am?”. After several disciples answered with names of prophets of old, Jesus addresses Peter: “Peter, who do you say I am?”. Peter replied, “You are the Christ (Messiah or Savior), the Son of the living God”! Jesus answered and said to him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven” (Matt 16:17).

Peter had been given a personal revelation of the truth of who Jesus was and is. It was not by human reasoning or intellect, but by the sovereign impartation from the Father, through the Holy Spirit, to Peter. Peter went beyond just hearing the words that Jesus had been saying about Himself. Peter suddenly understood that Jesus was *the* Christ (the expected Messiah)! Peter went from knowledge about Jesus to fully understanding who Jesus was. This is an example of personal revelation, and this is what we can seek as we study. We can pray that Jesus would reveal, by His Holy Spirit, the fruit of knowledge... understanding.

Wisdom – The Application of Understanding

Wisdom represents more than knowledge and understanding. Wisdom is knowing what pleases God *and*

doing it.

1. "For the Lord gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding" (Prov 2:6).
2. "For wisdom is better than rubies, and all the things one may desire cannot be compared with her" (Prov 8:11).

Many think that just having knowledge and understanding about God are enough. However, from God's point of view, there is a further step to take and that step is wisdom.

Wisdom is the knowledge and understanding of God being *correctly applied*, with correct motives, to everyday life. It is not enough to simply hear and understand the Word of God. We are called to be *doers* of the Word who are motivated by pure hearts. "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does" (James 1:22-25). Doing the Word is the solid foundation of wisdom spoken of by Jesus in the parable of the Two Builders, (Matt 7:24-27).

Being doers of the Word many times requires faith and it is this kind of faith that pleases God (Hebrews 11:6). This is what it really means to be led by the Holy Spirit. The Bible provides the knowledge, the Holy Spirit gives us understanding of the Bible, and again the Holy Spirit leads us and helps us to do the Word. We must *choose* to actually apply and do the Word of God. "That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him" (Ephesians 1:17).

All three aspects – knowledge, understanding and wisdom – require effort on our part. However, we must also receive the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit within us. The Holy Spirit illuminates the Scriptures for knowledge, the Holy Spirit gives us personal revelation for understanding, and the Holy Spirit leads us to be doers of the Word, stirring up our faith. It is this faith that will release the full blessings of God upon our life and it is this faith that pleases Him (Heb 11:6).

7 God's Promises or Covenants

The Study of God's covenants or promises in the Scriptures should be of primary importance to every Christian believer, and yet the subject is often overlooked. Learning about covenants is vital to understanding God's eternal plan of salvation for mankind.

This plan of God – which *He initiated* – is seen from the time of the Garden of Eden and throughout the Bible! The entire Old Covenant (or Old Testament) speaks of the anticipation and yearning to see the New Covenant of Grace initiated and fulfilled through the Son of God, Jesus Christ. We find covenants throughout the entire Bible, from Genesis to Revelation. Yet their significance is not always apparent to us. Both the general concepts of covenants, and the specific details of each covenant made between God and man, are important to study because understanding God's covenants will build faith in Him and His Word.

Foundational to our study of covenants is knowing that God is a covenant-making and a covenant-keeping God. Our God makes promises (covenants). Then He makes an oath upon Himself – since there is nothing greater (Heb 6:13) – that He will fulfill His promises (Isa 55:10-11). God is the supremely all-powerful Being in the universe. He has all the power and authority needed to fulfill all of His promises to mankind.

God has *progressively revealed* Himself and His plans for mankind over the ages. These revelations are recorded in the Bible and are further detailed through God's covenants

with man. The covenants reveal much about how God communicates with and relates with mankind.

Students of the Bible know that one way to determine the importance of a word or subject in the Bible is to count how many times it appears. When God speaks about a subject repeatedly it means that we need to pay attention for it has high importance with God.

The subject of covenants is one of those important topics. The word covenant is used 282 times in the Old Testament and 34 times in the New Testament - *a total of 316 times!* It is obvious that the subject of covenants is a priority principle to God. Therefore, if we are to live “overcoming lives”, we need to understand this significant subject.

There is also a principle in Bible study known as the “*principle of first mention*”. The principle of first mention means that the first time something is mentioned in the Bible, it is important to take notice. A doctrine or truth, when first mentioned in Scripture, is in its most basic form. More about that doctrine or truth may be revealed later in the Bible. Thus, this principle of first mention should guide how we interpret following occurrences, in Scripture, of that same word or subject.

The Book of Genesis is the first book in the Bible. It begins with God’s revelation of Himself to mankind. Even the word “genesis” means begin, or come into existence. It will be important to notice that four of the eight covenants that God makes with mankind are found in this book of beginnings called Genesis.

Our study of God’s covenants begins in the Garden of Eden, with Adam and Eve. We will then progress through Noah, Abraham, Moses, David and conclude with the final covenant in Scripture, the New Covenant through Jesus Christ.

Let us now look at some of the great benefits of studying and gaining an understanding of the covenants:

1. The study of covenants will confirm that biblical history is not a series of random events or stories. It is instead the step-by-step unfolding of God's great plan of redemption for mankind. Each of the eight covenants is linked, in purpose and plan, to the one before it and the one after it. Every successive covenant brings us a step deeper in the revelation of God's plan of redemption; and a step closer to when Jesus (the Christ, Messiah, Savior) will return. This deeper revelation is also a revelation of God's heart; a heart that does not seek to condemn His creation, but seeks salvation or redemption for His creation (John 3:16,17).
2. Our study of covenants will reveal that the historical events of the Bible fit together in a logical sequence within the context of the covenants. There are over 3000 individuals named in the Bible. Yet, those with whom God has made covenants; men like Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and of course, Jesus Christ, are some of the most important to study.
3. This study of covenants will help us know that God has a purpose for mankind. He has chosen to reveal His purpose through a series of successive covenants. Each covenant reveals something important about God's nature and also reveals something important about man's nature.
4. Our study will show why *Jesus Christ is the only way, truth and life* (John 14:6). All people, of every nation, tribe, and tongue can know and walk again with God. There is only *one way* that can happen and that is *through Jesus Christ* as a result of the New Covenant. This is the final covenant in which we now live.
5. We will also learn that, as Christ followers, we have entered into a covenant relationship. As part of

that New Covenant, we become sons and daughters of God, and co-heirs with Jesus (Gal 4:5-7). As sons and daughters, God desires *relationship* with us, not simply religious formality or ritual. As Adam walked with God in the Garden (Gen 3:8), so God desires to walk with us daily by His Holy Spirit (Gal 5:16, 25).

6. Our study will give us fresh eyes to see the *8000+* *promises* of the Bible. We will look at conditional promises (require an action on our part) and some that are unconditional (a gift, favor or *grace*). As New Covenant believers, having faith in God's promises can give us greater authority and power in our lives.

Truly, our God is a *covenant-making* and *covenant-keeping* God. All of His promises to us are "yes and amen" in Christ (2 Cor 1:20). As you study, allow your heart to rise with praise and thanksgiving; allow your faith to soar! Discover afresh the solid ground of the hope we have in Jesus as God's plan of salvation unfolds around us and through us.

8 Covenant Principles

As with most books that we read or study, we first try to discern the theme. In finding the theme of the Bible, we will also discover the miraculous nature of the Bible. The Bible has an incredible design. As we have said, God used 40 different people with different backgrounds, literary styles and educations, spread out over almost 2000 years of history. And yet *there is still one unifying message* of the Bible: the *redemption of mankind*. It is a theme running clearly from Genesis, the first book of the Bible to Revelation, the last book. This theme has been called the “scarlet thread of redemption,” a *thread of blood leading to the final shedding of blood by Jesus* for our redemption.

The redemption theme is most clearly understood when we see the Bible as God’s interaction with mankind through a series of eight primary covenants. The word *covenant* is a word that has no exact parallel in modern times: the words contract, promise, will, or testament are similar. While similar, we will see that they do not have the exact same meaning or significance as the biblical term *covenant*.

In the Bible, there are covenants between men, tribes, and nations. The Bible is actually a record of many different covenants. However, the most important covenants for us to study are the *eight covenants* that God made with mankind. They are:

1. The Edenic Covenant: A *Covenant of Innocence* made with Adam before he sinned.
2. The Adamic Covenant: A *Covenant of Conscience* made with mankind through Adam after “the Fall”.
3. The Noahic Covenant: A *Covenant of Human Government* made with mankind through Noah.

4. The Abrahamic Covenant: A *Covenant of Promise* made with mankind through Abram (Abraham).
5. The Mosaic Covenant: A *Covenant of Law* made with mankind through Moses.
6. The Palestinian or Land Covenant: A Covenant made with mankind through Moses that was a reaffirmation of the Covenant of Law and of the Abrahamic Covenant promise. This Covenant was focused on the promise of a land for Israel.
7. The Davidic Covenant: A Covenant made with mankind reaffirming that the Christ, Messiah, or Savior would come through the lineage of David, the king, and that Christ's Kingdom would be eternal.
8. The New Covenant: A *Covenant of Grace* made with mankind through Jesus Christ. This is the Covenant in which we live today.

As we progress through this study, we will examine each of these eight Covenants in greater detail.

God Is Not the Author of Confusion

God does not make mistakes because God already knows the outcome of every event that will take place. This principle that God knows everything (including what each person may choose to do) is called His *forethought* or *foreknowledge*.

God initiates His plans in order to accomplish His purposes. Even though God knows what a man will do, man still has the God-given ability to make freewill choices for either good or evil (Ps 94:11). For instance, we read in the Scriptures that "*we love Him because He first loved us*" (1 John 4:19). God loved us first! Another example of God initiating an action is: "*No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him*" (John 6:44). God initiates His plans but, each person must still choose how to respond to God's action, invitation and will.

While we look at the eight primary covenants that God initiated in succession, it may *seem* that when one covenant “failed,” God created another covenant to replace the previous one. Nothing could be further from the truth! *God never fails and He never makes mistakes.* As we study the covenants, we will find important lessons as to why *mankind failed* to keep his side of the covenants with God but, thankfully, God did not give up on mankind!

God knows everything. It is man who is limited in his understanding. Often man, instead of believing God’s truth and acting on it chooses to *experience* the truth through trials, tribulations, and testing. It would be God’s desire that we learn through a relationship of trust in Him and by obeying His Word (using *godly wisdom*). Unfortunately, we see throughout biblical history that mankind would often rather “*do what is right in their own eyes*” (Judges 21:25). Frequently man chooses to learn through hard experiences instead of walking with God and following His loving commands. It has been said that there are two teachers in life: wisdom and experience. Throughout history, mankind has chosen to learn about himself the difficult way, through the way of experience.

As we consider in our minds what we might do in a given situation, we may think noble, heroic, admirable thoughts about ourselves and our possible actions. When actually faced with adversity or temptation, we often end up falling far short of those ideals. All of us can relate to this experience! Fortunately, we have the ability to choose to live by God’s wisdom, understanding, and knowledge as revealed in the Bible, rather than living by our own limited human wisdom and knowledge.

The Word of God was given to enlighten and instruct us (2 Tim 3:15-17). God’s Word was given to guide us (Ps 119:105). God’s Word never fails (Isa 40:8; 2 Pet 1:19). *Everything* we need to know in life is made available to us through God’s Word, the Bible (2 Pet 1:2; Deut 29:29).

God has even given us a measure of faith so that we might walk by faith in Him and not by sight (Rom 12:3; 2 Cor 5:7; Gal 2:20). We can trust in God's way of doing things.

A Covenant-Keeping God

There are several ways to make agreements between two individuals. You can make a *verbal promise* to someone, which is a familiar method, or a more formal kind of agreement would be a legally binding *written contract*. These first two types of agreements are limited. They can be limited by the agreement itself or limited by the power, strength, and authority of the one who must fulfill or enforce it. A third type of agreement is a *will or testament*. In the case of a will, the testator (the one who makes the will) must die before the terms of the will go into effect.

God has made agreements with mankind. God also has unlimited power, unlimited strength, and unlimited authority. Thus, God *can* and *will fulfill all* of His agreements and promises. God *always* keeps His promises!

A promise is a commitment by someone to do (or not do) something. Obviously by making a promise, there is an implied *intent* to fulfill the promise. Man's promises are limited to *intent* because none of us can absolutely guarantee fulfillment of a promise. This is because we do not have absolute power or control over all the circumstances of life. For example, I might promise to meet you next week on Tuesday at 10 a.m. in my office. Yet, when that morning arrives, I become violently ill and end up in the hospital and cannot fulfill my promise to meet you. Some things are out of our control because our strength and power are limited.

God also makes promises. Some students of the Bible have found 1260 *specific* promises in the Bible. However, some would argue that since *everything* that God says will come to pass, then *everything* that God says is a promise! With this broader definition of a promise, that everything

God says is a promise, one could say that the Bible has more than 8000 promises!

God says what he means! God is not like a man (Num 23:19). God makes promises and He has the *authority* and *power* to keep them all. When God makes a *formal promise* to mankind, it is called a *Covenant*. When we understand that God is a covenant-making and covenant-keeping God, we begin to see the Bible as a unified, logical revelation of God's purpose, plan, and program.

Knowing God as a covenant-keeper causes our faith to grow and mature. We will recognize the faithfulness of God toward His Word: "So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it" (Isa 55:11). As we embrace and stand upon God's Word, we will see Him perform it! Let us now look more closely at some of the elements of a covenant.

What is a Covenant?

The word used for covenant in Hebrew is "beriyth"; in the Greek, it is "diatheekē." Beriyth literally means *to divide* or cut a sacrifice in two. When a sacrifice was split, the two parties of the agreement (known as *covenant-heads*) would walk between the parts of the sacrifice. The term "to cut a covenant" comes from this definition. A more common term today would be to "cut a deal".

A covenant is a *binding contract* or agreement between two people or two groups. It involves promises on the part of each to the other. For example, when an employer hires a worker, a verbal or written contract is made or "cut."

A biblical covenant implies much more than a contract or simple agreement. A contract can be between any two people and the contract has an end date. A covenant is also between two individuals (called *covenant-heads*) but can extend for generations. Another difference is that a contract generally involves only one part of a person, such as a

talent, possession or skill. However, a covenant covers a person's *total being*, and even includes family members, clan members, and all of their possessions. This last point is very important to understand. A covenant extends to every person who is connected to the covenant-head. Therefore, a covenant-head has associated with it a *covenant-body*, all those who are covered by the covenant.

In a biblical covenant, one covenant-head is generally *weaker* in power, authority, or wealth. The weaker party would usually covenant with a *stronger* covenant-head. For instance, Jonathan, a prince and son of King Saul, was a stronger party who formed a covenant with David (1 Sam 18:1-4). At that time, David was just a common man from a small family of shepherds.

Conditional (Law) vs. Unconditional (Grace)

A covenant can be either conditional or unconditional. A *conditional* covenant exists when both parties agree to do certain things. For example, an employer agrees to pay wages if the worker performs certain tasks over a period of time.

An *unconditional* covenant is when one party agrees to do certain things (a promise) whether or not the other party performs any function or work. The covenant is not dependent on the ability of the weaker party to perform a function or duty. In other words, the *stronger* covenant-head extends favor or *grace* to the *weaker* covenant-head.

Grace can be defined as: Favor or kindness shown to a person without regard to the worth or merit of the one who receives it, and in spite of what that same person deserves. Grace is a key attribute of God. "And the LORD passed before him and proclaimed, 'The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth'" (Ex 34:6). Grace is associated with mercy, love, compassion, and patience.

The Significance of Blood in Covenants

It wasn't until about 1615 that William Harvey, an English physician, first described correctly and in detail the circulatory system and the properties of blood being pumped to the body by the heart.

Prior to the discovery of the true nature of blood, there was always a mysterious and spiritual significance to blood among primitive people. Ceremonies involving blood or blood rituals were common to almost all primitive tribes. Before scientific understanding, blood has always had associated with it the idea of a primary life principle. As a result of this association with life, there has always been a reverence for the shedding of blood. Many primitive groups practiced the cutting and mixing of blood and the creation of scars to show blood-brotherhood or blood-friendship.

It would be a mistake to associate the importance of blood to primitive peoples only. Blood is important to God, as well. For example, we see imagery of the blood in the following two Scriptures, one from the Old Covenant and the other from the New Covenant:

1. "Come now, and let us reason together, Says the Lord, though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (Isaiah 1:18).
2. "And I said to him, 'Sir, you know.' So he said to me, 'These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb'" (Revelation 7:14).

The importance of blood to covenants is obvious, especially as we examine the covenants between God and man. Look at the following examples where blood is shed in relation to covenants:

1. Blood of animals was shed in the Garden of Eden when God provided clothing for Adam and Eve after they disobeyed God and ate the fruit of the Tree of

Knowledge of Good and Evil, "Also for Adam and his wife the Lord God made tunics of skin, and clothed them" (Genesis 3:21).

2. Blood of animals was shed when animals became available for food through Noah, "Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. I have given you all things, even as the green herbs. But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood" (Genesis 9:3-4).
3. Blood of man was shed in circumcision through Abraham, "This is My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: Every male child among you shall be circumcised; and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you" (Genesis 17:10-11).
4. Blood of animals was shed in the sacrificial system of the Law through Moses; some examples can be found in Leviticus 14 and Numbers 19.
5. Blood of the Lamb of God. This is the shedding of blood by a perfect sacrifice, our Lord and Savior Jesus.
 - a. "The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29)!
 - b. "But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ" (Ephesians 2:13).

What makes blood so important? It is because life is in the blood and blood requires a life. Now we see how profoundly God regards His covenants.

1. "For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul" (Leviticus 17:11).

2. "And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission" (Hebrews 9:22).

A Covenant Exchange

We will study in more detail the component parts of a covenant. But first, let us examine an essential principle in a blood covenant that is key to understanding the faithfulness of God.

As we have learned, a blood covenant is the most binding of all the covenants. A blood covenant also involves an exchange *that takes place between the two parties of the covenant* or the covenant-heads. This exchange results in "oneness," with the two parties of the covenant becoming one entity.

The *marriage covenant* is an example of two becoming one. In marriage, the two parties become one, one flesh (Gen 2:24; Matt 19:5,6; Eph 5:31). In addition, all that belongs to the bride including possessions, debts, and future potential – now belongs to the bridegroom. All that belongs to the bridegroom – possessions, debts, and future potential – now belongs to the bride. All the resources, power, and authority *are now shared* between the covenant-heads, in this case, the bride and bridegroom.

In the Bible are many examples of a powerful person coming to the aid of a weaker one because of the covenant principle. This principle gives the weaker person the *authority to call upon and receive* the power of the stronger one because of the promises made in covenant agreement. In Genesis 14, Lot, Abram's nephew who is also called brother, chose to leave the physical protection and covering of Abram and move to the region of Sodom. Sometime later, a war broke out (v8, 9). The region in which Lot lived was conquered and of course "to the victor goes the spoils." The cities, including Lot's, were plundered of all their wealth (v11).

In this case the conquering kings made a fatal mistake; they took Lot captive (v12). Abram discovered what had happened: "Now when Abram heard that his brother was taken captive, he armed his three hundred and eighteen trained servants who were born in his own house, and went in pursuit as far as Dan" (v14). Because Lot was of Abram's clan, Lot's captivity caused the entire clan of Abram to unite and fight against their now common enemy. "So he brought back all the goods, and also brought back his brother Lot and his goods, as well as the women and the people" (v16). The weaker (Lot) received the power of the stronger (Abram) because Lot was covered as part of the body of people (covenant-body) under the covenant relationship.

This is a very important covenant principle for us as Christians. Because of the New Covenant we have with Christ, which was established by His own blood, we have the power and authority of Jesus released to us! All because, as believers, we are part of the Body of Christ! This profound truth will be studied in more detail later.

A Non-Biblical Example

Another illustration of this principle of exchange is the story of Sir Henry Stanley when he conducted his famous search for Dr. David Livingston in Africa.

Dr. David Livingston, a strong Christian missionary, arrived in Africa in 1840. He came with dual purposes to explore the country and to end the slave trade. As he corresponded with England his writings and, later, his lectures caught the interest and fascination of the public. In some ways, Dr. Livingston became a national hero in Europe and America.

In 1864 Dr. Livingston returned to Africa and explored central Africa (currently Tanzania, Congo, Zambia and Burundi) searching for the source of the Nile River. He was not heard from for years. In 1871 a reporter, Henry Stanley

from America was sent to find Livingston. Stanley travelled with 200 porters and guides into the African jungle.

As Stanley began his search for Livingston, he was confronted by a very fierce and powerful tribe. They were intent upon stopping him from continuing his search. The guide who was with him convinced Stanley that if he wanted to continue his search he would have to "cut a covenant" with the chief of the tribe. The guide explained to Stanley that he would have to exchange gifts and that there would have to be a cutting along the arm so that blood would flow. Then the chief and Stanley would have to press their bloodied arms together, to mix blood. In essence, they were to become "blood brothers" and by this act Stanley would become a member of the tribe. One of the permanent signs of making the covenant was the scar that would form from the wound. It was customary to rub the scar with ashes or gun powder so that the scar would be visible and permanent.

Stanley was in poor health and as a result had a goat that supplied him with fresh milk on the expedition. The Chief wanted the goat to be part of the exchange. Reluctantly, Stanley gave him the goat and in exchange Stanley received a long spear with a copper tip. Of course, Stanley felt that this was not a good trade, but that was because he did not understand the power and authority that came with "cutting" a covenant with the most powerful tribe in the region; he was now a member of that fierce tribe.

Later, as they proceeded on their journey, they encountered another hostile tribe, but this time something unusual happened. When the hostile tribe members saw, the copper tipped spear, they bowed down before Stanley. They recognized the authority he had because he was a member, or part of the body, of the most powerful tribe in the region. To make trouble for Stanley would be to provoke the wrath of the tribe of which he was now a member! Stanley finally understood the power of covenant.

Some sources say that Stanley had about 50 scars on his arms representing the covenants he had established with various tribes during his search for Dr. Livingston.

On November 10, 1871 Henry Stanley found Dr. David Livingston in the small village of Ujiji on the shores of Lake Tanganyika and spoke the famous quote, "Dr. Livingston I presume"?

It is important to note that Christians have never used the cutting of flesh to establish a covenant, as in this example. This illustration simply points out the important concept of *exchange* in a covenant.

8 Covenants

Before we actually begin to look at each of the eight covenants, it would be helpful to be aware of the different ways, or components, covenants were established in the Bible. Not all of the covenants contain all of the elements we will examine, but they will contain some of them. Some of the elements are more important than others depending on the covenant-heads. Kings would form covenants one way, individuals another way, and so on. It is also important to understand that there are no formulas or patterns to make a covenant that will be binding. The key to a successful covenant is the right attitude of the heart in all the parties involved.

As we examine each of the eight covenants, we will see certain components of covenants that would have been very normal and natural for the times, yet may seem strange to us today. It is in these components that the New Covenant is revealed in the Old Testament as a shadow of what was to come. There are at least seven components of a covenant and they are:

1. Cutting of Blood
2. Exchange of Weapons, Clothing
3. Exchange of Name
4. Splitting of Animals

5. Blessing and Cursing
6. Eating of the Covenant Meal
7. Establishing a Memorial

As we examine each of these methods of entering a covenant we should be able to see how they are a *foreshadowing*, or prophetic look, at a coming covenant that the book of Hebrews calls the "better Covenant", the New Covenant "...Jesus has become a surety (guarantee) of a better covenant" (Hebrews 7:22). This better covenant is the New Covenant instituted by and through the blood, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

9 Part One Conclusion

Before we examine the covenants, in Part Two, it is important to say that holiness and righteousness are key attributes of God. Holiness as an attribute of God is difficult to understand, but it speaks to the purity and overwhelming majesty of God, while righteousness refers to His just or ethical nature. In simple terms the character of God is pure and good. There is no evil in Him. It was for this reason that Adam and Eve had to be turned out of the Garden of Eden after they sinned. God cannot have fellowship with evil or sin. Now that the sin-nature, as a result of Adam's sin, is resident in man, the question is, "How can God have fellowship with us, sinful man"? The answer is, of course, God cannot! God can never change and overlook or excuse sin because of His holy and righteous nature.

The story of redemption in the Bible is a story of the unfolding of God's plan to remove the "chasm" that separates God from His beloved creation. Since it was man who created the problem by disobeying God's law, wouldn't it seem logical that it is man who has to prove himself worthy of forgiveness and reconciliation? This has been the approach mankind has taken for thousands of years. How can man make himself holy and righteous? That is the question. How can he make himself "good enough" so that a genuine fellowship of love can be restored? The answer is that it is *impossible*. Man is unable to cross the separation or chasm, created by sin, in his own ability or strength. The works of man is insufficient, but with God "nothing is impossible".

The study of covenants is God's way of revealing to all of mankind the futility of man's efforts to be holy and righteous as a means of restoring a broken relationship with Him. The study of covenants will also reveal that there is

only one way to be reconciled with God and that way is the way of the Cross.

We have completed laying a foundation for understanding the purpose and nature of God's covenants, or promises, with mankind. We understand that God is a covenant-making and covenant-keeping God. We have taken a brief look at the structure of the Bible and the history of the Old Testament. We understand that the purpose of the Bible is to reveal God's redemptive plan, the salvation of a "lost" creation. We also looked at some of the fundamental characteristics of covenants, such as the importance of the Blood and the concept of covenant exchange. Now we are ready to see why it was necessary for God to make eight covenants with mankind and not just one.

The first three covenants are the Edenic, Adamic, and Noahic Covenants. These are all universal covenants in that they apply to all of mankind. The next four covenants are the Abrahamic, Mosaic, Palestinian, and Davidic Covenants. These four covenants are limited to the people of the Bible known as the Israelites. The purpose of these four covenants was to create and establish a nation called Israel. A nation under God, a theocracy, this nation would be a model for all the nations of the world- a nation that would be both blessed and a blessing.

The final covenant is the New Covenant, the "better" Covenant in which God Himself came to earth in the form of a man, Jesus Christ, to show us the only way to redemption. With these thoughts in mind, let's begin to look at each of the first seven of eight covenants in more detail in Part Two. The eighth covenant, the New Covenant, will be covered in Part Three.

PART TWO Seven Old Covenants

“Gain Understanding”

**“Give me understanding, and I
shall keep Your law...”**

Psalms 119:34

10 The Old Covenants

It is clear from Scripture that God never tempts anyone with evil, "Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone" (James 1:13). While God does not tempt, God does test and uses testing to reveal the truth about ourselves. Jesus tested Philip, "But this He said to test him, for He Himself knew what He would do" (John 6:6). From the Old Testament God said to Israel, "And you shall remember that the Lord your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not" (Deut 8:2). The end result of the testing of our faith is to produce patience or endurance (James 1:3). So the purpose of God's testing is positive not negative, "to do you good in the end" (Deut 8:16).

Contrary to how many view school testing, it is not done to make you feel inadequate or "stupid"! Testing is given for two reasons. One, so that the teacher may evaluate whether or not you have learned the content of the course or the lesson. Two, so that *you* may know if *you* have mastered the material. In God's eyes mastery is more than intellectual knowing.

For example, a privilege that requires testing is to legally drive a car. There are usually two parts to the testing: there is the written part of the test and then the actual driving test. You are first given instructions, in a book or a class, then given a written test which measures your understanding of the rules of the road. The driving test

measures your ability to apply the rules of the road to actual driving experience. To pass the written part of the test, you have to agree with the rules of the road and, using your mind or intellect, select the correct answers. For most people that is fairly easy to do. The driving test is literally where “the rubber meets the road”. Afterwards, you are expected to do what you said you would do according to the written test. That is the more difficult part of the process. In our minds and imaginations, we can see ourselves successfully driving the test course, but will what we think or imagine translate into successfully mastering the course?

Knowing what to do is one thing; doing what you know to do is another. That is the crux of the Old Testament. Since God knows all things and the outcomes of all things, His covenants are not for His benefit but for our own benefit. It is so easy for us to become “legends in our own minds”, and think the right things, but how to do the right things can be another story. As we view each covenant, think of it in the following way: God gives instruction as to what would please Him and allow Him to provide blessings to mankind. Then God waits to see if mankind is willing and able to live according to His instructions and commandments. As we will see, with each failure on man’s part to fulfill the covenant, there must come another covenant because God never gives up. In this process of covenants mankind is learning, or being tutored in two areas- learning about the character of God and, at the same time, learning the truth about one’s own character.

The conclusion of seven of the eight covenants is that it is impossible to be “good” (holy and righteous) without His intervention and help. Knowing what to do is not the same as being able to do it. Unless we are tested, we will never be sure of the truth and see our need for a *Savior*. Keep in mind that His testing is not capricious or random. Because He is Holy and Righteous, His desire is for His creation to walk in holiness and righteousness with Him.

The Eight Covenants

1. Edenic Covenant
2. Adamic Covenant
3. Noahic Covenant
4. Abrahamic Covenant
5. Mosaic Covenant
6. Palestinian or Land Covenant
7. Davidic Covenant
8. The New Covenant

11 The Edenic Covenant

The Edenic Covenant: The first three chapters of the book of Genesis are full of God's incredibly awesome, powerful creative acts starting with the creation of the world and then everything in it. God did all of these creative works by *speaking* them into existence. In other words, He spoke and what was spoken came into being. Included in all of this was the crowning creation of man- we know this man as Adam who is the prototype of all mankind. Adam was placed in a perfect paradise called the "Garden of Eden". While the garden was complete, Adam was incomplete until the creation of Eve, the first woman.

In the majesty of all of this creative work by God was the establishment of the first of eight covenants, the first of which is called the Edenic Covenant. Edenic because it was made in the Garden of *Eden*. Of course, God did not call it the Edenic Covenant, the names given to covenants are labels, assigned by Bible scholars to distinguish them apart. The only covenant that God named was the last covenant called the "New Covenant", the Covenant of grace.

The Edenic Covenant was made between God and Adam *before* Adam and Eve disobeyed God and sinned. This period before the "fall of man" is called by some the "*Age of Innocence*", because Adam and Eve knew no evil and were in an innocent state.

The scriptural language for the Edenic Covenant is found in Genesis 2:15-17: "Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to tend and keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, 'Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day

that you eat of it you shall surely die.” The moment God said, “You shall not eat”, came the immediate capability for Adam to choose: he could either obey or disobey God’s covenant.

God made the covenant with Adam; therefore, both God and Adam were the “covenant-heads”. Remember, this means that everyone joining Adam’s family or future clan would also be subject to the terms of the covenant, the covenant-body. This meant the entire future human race, represented by Adam, would also be subject to the covenant. At the time of the Edenic Covenant, Eve had not yet been created. When God created Eve (Gen 2:21), she also became subject to the terms of the covenant.

Terms of The Covenant

Let’s take a look at the terms of the covenant more closely. The covenant in the Garden of Eden is the first of the “comprehensive covenants”, meaning it pertains to all of mankind. In it, Adam (representing mankind) is charged with three responsibilities:

1. To be fruitful and multiply (produce children), to subdue (manage) the earth and have dominion (rule) over all the living things (Gen 1:28).
2. To maintain and care for the Garden of Eden and enjoy its fruit (Gen 1:29; 2:15).
3. All the blessings were contingent upon not eating of the fruit of the “Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil” (Gen 2:16,17).

Overview of The Edenic Period

The Scriptures show that when God created the world He created a physically and morally perfect earth. “Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good. So the evening and the morning were the sixth day” (Gen 1:31). God then placed Adam in the Garden of Eden which was truly a paradise. In the Garden there was no

struggle to survive, no physical wants, every need was met. There was no hunger, sickness or disease. There was no sin, nor the tragic consequences of sin. Adam was unaware of sin; he lived in a state of “*innocence*”.

Adam was blessed in every way. The greatest blessing Adam enjoyed was a *personal relationship* with God the Father, his Creator (Gen 2:7-9). God and Adam had perfect communication and fellowship with each other (Gen 2:1-25).

It is understood that mankind, through Adam, was created to walk with God and enjoy the benefits of His blessings. God gave opportunity for Adam to use his own free will and choose to obey God in return. This obedience would be an expression of love for God. The blessings of this relationship between God and man could continue as long as no one rebelled against God and ate the fruit of the “Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil”. This would test Adam’s obedience and love for God and the acceptance of God’s sovereignty over him and mankind. In this perfect carefree environment, would Adam obey God and stay away from the “Forbidden Tree”?

The Fall of Man. In Genesis 3:1, the serpent (Satan, devil) approaches Eve and uses lies and half-truths (John 8:44) to deceive her. Eve, being drawn away by her own thoughts and desires, is tricked and deceived into disobeying what she was taught about the covenant. “But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death” (James 1:14,15). The devil always chooses the path of least resistance in that he will appeal to one’s natural desires for beauty, comfort and pleasure.

The greatest mistake Eve makes at this point is that she stops and enters into a conversation with the serpent (Gen 3:2). The most effective tool that the devil has are his lies and half-truths. The devil said to Eve, “*Has God indeed*

said?" (Gen 3:1). The devil begins his trickery by sowing *seeds of doubt* about what God said and the consequences for disobedience. In her innocence, she does not run away, but ponders the lies the devil is sowing. Eve is drawn into the trap when she begins to respond with a half-truth of her own. She responds by quoting what God had said about the fruit in the Garden "but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die" (Gen 2:17), but then she adds to it, "*nor shall you touch it*" (Gen 3:3), which was something God had not said.

Then the devil appeals to Eve's pride, and uses his age-old method of half-truths and lies: You will be like God (a lie) and know good and evil (a truth). *Deception* is a key strategy of Satan even to this very day. His goal is to create doubt about what God has said in order to lead people into disobedience, destruction and death. The devil uses the attractions of the world to lead people astray; he appeals to the "lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life" to blind people to the truth of God (1 John 2:16).

Eve is seduced by the false offers and her desire for the fruit (Gen 3:6). Eve *chooses to believe the lies* (1 John 2:16). She takes the fruit and eats, and then gives some of it to Adam. The Bible reveals that Eve was deceived, and then sinned (1 Tim 2:14), but Adam, as the covenant-head, knew full well the choice he was making when eating the fruit. He chose to disobey the covenant he had made with God. Thus, sin entered Adam's heart and through him, as the covenant-head, sin also entered the entire human race, the covenant-body. Sin and death were now part of mankind's *spiritual* inheritance (Rom 5:12).

Adam and Eve were aware of their sin because their *conscience* had been awakened and they were now able to discern good from evil. They became aware of their nakedness and covered themselves with leaves and hid. For

the very first time Adam and Eve knew guilt, shame and condemnation. In their guilt and shame, Adam and Eve tried to run and hide from God in the Garden. When God called to Adam, "*Where are you*"? (Gen 3:9), it is obvious that their open fellowship of holiness and righteousness had been *broken by sin*. Adam's statement that he was afraid and naked reveals his *lost innocence*. Of course God already knew what Adam had done. God was not surprised. God knows all things; nothing is hidden from His sight.

In response to God's inquiries, Adam does what mankind continues to do today. He tries to put the blame on someone else. "Then the man said, 'The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate'" (Gen 3:12). Eve does not accept responsibility for her sin of disobedience either. Instead, she blames the serpent, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate" (Gen 3:13).

The Edenic Covenant was broken by man's disobedience to the covenant. Adam and Eve ate the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. The consequences of their disobedience resulted in their *spiritual separation* from God and eventual physical deaths (Gen 3:19, 24).

Despite Adam and Eve's perfect circumstances, the innocence of Adam and Eve, and the simple yet gracious covenant made by God, they still chose disobedience and rebellion (sin). This choice brought devastating consequences for them and the entire human race. The Bible clearly states that through the one man, Adam, sin entered the world (Rom 5:12). This was followed by death (spiritual and physical) for them and all of mankind, because everyone has in fact sinned (Rom 3:23).

Jesus Revealed in The Edenic Covenant

Jesus Christ is revealed in the Edenic Covenant as we look at Adam as a type of Christ (Rom 5:14). Adam was *a type* of Jesus, but with these important differences:

1. Through Adam's disobedience, mankind became spiritually separated from God and ultimately would experience physical death.
2. Through Jesus, the obedient Son and righteous sacrifice, man has been given the opportunity to restore the broken spiritual relationship with God and receive the gift of eternal life (Rom 5:12-19).

The end result of Adam's sin was condemnation. The end result of the free "gift of God" in Jesus is *justification* (being judged innocent, or saved; Rom 5:18,19). Sin came into the world through one man, Adam. Salvation would come into the world through one Man, Jesus. There is no other way to salvation than through Jesus. He is "the way, the truth and the life" (John 14:6). "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

Progressive Revelation

The key to understanding the Edenic Covenant, and the following covenants, is to realize that it is the beginning of God's progressive (step-by-step) revelation of Himself and His plan of redemption for mankind. It was as if mankind were being schooled or tutored by the experiences of life that God would arrange. God began with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and continued through the ages until the Garden of Gethsemane and the Cross of Calvary.

Even in a perfect environment such as the Garden of Eden, where every need was met, man still chose that which was forbidden. Even *innocence* (without evil) is no guarantee that one will not choose to sin. "If only my circumstances were different, I wouldn't sin", is a common excuse. Yet, we see from the Garden the false premise of this common reasoning. Thus, this argument can be eliminated from man's thoughts about having holiness and righteousness due to his own merit. "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23). No man can

ever say to God, "I am holy and righteous because I am innocent"! For no man or woman is innocent through his or her own effort. "There is none righteous, no, not one" (Rom 3:10).

God knows our tendencies (Psalm 103:14). He shows us by experience that we cannot make ourselves holy or righteous (Psa 14:1-3). Even innocence will not change the human tendency toward rebellion against God. Human nature wants to be independent of God. Human nature wants to "work or earn" its own salvation, but this is not possible for our own attempts at righteousness are like *filthy rags* (Isa 64:6). There can be no boasting in who truly does the work of making one holy and righteous (Eph 2:9). It is clear that it can only be God!

A Glimpse of Heaven

In the Garden of Eden, man was given rule and reign over all things on the earth. As a result of Adam's disobedience, his right to rule and reign was given to the serpent or Satan. This happened because Adam, the covenant-head, chose to obey Satan and disobey God- you serve whom you obey (Rom 6:16)! We see evidence of Satan's rule during the temptation of Christ in the wilderness where Satan offered Jesus the authority that had been *delivered* to him (Luke 4:5-7). In Scripture, Satan is called the "ruler of this world" (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11), the "prince of the power of the air" (Eph 2:2), the rulers of darkness (Eph 6:12), and the "god of this age" (2 Cor 4:4). The final covenant, the New Covenant, restores man's authority. It was regained by Christ and restored to every believer.

The Edenic Covenant also gives us a preview of what Heaven will be like (Rev 22:1-5). It will be like the Garden of Eden before man's fall, without sin. This is a "type" of Heaven. Heaven is the place where Jesus Christ is now (Mark 16:19, Acts 3:20,21). Heaven is also the final destiny

of all those who believe in Jesus Christ as Savior (John 14:2-4) as promised by the New Covenant.

The Matter of Innocence

It is worth repeating that the insight we gain from the Edenic Covenant is that innocence cannot keep people holy and righteous. Eventually that which is forbidden will tempt people to do what they know they should not do (Prov 9:17). Now that sin has entered the human race (Rom 5:12), the unbeliever is powerless in his own strength to resist temptation in all areas of life (Rom 7:15-23). It is only by believing and following Jesus Christ that we are set free from the power of sin (Titus 3:4-7). As believers we are given a "Helper" (John 15:26), the Holy Spirit (John 15:26, 16:5-7). The Holy Spirit helps us see the truth (John 14:17), leads us away from temptation (Rom 8:14) and empowers us to live for Christ!

12 The Adamic Covenant

The Edenic Covenant came to a close with the need for a new covenant with Adam and Eve. This new covenant was to become known as the Adamic Covenant. This time, Adam and Eve were in a different spiritual condition than at the time of the first Covenant. They were no longer *innocent* because they had sinned and their eyes were opened to the knowledge of good and evil, their *conscience* was awakened (Gen 3:7). Since they were able to make choices between good and evil, this period of time is often referred to as the "*Age of Conscience*".

The Covenant is called Adamic because the covenant-heads are God and Adam, therefore the covenant applies to all of Adam's descendants. The relevant covenant scriptures are found in Genesis 3:14-21, "So the Lord God said to the serpent: 'Because you have done this, you are cursed more than all cattle, and more than every beast of the field; On your belly you shall go, and you shall eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.' To the woman He said: 'I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; In pain you shall bring forth children; Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.' Then to Adam He said, 'Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat of it': "Cursed is the ground for your sake; In toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, and you shall eat the herb of the field. In the sweat

of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; For dust you are, and to dust you shall return.’ And Adam called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all living. Also for Adam and his wife the Lord God made tunics of skin, and clothed them”.

The terms or conditions of the Adamic Covenant are as follows:

1. The Serpent is cursed (Gen 3:15). The curse affects not only the serpent, but also the evil force behind the serpent, Satan.
2. Satan is judged. Though he will have some power and success, it will be for a limited time. "*You shall bruise His heel*" is a prophetic statement that Satan will seem to have victory over Jesus the Messiah as He hangs upon the Cross with His weight upon His heel. Ultimately, Satan will be judged by Christ and trampled at the Cross: "*He shall bruise your head*" (see 1 Corinthians 2:7,8). In a broader sense, Jesus Christ will one day completely triumph over the evil one (Rom 16:20).
3. A Savior is promised (Gen 3:15). The first prophecy in the Bible of the coming of a Savior or Messiah is given in the reference to a "*Seed*". (Note the singular case and the capitalization of the word).
4. The woman comes under God's general curse (Gen 3:16). There will be pain in childbirth and the woman will desire the godly leadership of her husband.
5. The man comes under God's general curse as well (Gen 3:17-19). The ground is cursed and will bring forth weeds among man's food. The man's role is changed, damaged, crippled; his work will be filled with sweat, challenge and futility, and will end in death. Due to sin, all of mankind dies spiritually

and ultimately will die physically. His flesh will decay until it returns to the dust from which it originally came (Gen 3:19; Rom 5:12- 21).

The covenant with Adam is the second of the comprehensive covenants, comprehensive meaning that it pertains to all of mankind. It could be called the "*Curse of the Fall*" for the covenant establishes the conditions that will remain in the world until the curse of sin is lifted (Isa 11:6-10; Rom 8:8-23).

The Adamic Covenant is the first of the "blood covenants". In this case, when God provided Adam and Eve with animal skins to cover their nakedness, blood was shed for sin and to ratify the covenant (Gen 3:21).

Finally, Adam and Eve are cast out of the Garden of Eden.

Jesus Christ Foreshadowed

God speaks a prophetic word to the serpent, Satan ('serpent' or 'dragon' are used in Scripture as symbols of Satan). "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel" (Gen 3:15).

There are three important issues to examine: (1) the *enmity* between the serpent and the woman, (2) the *Seed* and (3) the *bruising*. All of these are foreshadows of Jesus Christ and the New Covenant.

Enmity: The word *enmity* speaks of *the bitter struggle or hatred* started in the Garden of Eden that continues to this very day. The battle is between the devil and his followers against the godly line of believers in Christ, who are the faithful remnant of God (Eph 2:2; 6:12). The devil will continue to use deception and temptation to release his destruction upon mankind. This battle will continue until that day when Jesus, the *Seed*, comes to totally defeat the

enemy and cast him into the Lake of Fire (Rev 20:10). Until that day comes we, as believers, are called to:

1. Realize that there are practices that we can develop in order to stand against the attack of hell. "Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil" (Eph 6:11).
2. Be aware of our surroundings and the people we associate with. "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour" (1Pet 5:8).
3. Make sure that the Bible becomes our *only* source of spiritual truth, to do warfare in prayer and use our Christ-given authority: "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God..." (2Cor 10:4,5).

Seed: God addresses the serpent (Satan) and "*your seed*" (Gen 3:15). This lower-case seed refers to all people who will follow Satan, as well as his demonic forces. In the same verse, God also refers to the upper case "Seed" of the woman. This refers not only to the righteous seed that will be born of her throughout the generations, but ultimately to the *Seed of the Messiah, Jesus Christ* (Rom 1:1-4; also see Luke 3:23-38 for Christ's genealogy). In the midst of the tragedy of man's fall, God implants the hope of a Redeemer!

Bruising: "He [the Seed] shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel" (Gen 3:15). This expression means that Jesus would pay the price to defeat Satan. Jesus was "bruised in His heel" at the Cross. He offered Himself as a perfect sacrifice for our redemption. It cost Jesus His life, but the Father raised Him up from the grave as a testimony of His victory over sin and death (1 Cor 15:20-26). At the Cross, the power of Satan was broken (Col 2:13-15; Heb

2:14,15; 1 John 3:8) that is why Jesus proclaimed, "It is finished!" as He hung on the Cross (John 19:30).

The bruising of Satan's head, which began at the Cross of Calvary, will be completely finished when Satan and all of his followers are cast into the Lake of Fire. "And He said to me, 'It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts'" (Rev 21:6).

Overview of The Adamic Period

In Genesis 4 we see that as a result of the "Curse of the Fall" man is living with the ability to discern right from wrong, relying on conscience. Living outside of the Garden of Eden was challenging and dangerous, but in spite of the difficulties Adam and Eve had two sons, Cain and Abel.

Cain was a tiller of the ground and Abel was a keeper of sheep. At the appropriate time each brought an offering to God. Abel's offering was a sacrifice from his flock, therefore, a blood sacrifice. Cain's offering was from his crops. God gave more attention to Abel's gift than Cain's and as a result Cain became very jealous. Cain's anger grows murderous and God warns Cain, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it" (Gen 4:6-7). Instead of ruling over sin, Cain allowed sin to rule over him and he murdered his brother Abel.

The conflict between Cain and Abel characterizes the lawlessness and violence of this Age of Conscience. Relying only on one's conscience for moral guidance essentially results in having no moral compass at all.

Abel represented a Godly line and with his death Adam and Eve had another son named Seth, who now represented the godly line. This godly line, or *remnant*, represented a small group of people who trusted in God and kept the hope of a Savior (Seed) alive. Seth had a son

named Enosh and it is said of Enosh's generation that the people then began to worship and pray to the Lord (Gen 4:26). In the midst of the generations of evil that followed, there remained a godly line that would eventually lead to the family of Noah.

Progressive Revelation and Conscience

The "school", or tutoring, of God's progressive revelation continued. For about 950 years, mankind relied on their own *conscience* to do what was right in God's eyes, and failed miserably. Choosing instead to do what was right in their own eyes, the entire world became corrupt (Gen 6:5). Thus, we see that *human conscience was eliminated as a sole means of holiness and righteousness*. Conscience alone is not enough to keep mankind from sin. One by one, the excuses a person might make to be found acceptable to God are being removed. In the Edenic Covenant, God showed that being innocent would not prevent one from choosing sin. The Adamic Covenant reveals that even having a conscience, knowing good from evil, is not enough to keep one from choosing evil or sin.

God made a prophetic promise of a Seed (Jesus Christ). Yet, in God's foreknowledge He knew that *man had not yet learned* how desperately he needed a Savior. Another covenant was needed. This time it would be with a man named Noah.

13 The Noahic Covenant

The third covenant is called the Noahic Covenant. God made this covenant with Noah and his descendants just after the Great Flood. Noah and his family were the only survivors of the flood. The Noahic Covenant is a covenant that establishes consequences for taking a life. In today's language it could be murder, homicide, manslaughter, self-defense or an accident, any way that blood is shed. Since the purpose of government is to protect the individual rights of an individual to life and property, biblical scholars refer to this period of time as the "*Age of Human Government*" (Gen 9:5-7).

Overview of The Noahic Period

We read in the Scriptures (Gen 6-10) of God's displeasure and sorrow at the violence and sin that had spread throughout the earth during the time of the Adamic Covenant (Gen 6:3-13). God sovereignly decided to destroy this evil generation by means of a Great Flood. In the midst of all the corruption was a righteous man by the name of Noah, a descendant of Seth (Adam and Eve's son). Noah is charged with the responsibility to build an ark for the rescue or deliverance of his family from the flood. He is also to bring aboard two of every animal and enough supplies to care for them, for they will be needed to repopulate the new earth after the flood.

When the ark was completed God caused torrential rains for 40 days and 40 nights until the earth was completely flooded. Eventually the waters began to recede and they were able to step out on to a new world. In Noah's family were eight people: Noah and his wife, their three sons and

their wives. The sons were Japhath, Ham and Shem. Shem would represent the godly line that would eventually lead to Abraham (Abram), the covenant-head of the next covenant. This family of eight would be the only human survivors of the flood and would be charged with the responsibility to repopulate the earth.

The Covenant

The covenant between God and Noah and his descendants is found in Genesis 9:1-13, "So God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them: 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be on every beast of the earth, on every bird of the air, on all that move on the earth, and on all the fish of the sea. They are given into your hand. Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. I have given you all things, even as the green herbs. But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood. Surely for your lifeblood I will demand a reckoning; from the hand of every beast I will require it, and from the hand of man. From the hand of every man's brother I will require the life of man. Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed; For in the image of God He made man. And as for you, be fruitful and multiply; Bring forth abundantly in the earth and multiply in it.' Then God spoke to Noah and to his sons with him, saying: 'And as for Me, behold, I establish My covenant with you and with your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you: the birds, the cattle, and every beast of the earth with you, of all that go out of the ark, every beast of the earth. Thus I establish My covenant with you: Never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood; never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.' And God said: 'This is the sign of the covenant which I make between Me and you, and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations: I

set My rainbow in the cloud, and it shall be for the sign of the covenant between Me and the earth”.

The covenant-heads of the Noahic Covenant are God and Noah, the terms and conditions of the covenant are as follows:

1. The responsibility to populate the earth is restated (Gen 9:1, Gen 1:28).
2. Man having dominion over the animal kingdom is restated (Gen 9:2, Gen 1:28).
3. Up to this point, mankind had been vegetarian. Man is now permitted to eat the flesh of animals, though not the meat with blood in it (Gen 9:3,4). God established the shedding of blood as a substitutionary sacrifice for man's sin. Therefore, blood belongs to God; man is not to partake of blood (Lev 17:11).
4. All human life is sacred. Any man or animal that sheds a man's blood must be put to death (Gen 9:5,6). The judgment upon sin is ultimately death; this is affirmed by the Edenic, Adamic and Noahic Covenants.
5. God confirms the covenant with Noah, with all mankind, and with every living creature on the face of the earth (Gen 9:9,10).
6. God promises to never again destroy the earth by a universal flood (Gen 9:11). The next time God destroys the earth, it will be with fire (2 Pet 3:10).
7. The rainbow is given as God's testimony to the existence of this covenant and His promise to never again destroy the earth by flood. The rainbow reminds us that the Noahic Covenant remains in effect (Gen 9:12-17).

The covenant with Noah is the third of the comprehensive covenants (pertaining to all man-kind). Noah has just passed through the Great Flood in which the world's entire population was destroyed. Only Noah, his wife, their three

sons and their sons' wives (eight people) represent the world's total population. It is virtually a new beginning. Noah, in a sense, is the new Adam. All the world's populations are to be descendants of Noah (Gen 9:19).

When God established the Noahic Covenant, He reaffirmed to Noah (and all of humanity to follow) that the Edenic and Adamic Covenants were still in effect (the Curse of the Fall). What is new in the Noahic Covenant is the provision of human government. This human government was intended to limit the spread of sin and violence.

Foreshadows of The New Covenant

Noah as a Type of Jesus- We see Noah as a prophetic type of Jesus because:

1. Noah is the deliverer or savior of his family (1 Pet 3:20); Jesus is the Deliverer and Savior of the world (John 4:42).
2. Noah was a preacher (2 Pet 2:5); Jesus also preached the Kingdom (Luke 4:43).
3. Noah found favor in God's eyes and walked with Him (Gen 6:8-9); Jesus did the same (Luke 2:52).
4. Noah did all God showed him to do (Gen 6:22); Jesus did what the Father showed Him to do (John 5:19).
5. Noah was proclaimed righteous (Gen 7:1); Jesus is proclaimed as righteous (1 John 2:1).

The Flood as a Type of Baptism- The Great Flood, which was God's judgment upon sin and represented a cleansing, is a prophetic type of the baptism found in the New Covenant (1Pet 3:20,21).

Noah's Obedience as a Type of Faith- God introduces the importance of faith as part of His progressive revelation of holiness and righteousness. "By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by

which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith" (Heb 11:7).

Human Government

The purpose of human government within the Noahic Covenant was to hold back the outbreak of sin and violence. It was unrestrained sin and violence that made it necessary to destroy those on the earth in the first place.

Here is the key to understanding the Noahic Covenant: Though God introduced human government, it would soon become clear that human government could not control how human beings act toward one another. Human government cannot lead people to become holy and righteous. Human government may control external behavior to some extent, but government still *does not change the motivations or issues of the heart*. Laws are important and provide a measure of restraint but, external laws that dictate how society should operate *are not enough* to prevent lawless behavior.

Step by step, we see that God is revealing to mankind the futility of human attempts to become holy or righteous. We have seen thus far that innocence (Edenic Covenant), conscience (Adamic Covenant) and now human government (Noahic Covenant) cannot make people morally or spiritually good.

The Tower of Babel

The building of the Tower of Babel during the Noahic Period (Gen 11:1-9) reflects man's sinful pride and rebellion. It is clear that the corruption of mankind was not restrained by human government. Man was symbolically trying to reach or approach God on his own terms. This is a human problem that still exists today: "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber" (John 10:1).

At Babel, God confused the languages of the people. As a result of not being able to communicate with each other, they abandoned their efforts to build the tower and scattered as various tribes throughout the earth.

Man's failure to fulfill his part in the Noahic Covenant, righteousness through human government, necessitated yet another covenant, this time with a man named Abram (Abraham).

14 The Abrahamic Covenant

The Abrahamic Covenant is the fourth in a series of covenants in Scripture that demonstrate mankind's need for a Savior. This covenant was made with Abram, or as he is later known, Abraham. The Bible has much to say about Abraham and his family; the book of Genesis devotes 39 chapters to him and his family. In Hebrews 11, in what is sometimes called "The Hall of Faith", the key men and women of faith are mentioned and most of them are represented by Abraham and his family.

Keep in mind that as in all of God's dealings with mankind, the account of Abraham and his family is rich in life illustrations, prophetic utterances, and examples of God's faithfulness, but we are at present only interested in those events connected to the covenant.

The life story of Abraham begins in Ur of the Chaldeans where Abraham originally lived. Archaeology has disclosed that Ur was located not too far from Babylon (present day Iraq) and was an evil city where pagan sacrifices, including human sacrifices, abounded. It was a place where many gods were worshipped, and Abraham's family was part of that worship. Hebrew tradition maintains that in time, Abraham came to the conclusion that there could only be one God over all, El or Elohim. The term El or Elohim was not a personal name for God, but a general name for God and could be applied to pagan gods as well.

According to Genesis 12:1 and Acts 7:2-3, God directed Abraham to leave his country, leave his extended family, and dwell in tents for the rest of his life, living the life of a

nomad. Abraham started out with his father and his nephew, Lot, and got as far as Haran. Only when his father died did Abraham move on to Canaan, the promised land, with Lot. At last he had come, by faith, to the place to which God called him. Hebrews 11:8 records, "By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going".

Through the promises God made to Abraham, the beginnings of a nation were instituted, the fledgling nation of Israel, God's chosen people. "For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth" (Deut 7:6). Through Abraham, all the nations of the earth would be blessed (Gen 12:1-3).

God promises to use the people of Israel (Abraham's offspring) as an example of the kind of relationship He desires in a people He could call His own. "I will walk among you and be your God, and you shall be My people" (Lev 26:12). Because of the great and wonderful promises of God this time period is often called "*The Age of Promise*".

Initiating the Covenant

The Abrahamic Covenant is initiated in *Genesis 12:1-3*. It is an *unconditional* covenant, which means it will be fulfilled solely by God. Another word for unconditional is the word "grace". It is a covenant of grace that is not dependent on man's behavior. *It depends solely upon God* who promises to fulfill the blessings. The Abrahamic Covenant was first given in simple, general terms (Gen 12:1-3). It was later confirmed to Abraham in greater detail (Gen 13:14-17; 15:1-7, 18-21; 17:1-8).

Obviously, the Abrahamic Covenant is made between God and Abraham, they are the covenant-heads. God adds something new to the covenant with Abraham. It is the first

of the *theocratic covenants*. The word “theocratic” or “theocracy” means that God is the supreme ruler of the government or, in other words, the *King*. God is looking for a people to call His own. Because He is a Sovereign King, His will is to rule and reign over His people.

The Abrahamic Covenant is the foundation of all future theocratic covenants. It provides for blessings in three general areas:

1. **National** – “I will make you a great nation” (Gen 12:2) The national aspect of the Abrahamic Covenant is that, through Abraham, a nation will be formed. That nation is the biblical nation of Israel, which exists to this day. You may recall, that Abraham had a son, Isaac. Isaac had a son, Jacob. *Jacob’s name was changed by God to Israel* (Gen 32:28; 35:10). Jacob, now called Israel, had 12 sons named Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph and Benjamin. These 12 sons were to become tribes and, one day, be collectively known as the nation of Israel.
2. **Personal** – “I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing” (Gen 12:2). The personal aspect of the Abrahamic Covenant is specifically for Abraham: Abraham is to be the “father” of this great nation. Abraham is to receive personal blessing; he and his wife, Sarah, having a son (Isaac) at well past childbearing age (Gen 17:1-22). Abraham is to receive personal honor and reputation (Gen 24:1) and be a source of blessing to others.
3. **Universal** – “In you all families of the earth shall be blessed” (v3). The comprehensive aspects of the covenant, which extend far beyond Abraham, are: blessings for the people and nations that bless

Abraham and the nation that comes from him, Israel; cursing upon those people and nations that curse Abraham and Israel; blessings upon all the families of the earth through the Messiah who, according to the flesh (future bloodline), is Abraham's "son" and provides salvation for the entire world (Matt 1:1-17).

God then *seals* His covenant with Abraham by the splitting of animals. He then indicates that the *sign* of the covenant will be **circumcision**, a *shedding* of blood by every male embracing the covenant (Gen 15:9-21; 17:10,11).

Ratifying the Covenant

"On the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying: 'To your descendants I have given this *land*, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates'" (Gen 15:18). The same promise had been previously made to Abraham in general terms (see Genesis 12 and 13) but it is important to note that the promise is not termed a covenant until it is *ratified by a sacrifice and the shedding of blood*.

The Need for Purification - A sacrifice was considered a necessary part of a covenant agreement. The word *beriyth* ("covenant" in Hebrew) also means *to purify* or cleanse. In all covenants between God and man, sin and sinfulness were always associated with man. A Holy God could not enter into a covenant with sinful man unless there was a purifier. Therefore, in all covenants, a sacrifice was offered for the removal of offences and for the reconciliation of the sinner to God.

So, the word *beriyth* signifies not only a covenant, but also the sacrifice that was offered on the occasion. This sacrifice was made by a priest, or anointed one. Jesus Christ, the Anointed One, is not only our High Priest, but

also the Sacrifice that became our atonement and purifier before God (Heb 9:11-15).

Abraham and God - We see an example of the “splitting of animals” for covenant purposes when God established a covenant with Abraham (Gen 15:9,10). The animal sacrifices represent a *foreshadowing* of what was to come when Moses received the Law and the sacrificial system from God.

The sacrificial system given to Moses was also a prophetic foreshadow of the sacrifice of the “Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29) in the New Covenant.

Passing Between the Sacrifice - The splitting of an animal as a covenant rite may seem very odd to some of us today, but in ancient times it was a fairly common custom. As a matter of fact, the *non-Christian* practice of the sacrifice of animals still takes place in various parts of the world today.

“And it came to pass, when the sun went down and it was dark, that behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a burning torch that passed between those pieces” (Gen 15:17). In this mysterious and symbolic dream, God manifests Himself to Abraham in fire and smoke. God would later actually appear to the people of Israel in the pillar of cloud and fire (Ex 13:21,22). In Abraham’s dream, God passes through the sacrificial pieces to ratify or authorize the covenant that He had made with Abraham. God’s glory was enveloped in fire and smoke. Abraham could not pass between the sacrificial pieces, because only the One who had initiated the unconditional covenant and made the promises could ratify the covenant; this was God alone.

A Change of Name - Another component of a covenant is the change of a name. While there are a number of name changes in the Bible; Abram to Abraham, Sarai to Sarah, Jacob to Israel, Simon to Peter and Saul to Paul, only two of

these are as a result of a covenant. The two are Abram and Sarai.

God speaks to Abram as a covenant-head and initiates the Covenant of Promise through him (Gen 12:1-3). It is not until Genesis 17 that the Covenant of Promise is instituted or put into effect by God. After the covenant is in effect, God then changes the name of Abram (High Father) to Abraham (Father of Multitudes). "No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations" (Genesis 17:5).

God also changes the name of Sarai (My Princess), Abraham's wife, to Sarah (Mother of Nations). "Then God said to Abraham, 'As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name'" (Genesis 17:15).

The name change represents an identity change and how God now saw Abraham and Sarah. The name change was also a continual reminder to both Abraham and Sarah of their potential, destiny, and most of all, God's promises.

Overview of The Abrahamic Period

The Son of Promise. Although Abraham demonstrated great faith in so many areas of his relationship with God, there was one area of frustration; Abraham and Sarah had no children of their own. How could God fulfill His promise that his descendants, a multitude, would possess the promised land if he had no children?

It was in this period of waiting for the promised child that Sarah made a suggestion to "help" God. She urged Abraham to have a child with her maid, Hagar, a not uncommon practice in the East. Abraham was agreeable and shortly thereafter Ishmael was born. Ishmael became a beloved son to Abraham but he was not the "son of promise". The son of promise was to be the progenitor of the 12 tribes of Israel; one of those tribes, Judah, was to be

the bloodline that would one day produce David the King and finally the future Messiah, Jesus Christ.

When Abraham was 99 years of age and Sarah was 90, way beyond childbearing age, God visited the couple. "Then God said: 'No, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name *Isaac*; I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his descendants after him'" (Genesis 17:19). Within the year Sarah gave birth to a child; Isaac was the long-awaited child of promise. God is a miracle working God and He loves doing the impossible!

The New Testament also confirms Abraham's faith in Romans 4:19-22, "And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb. He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform. And therefore 'it was accounted to him for righteousness'".

Abraham's Sacrifice. Some years later came another challenge to Abraham's faith. God asked Abraham to sacrifice his long-awaited and only beloved son, Isaac, who was a young man at the time, as a test of Abraham's faith and obedience. What an incredible thing God was asking of Abraham! Abraham had waited 25 long years to see God's promise of a son fulfilled. Now God was telling him to sacrifice that very same son! What is even more amazing is that we see no indication of Abraham doubting or questioning God.

Though it must have been agonizing for Abraham, he still trusted in God and obeyed God's word to him (Gen 22:3). For three days, Abraham and Isaac walked toward the mountain. We can only imagine Abraham's heart breaking with each step, thinking he would be sacrificing the son he loved so deeply (Gen 22:4-6).

Finally, Isaac speaks: “‘My father!’ And he said, ‘Here I am, my son.’ Then he said, ‘Look, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?’ And Abraham said, ‘My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering.’ So, the two of them went together” (Gen 22:7,8). Isaac asked a perfectly reasonable question. When Abraham answered, he was speaking in faith, both in the present and prophetically, “God will provide for Himself the lamb for a sacrifice”. Yes, we now know that Abraham was speaking of a ram stuck in the thicket by its horns (Gen 22:13), but he was also speaking of a far-off day when God would provide the perfect sacrifice for all mankind; Jesus, the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29).

“Then they came to the place of which God had told him. And Abraham built an altar there and placed the wood in order; and he bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, upon the wood. And Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. But the Angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, ‘Abraham, Abraham!’ So he said, ‘Here I am.’ And He said, ‘Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now, I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me.’ Then Abraham lifted his eyes and looked, and there behind him was a ram caught in a thicket by its horns. So Abraham went and took the ram, and offered it up for a burnt offering instead of his son. And Abraham called the name of the place, The-Lord-Will-Provide; as it is said to this day, ‘In the Mount of the Lord it shall be provided’ (Gen 22:9-14). Perhaps you are familiar with the phrase, Jehovah Jireh; it literally means “the Lord will provide” and comes from this portion of Scripture.

Isaac - In this account, God in His grace saves Isaac from death by providing a substitute. This is a beautiful foreshadowing of how God, in His grace, has come to mankind’s rescue by providing a substitute Lamb to be slain

for our salvation. The story of Abraham's sacrifice teaches us that the only way one can be saved is through the way of the Perfect Sacrifice that God provided in Jesus Christ (Rom 5:6-10).

The Ram - God provided a ram to die in the place of Abraham's son, Isaac. The Bible gives us insight into the symbolic nature of the sacrificial system (see Hebrews 10). The sacrificial animals were merely used until "the Perfect" sacrifice came. Therefore, the ram that replaced Abraham's son on the altar was an illustration of a greater, more perfect sacrifice that would one day come. It is an illustration of the Savior Whom God promised to send into the world. That Savior would take the place of sinners who deserve God's righteous judgment!

The Promise - Remember what Abraham said to his son as they were climbing the mountain? He said: "God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering." He also said of the place of sacrifice: "In the Mount of the Lord it shall be provided."

In both cases, God was speaking prophetically through Abraham of a future event (see John 3:16). The event was the crucifixion of Jesus on the Mount of Calvary. On that Cross was the Lamb slain for our salvation, Jesus Christ. "And they sang a new song, saying: 'You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth'" (Rev 5:9,10).

An Unconditional Covenant

It is worth repeating that the Abrahamic Covenant provides something new, an *unconditional* covenant of promise through Abraham (Rom 4:16). This covenant is not about what man must do, but instead *what God Himself has promised to do*.

Abraham saw the fulfillment of the promise in his own life because he walked by faith in God and not by sight (2 Cor 5:7). Abraham trusted God even when it seemed impossible: "Being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform. And therefore it was accounted to him for righteousness" (Rom 4:21,22). Our faith is accounted to us as righteousness as well, when our faith is in Christ for salvation. "For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'The just shall live by faith'" (Rom 1:17); "But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness" (Rom 4:5).

God made great promises to Abraham and his people. Yet, we see in the Scriptures, and in the life of the nation of Israel, that many will forget the promises of God and lose their way. When difficulties arise, doubts about God's faithfulness will also arise and then we often take things into our own hands. The key to promises fulfilled is unwavering faith in God and what He has said. True faith in God is the pathway to righteousness and holiness. The tragedy of Israel, during the Age of Promise, was that they were so focused on the promises they lost sight of the Promise Maker, God! They were so intent on fulfilling their destiny of becoming a powerful and prosperous nation that they began "to do what was right in their own eyes", believing the "ends justified the means".

The key to understanding the Abrahamic Covenant is to realize that mankind is continuing to be *tutored* by God. Mankind has experienced innocence, conscience and human government as a means of securing holiness and righteousness. We can clearly see that none of these were sufficient. Now God makes an *unconditional promise* and all that is required is acceptance that *God is King*; God offers a gift, man just needs to accept and acknowledge that God is King, not with words only, but with a life that confirms the words.

With each covenant, mankind has failed to keep his part of the covenant. Of course, God knew before each covenant that man could not succeed. But man has not yet learned his own desperate need for God and a Savior. With each covenant failure by man, God planned for that failure by providing another covenant step in His progressive revelation.

From a historical point of view, the Abrahamic Covenant was pivotal in the formation of a people known as the Israelites. The Covenant of Promise was a covenant God made with the person of Abraham, a covenant-head and, therefore, all of his offspring (covenant-body). It is not absolutely clear why God chose Abraham, but we can see the character traits that made him an excellent choice. Abraham believed in one God and one God only when most of the world believed in multiple gods. He was obedient to follow God's voice in leaving the life he had known to go to a place he didn't know and live the life of a nomad. He was described as one who would faithfully teach his children about God. Finally, he was destined to miraculously produce a son by the name of Isaac who in turn would have a son called Jacob. God would change Jacob's name to Israel and the 12 sons that Israel would have would become known as the Israelites. One of Israel's sons, Joseph, would be instrumental in bringing the Israelites out of Canaan and into Egypt in order to avoid a famine that would have destroyed Israel, his 12 sons and their families.

15 The Mosaic Covenant

The fifth major covenant we will study is the *Covenant of the Law* or the *Mosaic Covenant*. It was made between God and the Israelites through Moses.

After 400 years in the land of Egypt, the Promises of God are forgotten and the need for a new covenant brings the book of Genesis to a close. We enter a new phase of God's instructions to mankind, the book of Exodus.

The Age of the Law

There is a period of time that began at the giving of the Law (the written Ten Commandments and the Oral Law) to Moses and ended with the crucifixion of Jesus Christ on the Cross of Calvary. This period of time is known by scholars as the "*Age of the Law*". During this time, there were three covenants instituted by God, all related to the Covenant of Law. They are the Mosaic Covenant, the Palestinian Covenant and the Davidic Covenant. The Palestinian and Davidic Covenants were formed to re-emphasize and clarify the Mosaic Covenant.

The Mosaic Covenant is the best known because it relates to the *Law* and so much of the Old Testament is about the Law. Fully 38 of the 39 Old Testament books (Exodus-Malachi) in some way involves the Law or the Mosaic Covenant. The word law (or laws) appears 460 times in the Bible.

When God gave the Law to Israel, He was communicating to them the kind of behavior- personal, societal and national- that would both please Him and most benefit the people, but they would need to be willing to embrace and live by His Law. God was looking for a people who were

"willing and obedient" (Isa 1:19). This went beyond obedience as just a way to receive a blessing or some other benefit from God. A person's *motive* for obedience is important to God, and is also a key to understanding the purpose of the Law. The right heart motive could come only from a heart that loved God (Deut 6:4-6; 10:12,13,16). When questioned by the learned Law experts (the scribes) of His day, Jesus reaffirmed the heart of the whole Law and its requirements of man, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:37-39).

God's Covenant Name

In Exodus 3:13-14 a profound change in relationship between God and man takes place. Up to this time in history the Israelites or Hebrews would refer to God as *El* or *Elohim*; this was the general name used for God. As God prepares to use a reluctant Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, God reveals His *personal name*, indicating His desire for covenant relationship with the Hebrew people. *"Then Moses said to God, 'Indeed, when I come to the children of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they say to me, 'What is His name?' what shall I say to them? And God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM.' And He said, 'Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.''"* (Exodus 3:13-14).

"I AM" can be translated as the "ever existent one" and is God's personal name. The Ten Commandments forbid taking God's name in vain. The very religious Hebrews were very afraid of misusing God's name so they would avoid saying the name of God; instead they would refer to God as *"Ha Shem"* or *"The Name"*. The early Hebrew writings had no vowels so when writing God's name, it was spelled

YHWH; this is called the tetragrammaton. Latin translations of the Hebrew texts used the letters JHVH instead. When the Hebrews would read YHWH, out loud, they would substitute the Hebrew word "*Adonai*" which means Lord, for fear of using God's name in vain.

Early Christian scholars substituted the vowels of Adonai into YHWH and got YaHWeH or JeHoVaH. Modern Christian Bibles use Yahweh, Jehovah or LORD (note the uppercase letters), to denote the personal name of God. Different Bibles use different conventions in the choice of this word. It is important to note that the Hebrews do not use any of these conventions; they still refer to God as *Ha Shem* or *Adonai*.

Terms of The Mosaic Covenant

The requirements and blessings for the Mosaic Covenant are found in Exodus 19:5-8. The Mosaic covenant-heads were God and Moses. Moses was acting on behalf of the people of Israel.

The covenant with Moses is the second of the theocratic covenants (the first was the Abrahamic Covenant). The Mosaic Covenant is *conditional* because of the following language: "*if you will indeed obey My Voice... then you shall be a special treasure*" (Ex 19:5). If the people would do their part, then God would do His part. From the time of Creation to this point in history, *the overwhelming human challenge continues to be obedience to God from the heart*.

The Mosaic Covenant was given to the *nation of Israel alone*. It was given so that those who believed in the promise to Abraham, through the Abrahamic Covenant, would know how to conduct their lives – both toward one another and toward God. The Mosaic Covenant governs the lives of God's chosen people in relation to Himself, His people and His Tabernacle. Some of the provisions include:

1. *God's Special Possession*: To make the children of Israel His special possession among all people if

they would obey God and keep His covenant (Ex 19:5).

2. *A Kingdom of Priests*: To make the children of Israel a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Ex 19:6).
3. *The Ten Commandments*: As part of the terms of this covenant, God gave Moses the Ten Commandments (Ex 20:1-17), written on tablets of stone, as well as oral instructions and commands. The oral traditions were referred to as the Judgments, Ordinances and the Sabbath. These commandments are explained in detail in the remainder of the Pentateuch (Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy). The Ten Commandments were to govern their personal lives, mainly in relationship to God and to one another.
 - a. *The Judgments*: To govern their social lives, particularly as they related to one another (Ex 21:1-24:11).
 - b. *The Ordinances*: To govern their religious lives so that the people would know how to approach God in a way that would please Him (Ex 24:12-31:18). This also included a complex sacrificial system.
 - c. *The Sabbath*: To give the children of Israel the Sabbath as the permanent sign of this covenant (Ex 31:12-17).

All of these provisions were given so that the people of Israel would have a set of rules, regulations and guidelines to follow, so that they would know how to be *good* in God's eyes. This of course begs the question, how good is good enough? No one can keep the Law perfectly!

Blessing and Cursing

An important feature of covenants in general, and the Mosaic Covenant in particular, is the concept of blessing and

cursing. When examining blessings and curses, we see that there are two ways in which they can come:

1. When God pronounces a blessing or a curse, He has the power and authority to make His word fulfill that which He has said (Isaiah 55:11).
2. When a person pronounces a blessing or a curse, he is essentially praying or wishing that good or evil would befall another person. He does not have the power, *in himself*, to make it happen. This kind of action can take two forms, either aligning with God or resisting God:
 - *Aligning with the moral universe.* God has created a moral universe and by this we mean that actions, deeds or motives have moral consequences. God is the ultimate judge as to what is right or wrong, good or evil; what will result in a blessing or a curse. If you bless what God blesses, or curse what God curses, you will see it come to pass (Genesis 12:3). Balak, the king of Moab, tried to enlist the help of Balaam, an enemy of Israel, to curse God's people in Numbers 22-24; the conclusion of that scheme was the following truth, "You cannot curse what God has blessed".
 - *Rebelling against the moral universe* opens you up to demonic activity. You cannot curse what God has blessed, nor bless what God has cursed.

As relating to covenants, blessing and cursing would be pronounced by the two covenant-heads. They would dictate and then agree to the terms. The terms would define what would happen when either of the parties followed the terms of the covenant (blessing) or did not follow the terms of the covenant (cursing). An example of this would be a statement like: "if you break this covenant then may you go childless until your death, but if you keep this covenant may

the laughter of many children ring in your home". The clearest example of blessings and cursing associated with a covenant is found in the covenant God made with the people of Israel through Moses, the Covenant of the Law.

The book of Deuteronomy is the fifth book (Pentateuch) of Moses, and represents a reviewing and refining of the terms of the covenant God earlier made with Israel. It is here that Moses repeats the conditions of the Law.

1. *The Charge* - Moses charges the people to obey the Law, "Then Moses and the priests, the Levites, spoke to all Israel, saying, 'Take heed and listen, O Israel: This day you have become the people of the LORD your God. Therefore, you shall obey the voice of the LORD your God, and observe His commandments and His statutes which I command you today'" (Deuteronomy 27:9-10). It is important to note that the people agreed to the terms of the covenant (Exo 24:3).
2. *Cursing* - Moses proclaims the curses that will follow for disobedience (Deuteronomy 27:11-26, Deuteronomy 28:14-68). After the charge to obey, Moses pronounces the curses and blessings: "But it shall come to pass, if you do not obey the voice of the Lord your God, to observe carefully all His commandments and His statutes which I command you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you" (Deuteronomy 28:15).
3. *Blessing* - "And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, because you obey the voice of the LORD your God" (Deuteronomy 28:2). In Deuteronomy 28:1-14, Moses describes the blessings that will follow those who obey the Law.

The covenant-heads would represent a group of people; for example, Moses represented the Israelites, this means

that if a person of the group willfully violated the covenant (a circumstance commonly called "*sin in the camp*") all of the people would suffer until the situation was corrected. A good example of this is found in the book of Joshua.

After a resounding victory over Jericho (Joshua 6), Joshua went to conquer a much weaker city and was quickly defeated. The city was Ai (Joshua 7). Achan, a member of the tribe of Judah and under the Covenant of the Law, had taken spoils from Jericho that God said should have been destroyed. As a result of his disobedience, he broke the covenant and God's blessing was lifted from Joshua and his army. "Then it shall be that he who is taken with the accursed thing shall be burned with fire, he and all that he has, because he has *transgressed the covenant of the Lord*, and because he has done a disgraceful thing in Israel" (Joshua 7:15). It was not until Achan and the stolen spoils were destroyed that they were able to have victory over the city of Ai (Joshua 8).

Overview of Mosaic Period

The "Age of the Law" covers the period of time from the giving of the Law up to the crucifixion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, a period of about 1500 years and extends from the book of Exodus to the book of Malachi. Fully 38 of the 39 books of the Old Testament pertain to the Covenant of the Law. Let's take a quick overview of the time frame covered by the Mosaic Covenant.

Out of Egypt. As we learned in the study of the Abrahamic Covenant, Jacob and his sons were forced by famine to go to Egypt. When they arrived, there were only 70 of them (Gen 46:27); but within four hundred years there were 600,000 men (Ex 12:37).

A new Pharaoh of Egypt became concerned by the threat of the growing number of Israelites and had the Hebrew

people enslaved. In order to reduce their numbers even further, Pharaoh ordered the death of all male Hebrew infants. During this time, Moses, who was of the tribe of Levite (priestly line), was born and was miraculously saved by Pharaoh's daughter (Exodus Chapters 1 and 2). Moses spent the next 40 years living in Pharaoh's court.

After 40 years in Pharaoh's court, Moses spent the next 40 years in exile in the land of Midian. It was during this time that the God of Israel revealed Himself to Moses in a "burning bush" (Ex 3:4). God then revealed His purpose for Moses: "Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel has come to Me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. Come now, therefore, and I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring My people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt" (Ex 3:9,10).

After the mighty deliverance of God from the hand of Pharaoh through ten plagues and a supernatural rescue in crossing the Red Sea, the Israelites find themselves on a 40-year journey, wandering in the desert.

The 12 tribes of Israel in the Desert. During the 40 years in the wilderness, God revealed His Moral Law in the form of written tablets called the Ten Commandments. God also provided oral traditions of laws that covered their government, social interactions and religious practices.

The 12 tribes occupy the Promised Land. After 40 years in the wilderness, the 12 Tribes of Israel are ready to enter into the promised land. Only Moses, Joshua and Caleb are left from the original exodus from Egypt. Moses is prohibited from crossing the Jordan River by God and entering Canaan, but before he dies sees the land from across the river. Leadership is transferred to Joshua.

The 12 Judges. God raised up judges, or deliverers, to lead the young nation of Israel following Joshua's passing. The Israelites would go through cycles of living under the blessings of God, then abandoning God and finding

themselves under oppression from neighboring nations. God would raise up a judge to deliver His people, and then the cycle would repeat itself.

United Kingdom of Israel. Then occurs the transition from the leadership of judges to the leadership of kings. The most prominent kings in establishing Israel as a nation were kings Saul, David and Solomon. These three kings were responsible for establishing Israel as a great nation.

Of these three kings, David was the most significant. God said of David, "He is a man after my own heart, in that he will do all that I ask him to do" (Acts 13:22). David was passionate about serving God. A very important point here is that David was from the tribe of *Judah*. This was the very tribe from which the promised Messiah (Gk. Christ) would come. David had a son with his wife Bathsheba, his name was Solomon. He ruled Israel after the death of King David.

Divided Kingdom of Israel. The end of King Solomon's rule represented the beginning of the decline of the United Kingdom of Israel. After Solomon's death, Solomon's son, Rehoboam, assumed the reign over the United Kingdom. In short order he met resistance from Jeroboam, a servant of the House of Solomon. Ten of the 12 tribes sided with Jeroboam. Only the tribes of Judah and Benjamin stood behind Rehoboam. Greatly outnumbered, they fled to Jerusalem in the south. Thus, began the period known as the Divided Kingdom: Judah in the south with the Temple and Jerusalem as its capital; Israel in the north with Samaria as its capital. When King Jeroboam barred the Levites, the priests, from worship in Israel, many of them also fled to Judah in the south. Soon, the people of the northern state of Israel fell into idol worship and turned their backs on God. The 18 kings following Jeroboam are described in the Bible as evil kings.

Judah, in the south, did not fare any better than Israel, in the north, and spiraled into decline. In the line of 19 kings

that followed Rehoboam, some are described as good, but many were evil.

The Exile and Return. By 722 BC, Israel in the north is conquered by the Assyrians and the population taken into exile which was a common practice in those days. The 10 tribes of the northern kingdom, Israel, never were to return to the promised land. They became known as the "lost tribes of Israel". By 586 BC, Judah was conquered by the Babylonians and also taken into exile, but God would not forget His promise to Judah. Judah would one-day return to the promised land.

Seventy years after the exile of Judah, God began the process of returning the remnant of Judah back to Israel. To this day, Israel has not known a king nor the glory of a United Kingdom.

The 400 Silent Years. This period known as "The 400 Silent Years" is between the restoration of the remnant of Judah to the land of Israel and the New Testament period. For 400 years, this period of time is called "silent" because no prophet of God spoke during this time. This "silent" period is broken by John the Baptist, a prophet proclaiming the coming of the "*Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world*" (John 1:29) in the Person of Jesus Christ.

Foreshadows of Christ

The Book of Exodus is about *God's deliverance* through a man named Moses. It is the story of God delivering His promised people out of slavery and bringing them to the edge of entering the promised land. The responsibility of bringing the people into the promised land would fall to a leader named Joshua.

Exodus included several important events: Moses confronting Pharaoh, the Passover, the crossing of the Red Sea, and the giving of the Covenant of Law. All of these events are types and foreshadows of Jesus Christ and the New Covenant.

Moses Confronts Pharaoh. As Moses led his people (the Israelites) out of the bondage of Pharaoh and Egypt, so Jesus Christ leads His people out of the bondage of Satan and the world:

1. Moses: "So I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and large land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Amorites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites" (Ex 3:8).
2. Jesus: "...to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me" (Acts 26:18).

The Passover. Israel's deliverance from Egyptian bondage and adoption by God were sealed by what is known as the Passover (Ex 12:23; Heb 11:28). Those who believed (had faith) in God's instructions about the Passover would have life; those who did not would die.

God gave the enslaved people, through Moses, instructions for the Passover before the exodus from Egypt (Ex 12:1-14). Obedience to the Passover instructions was an act of faith toward a faithful God. The same is true today of our faith in the grace or gift of God, through Christ which saves us. "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast" (Eph 2:8,9).

The Passover was a type of sacrifice that joined Israel to God. This was an act of God's grace toward them. The slain lamb of the Passover was a foreshadow of "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Those who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ have died to sin that they might live for righteousness (1 Pet 2:24). Those

who do not place their faith in Jesus Christ remain “dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph 2:1).

The unleavened loaves, called “bread of affliction” (Deut 16:3), were a reminder of past affliction. They symbolized the new life that had been cleansed from the leaven of the old “Egyptian-like” nature (1 Cor 5:8). God’s Passover sacrifice (Ex 23:15-18; 34:25) came first. Then, because of God’s provision, came the seven-day feast of unleavened bread. This symbolized that they now walked in the strength of the pure bread of a new life and in fellowship with God.

Eating of the Covenant Meal. An almost universal feature of making covenants was the sharing of a meal between the covenant-heads. This was more than a simple formality. The *covenant meal* was a symbol of unity, but more importantly, it was a seal or ratification of the covenant. The following examples will show this.

After their liberation from Egypt and the harsh rule of Pharaoh, the Hebrew people travel into the wilderness. In Exodus 19, God reveals His desire to establish a covenant with the people. “Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My Covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel” (Ex 19:5-6).

The people heard and accepted the covenant. “So Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before them all these words which the Lord commanded him. Then all the people answered together and said, ‘All that the Lord has spoken we will do.’ So Moses brought back the words of the people to the Lord” (Ex 19:7-8).

Following this, Moses is called up to Mount Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20. It isn’t until chapter 24:1-8 that the covenant is ratified or sealed and finally a *covenant meal* is shared, “But on the nobles of the

children of Israel He did not lay His hand. So they saw God, and *they ate and drank*" (Ex 24:11).

The account of Jacob and his father-in-law, Laban, is another instance where a meal seals the deal or covenant. Jacob had been taken advantage of by Laban for 20 years, "Thus I have been in your house twenty years; I served you fourteen years for your two daughters, and six years for your flock, and you have changed my wages ten times" (Gen 31:41). In spite of this trickery by Laban, God blessed Jacob.

Jacob planned to secretly leave Laban with the possessions he had earned and return to his homeland. After Jacob sneaked away, Laban pursued Jacob and there was a confrontation. Jacob spoke the words above and these words of Jacob "cut Laban to the heart" with their truth, so Laban turned around, offered his hand, and proposed a covenant. "Now therefore, come, let us make a covenant, you and I, and let it be a witness between you and me" (Gen 31:44). They erected a heap of stones as a memorial and a boundary. At this time, they shared a *covenant meal* to ratify the covenant. "Then Jacob offered a sacrifice on the mountain, and called his brethren to eat bread. And they ate bread and stayed all night on the mountain" (Gen 31:54).

The Passover was instituted to memorialize and consecrate Israel's deliverance from Egyptian bondage. The Passover was a kind of sacrament, uniting the nation to God on the ground of God's grace to them. The lamb that was slain to provide the blood applied to the door frame of the home was a foreshadowing of the "Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

Today the Passover meal, or Seder, as it is called, represents a memorial, or reminder, to the deliverance of the people of God from slavery. The very first Passover with its meal represented the sealing of a promise by God to deliver His people.

Establishing a Memorial. When referring to the establishment of a memorial, we mean to erect a monument, establish a holiday, or create a ritual which serves as a remembrance or reminder of a person or an event. The Feast of the Passover was a memorial (both a holiday and ritual) of God's sparing the firstborn of the Israelites in Egypt and of Israel's deliverance from Egyptian bondage (Ex 12:14-20).

When Israel crossed the Jordan River and occupied the promised land, Joshua commanded that 12 stones (a monument), representing the 12 tribes of Israel, be set up in the midst of the Jordan (Josh 4:9). "These stones," he said, "shall be for a memorial to the children of Israel forever" (Josh 4:7).

When Jesus was in the house of Simon the leper, a woman anointed His head with oil (a ritual). "Wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world," said Jesus, "what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her" (Matt 26:13; Mark 14:3-9).

On the eve of His crucifixion, Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper. The observance of the Lord's Supper is an ongoing Christian memorial that helps the believer remember the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on his behalf (1Cor 11:24-26)

Baptism - Crossing the Red Sea. In crossing the Red Sea, the people of Israel had already been redeemed by blood (Passover lamb) and had left Egypt (the old life) forever. They were entering into a "*new life*" and taking on a new "*leader*".

In order to embrace the new life, they had to leave the old life behind. Isn't this also true about a Christian's baptism? It symbolizes the "*death of the old man*" and being raised to "*new life in Christ*". Paul, the apostle, writes of the believer's baptism: "Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore, we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the

dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" (Rom 6:3,4).

The crossing of the Red Sea foreshadows water baptism for the Christian. "Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea" (1 Cor 10:1,2). Note the reference to being "baptized into Moses." In the same way today, the Christian is "baptized into Jesus". We can see that Moses foreshadows or is a type of Christ, the One Who leads us out of the bondage of sin and into new life as we follow Him.

Purpose of The Law

The Law was introduced to explicitly guide people into the behavior God knew was best for His people. The Law dictated what every aspect of life should look like for those who were in covenant with God. It was meant to regulate worship, business, social and family interactions. The Law defined what God would bless and what God would curse.

Remember: Each new covenant that God established with man did *not* cancel out the previous covenant. Each new covenant simply built upon or *added to* the prior. For example, the Mosaic Covenant did not replace the Abrahamic Covenant. The purpose of the Mosaic Covenant is clearly set forth by Scripture (Gal 3:17-19):

1. The Mosaic Covenant came 430 years after the Abrahamic Covenant.
2. The Mosaic Covenant was added alongside the Abrahamic Covenant so that the people of Israel would know how to conduct their lives until "the Seed" prophesied by the Adamic Covenant – the Christ or Messiah – would come and make the complete and perfect sacrifice.
3. The laws and sacrifices of the Mosaic Covenant are merely a copy or shadow of the very real salvation

and deliverance that the New Covenant provides (Heb 8:5-7; 9:23-28).

Helpless and Hopeless

The Law was given so that man would recognize that he is helpless and hopeless to perfectly obey what is required for righteousness and holiness before God. The Mosaic Covenant was never given to provide salvation for those who would keep it perfectly, since no one could keep the Law completely.

The Mosaic Covenant was given so that *all of mankind would realize* that they cannot do what God wants them to do in their own strength, even when God writes it down on tablets of stone. All of the covenants we have studied thus far, step by step, have pointed us to this truth.

In the Old Testament, 38 of the 39 books (Exodus to Malachi) cover the period of the Covenant of the Law. During this span of about 1,500 years in the life of Israel, we learn some important things (1 Cor 10:1-11):

1. *God never changes* (Mal 3:6; Heb 13:8). God's purpose and plan for mankind has not changed since the Creation in the Garden of Eden. That purpose and plan for mankind was – and still is – for God to be in personal relationship and fellowship with His creation, man.
2. Man is born with a "*sin nature*" (Ps 51:5) as an inheritance from our father, Adam (Rom 5:19). This sin nature will always strive to have its own way. "Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the hearts" (Prov 21:2).
3. The Old Testament gives many examples of God's chosen people "drifting away from" or "rebellious against" the laws of God and experiencing His wrath. That wrath would come by allowing the enemies of Israel to defeat and enslave them. Israel would repent and then God would deliver

them. This would happen time and time again throughout their history.

4. The Law provided a contrast so that sin could be seen for what it was. Man then had a clear choice about who or what to serve and obey: God and His ways, or sin and its consequences, "Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin" (Rom 3:20).

Israel quickly discovered that the *heart condition* required to lovingly keep God's commandments was not attainable. The "law of sin" was already at work within them (Deut 5:28,29; Rom 7:7-22). Israel's history under the Law revealed an important truth: Unless God provided a means for *man's heart to be transformed*, man was not capable of fully obeying the Lord's righteous requirements for a blessed life in relationship with Him.

Free from The Curse

The Law was given to prepare God's people for the New Covenant to come – one that would bring them the possibility of a "new heart" (Ezek 36:24-27). This principle is clarified when we read the words of Paul, a Jew raised under the Law. In Paul's discourse about the nature of sin and the Law (Rom 7), he cries out in anguish, "But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (Rom 7:23,24).

Paul answers his own question with the glorious good news: "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death" (Rom 8:1,2).

God in His wisdom was setting the stage for a final covenant that would be completely different from anything He had done before. This new Covenant of Grace would deal with the *sin nature* once and for all! But, first, let us study two more covenants related to the Law: The Palestinian and the Davidic Covenants.

16 The Palestinian Covenant

In the historical timeline we must backtrack to that time when Moses was leading the people in the wilderness after 40 years. The Israelites are ready to cross the Jordan River under the leadership of Joshua, into Canaan, the promised land. From the population that entered the desert, only Moses, Joshua and Caleb were present when the Law was given, 40 years prior. Everyone else had passed away. The present Israelites had to be reminded of God's promise of a land. The reminder would come in the form of a covenant called the Palestinian Covenant. The Palestinian Covenant is also known as the "*Land Covenant*" because it is about the "land" that God had promised the people of Israel through the Abrahamic Covenant. The word "Palestinian" is not a biblical term, but a term used by biblical scholars to describe the land that the Bible calls Canaan. This covenant has nothing to do with the present day Palestinian people.

The Covenant

The Palestinian Covenant is made between God and Moses on behalf of the people, and is a *reaffirmation* of the Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants. This covenant took place during the Age of the Law, and was given 40 years after the Mosaic Covenant.

The Palestinian Covenant is the third theocratic covenant. It is theocratic because it deals with God's rule over His people, the Israelites; and because it *repeats* the language of the Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants.

It had been 40 years since crossing the Red Sea from slavery to freedom (darkness to light). The *new generation* of Israelites was now about to cross the Jordan River and enter into the promised land of Canaan under Joshua's leadership. God used this time to affirm to the Israelites Who He is and to reveal His purpose and plan for the nation. The Palestinian Covenant is what God chose to use to remind the people of His faithfulness.

Terms of The Palestinian Covenant

The language of the Palestinian Covenant is found in Deuteronomy 29:10-15 and Deuteronomy 30:11-20. In chapter 29:

1. The covenant is with all those who are preparing to cross the Jordan River and possess the land, Canaan, promised to the people of Israel (vs 10-12).
2. God reminds the people that He is their God and they are His people (v 13).
3. God reminds the people that this is an everlasting covenant He is making with them and with all future generations (vs 14, 15).

In Chapter 30:

1. The covenant is to take immediate effect; it is not for some future date (vs 11-14).
2. God calls for blessings on those who obey His commandments, statutes and judgments, and upon those who will love Him. He also pronounces curses upon those who disobey Him (vs 15-18). Deuteronomy Chapters 27 and 28 give details of the blessings and curses.
3. The choice of living under the blessings or curses belongs to the Israelites. The choice to walk with God in love or rebel against God is theirs to make. The final admonition reveals God's heart: "I call

heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live" (vs19, 20).

Joshua as a Type of Christ

Joshua is a foreshadow, or type of Christ, as he leads the people through the Jordan River into the promised land. Jesus was immersed in the Jordan River at His baptism (Matt 3:13-17) and will lead His people to a heavenly promised land (John 14:2, 3). It is also interesting to note that the Hebrew name for Jesus is Joshua.

Canaan Belongs to Israel

The Palestinian Covenant is a reaffirmation of the commitment God made: *The land of Canaan belonged to Israel*. God always keeps His promises, even when people do not (Num 23:19; 2Tim 2:13; Heb 6:13-18). The history of Israel provides many examples of God's chosen people promising to follow Him – yet repeatedly failing to keep their promises and rebelling against Him. Of course, there were consequences for their actions, but still God *never* forgot them, rejected them or turned His back on them.

The history of Israel from Exodus to Malachi reveals that the Israelites were a "stiff-necked" or stubborn people (see Deut 9; 10:16; 2 Kings 17:14-16). Although their father was Abraham, the "Father of Faith", they did not choose to walk by faith (2 Cor 5:7). Over and over again, the Israelites would walk by what they saw or thought was right in their own eyes (Deut 12:8-12; Judg 17:6), ignoring the laws and counsel of God. Instead of listening to God and choosing to walk with Him, they would choose their own way, and with it, the horrible consequences. "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death" (Prov 14:12).

In spite of Israel's stubbornness, please remember that God was preparing Israel to be an example of His faithfulness. Through Israel the Messiah would come, and all of mankind would have the opportunity to receive the ultimate revelation of God and His salvation through the New Covenant. The prior covenants were not designed to be sufficient to save (Heb 10:4). Rather, they served as a constant "tutor", or reminder, that because sin had entered the human race every man, woman and child needs a Savior.

In the New Covenant, God would provide the "eyes," "ears" and "heart" to see, hear and follow Him by His Holy Spirit (1 Cor 2:9-16). That way was not yet available. Mankind first had to realize that the Law could not save or enable one to be holy and righteous.

God's Faithfulness to Israel

Israel as a nation ceased to exist following the exiles by the Assyrians (772 BC) and the Babylonians (586 BC). For over 2000 years there was no state of Israel, but God did not forget His promises to the people of Israel.

The area historically known as Palestine included the land that was the United Kingdom of Israel. This land has had many countries ruling over it throughout the centuries. The Ottoman Empire had control over it until World War I. With the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, Britain took over Palestine. In 1917, Britain issued the "Balfour Declaration", which declared its intent to establish a Jewish homeland in Palestine. The Balfour Declaration was included in the British mandate over Palestine which was authorized by the League of Nations in 1922. With the withdrawal of Britain from Palestine, Israel was declared a State on May 14, 1948, and stands to this very day. God keeps His promises!

17 The Davidic Covenant

The Palestinian Covenant concerned the land (Promised Land). The *Davidic Covenant* relates to the “Seed” prophesied in the Adamic Covenant (Gen 3:15; Rom 1:3).

The Davidic Covenant takes place during the Age of the Law (that was ushered in by the Mosaic Covenant). The Davidic Covenant was made about 500 years after the Mosaic Covenant and reaffirmed the lineage of the “Seed.” The “Seed” spoken of is important because the ultimate “Seed” is Jesus Christ.

King David had a heart to build a house, a permanent dwelling place, for the Lord (see 1 Chron 28:1-8). Prior to this time, the Ark of the Covenant was housed in a portable tent or *tabernacle*. David went so far as to draw up the plans for a place to house the Ark in Jerusalem, but God told David that he was not to build the house because David was a man of war and had shed blood (v 3). God revealed to David that his son, Solomon, would build the Temple (vs 6, 7).

It is in this context of building a house for God that the *Davidic covenant* was established. The building of a physical structure would be temporary and of limited value. This physical temple was a prophetic foreshadow of a “spiritual house” from which the Messiah or “Seed” would come.

Terms of The Davidic covenant

The actual language of the Davidic covenant is found in 2 Samuel 7:1-17. Here is a portion of that Scripture, “Moreover I will appoint a place for My people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in a place of their own and move no more; nor shall the sons of wickedness

oppress them anymore, as previously, since the time that I commanded judges to be over My people Israel, and have caused you to rest from all your enemies. Also the Lord tells you that He will make you a house. When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his Father, and he shall be My son. If he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men and with the blows of the sons of men. But My mercy shall not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I removed from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever”.

Important key words are found in this passage. Many interpret the key words found in the covenant in the following way:

1. *House*: Refers to a family line or dynasty (v 11).
2. *Kingdom*: Refers to a realm of political power and to a people who are governed by a king (v 12).
3. *Throne*: Refers to the authority of the king's rule (v 13).
4. *Forever*: Refers to the eternal and unconditional nature of this promise to David and Israel (v 13).

The Davidic Covenant is an unconditional covenant between God and King David delivered through the prophet, Nathan. It is the fourth theocratic covenant, and is theocratic in nature because it has to do with God's rule through the lineage of David.

God promises King David and Israel that the Messiah would come from the lineage of David and the tribe of Judah, and that He would establish a kingdom that would endure forever (2 Sam 7:10-13).

God reaffirms the promise of the Promised Land (Palestine) that He made in the first two covenants with Israel, the Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants (2 Sam 7:10).

God promises that David's descendant (Solomon) will succeed him as King of Israel. God declares that He will establish Solomon's kingdom and throne, and that Solomon will build a house for God's name (2 Sam 7:12, 13). God told David through Nathan the prophet, "And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever" (2 Sam 7:16). This is important because it reveals that the Messiah will come from the lineage of David; and the Messiah will establish an eternal kingdom over which He will reign (Rev 11:15).

David as a Type of Christ

David is a type of Christ because of his obedience to God that was demonstrated in his life. Jesus was characterized by His obedience to the Father: "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me" (John 6:38; see also John 8:29; Phil 2:5-11; Heb 5:8, 9).

However, unlike Christ, David was not perfect. However, when David failed, he was quick to repent (Psalms 51). David was one of those rare people of the Old Testament who obeyed the Lord from a loving heart, so much so that God even called David, "a man after My own heart" (Acts 13:22-24).

From the Line of David

The Davidic Covenant is so important because God reveals an unbroken line through which will come the Messiah (Jesus Christ). The Messiah will establish an eternal Kingdom over which He will reign. Mary and Joseph, Jesus' earthly parents, were both of the tribe of Judah. This is

important because of the prophecy that the Messiah would be of the tribe of Judah.

Jesus' human father, Joseph, was His *legal* father (adoptive) but not His biological father (Luke 1:31-35). Joseph could trace his lineage to David through Jeconiah (Matt 1:1-17). This would mean that Jesus had a "*legal right*" to David's throne, but Jeconiah (Coniah, or Jehoiachin, in Hebrew) was rejected because of sin; Jeremiah prophesied that no descendent of Coniah would sit on the throne of David (Jer 22:24-30). So legally Jesus had a right to David's throne through Joseph, although not a blood right. Which was not a problem since Joseph was not Jesus' biological father.

However, David had another son, Nathan. His line was not cursed. Mary, the physical mother of Jesus, traces her bloodline back to David through Nathan (Luke 3:23-38). Mary, Jesus' natural mother, provides the "*bloodline and blood right*" to David through David's son, Nathan.

Jesus in the Line of David

It is clear that Jesus receives His "*blood right*" to David's throne through His earthly mother, Mary, and His "*legal right*" to David's throne through His adoptive father, Joseph.

God always keeps His Word! God ordained the "virgin birth" by Mary to keep His Word and to preserve its truth. The virgin birth (Isa 7:14) was absolutely essential not only to ensure the sinless character of Jesus (Heb 4:15), but also to fulfill the Davidic Covenant and to fulfill the prophetic promise that the Messiah would come from the tribe of Judah (Genesis 49:8-12).

The primary promise of the Davidic Covenant was one of kingship forever in the line of David. This promise included the New Covenant, and is expressed and fulfilled in the Person of Jesus Christ. "And of the increase of His

government and peace there will be no end" (Isa 9:6,7).
Jesus Christ, King of kings and Lord of lords, forever!

18 Part Two Conclusion

We don't want to lose "sight of the forest for the trees" because doing so would mean missing God's plan and purpose for the Bible and for our lives. Psalm 119:130 states the following, "The entrance of Your words gives light; It gives understanding to the simple". The following are four key issues illuminated by our study of His words, up to this point:

1. God's progressive revelation of Himself as a covenant-making, covenant-keeping God.
2. Seeing the faithfulness of God through the biblical historical record of His dealings with mankind and Israel. From the Garden of Eden to the return of exiled Judah to the land of Israel; man has repeated the cycle of being at peace with God, walking away from God, losing the blessings and protection of God, finding himself in bondage and oppression, brought to a place of repentance and restoration, and then the cycle starts again. Through it all God never gives up, forgets or turns His back on His creation.
3. Seeing the coming of the Messiah, or Christ, through the covenants. Slowly, inexorably, we see the promise of a "Seed" being worked out through the blood-line in God's covenants: Adam and Eve, Seth, Enosh, Noah, Shem, Abraham, Judah, Moses, Joshua, David, Nathan, and finally, to Jesus Christ.
4. Seeing some of the types and foreshadows of Jesus Christ and the New Covenant throughout all of the covenants in the Old Testament.

The conclusion of these seven covenants is that it is impossible for man to produce his own holiness and

righteousness through works or efforts. Not innocence, nor conscience, nor human government can bring one into right standing with God. The Law revealed what God required and man responded with a legalistic system for obeying the Law. A legalism that substituted outward external acts of obedience rather than a heartfelt desire to do what would please God.

PART THREE The Believers' Covenant

“Obtain Wisdom”

**“For wisdom is better than
rubies, and all the things one
may desire cannot be
compared with her”.**

Proverbs 8:11

19 The New Testament

An important reason for studying the covenants is to contrast the Old Testament (Old Covenant) with the New Testament (New Covenant). To repeat, the majority of the Old Testament is about the Law, from Exodus to Malachi, a full 38 of the 39 books. In contrast, the entire New Testament is about the New Covenant and God's grace.

For us as believers in Christ, the covenant in which we now live is the New Covenant. As Christians, we should make it our priority to study and learn from the New Testament. The Old Testament, through its frequent foreshadows and types, points to the New Testament.

Please understand, the Old Testament is *God's eternal Word* and it is consistent, understandable and trustworthy (Isa 40:8). However, we no longer live under the Covenant of Law or the old sacrificial system of the Old Covenant. We now live under the Covenant of Grace and the Lordship of Jesus Christ, who is God. As believers, we should study *all* of the Scriptures, but learn to interpret the Old Covenant through the truths and the spirit of the New Covenant. As Christians, the Old Covenant of Law (Mosaic) is not our covenant, it was for Israel and Judah. Our covenant is the New Covenant, the "Better" Covenant. Since the New Testament of the Bible covers the New Covenant, these two terms can be used interchangeably.

Before we get into the New Covenant, it would be helpful to review and expand our understanding in three areas: (1) New Testament canon, (2) a historical view of Jesus Christ, the Church; and finally (3) discerning the central message of the New Covenant.

New Testament Canon

The books that make up the New Testament were originally writings and letters that were copied and passed around in the early church. The first efforts at collecting the writings and letters into an "authorized" collection or *canon* took place in AD 170. Four of our current number of 27 books were not included. By AD 363, the Council of Laodicea stated that only the Old Testament and 26 books of the New Testament (everything but the book of Revelation) were canonical and to be read in the churches. Finally, the Council of Hippo (AD 393) and the Council of Carthage (AD 397) affirmed our current 27 books *and* the Old Testament as authoritative, and could be used in the church.

The New Testament contains 27 books and they are arranged by types of literature:

1. *The Gospels* - Matthew, Mark, Luke and John: The first four books of the New Testament are called the Gospels. The word "gospel" means "good news." These books tell us the good news of the coming of Christ to save man from his sins. The four Gospels also give us the account of the birth, life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Gospels also reveal how Jesus was the promised Messiah of the Old Testament and lay the foundation for the teaching of the rest of the New Testament. The authors of the Gospels are the same as the title of each book.
2. *The Book of Acts*: This book was written by Luke and records the deeds of Jesus' apostles, the men Jesus sent out into the world to proclaim the gospel of salvation. The book of Acts tells us of the beginning of the church, its empowerment by the Holy Spirit, and the rapid growth of the church in the first century A.D. The book of Acts also tells us about the ministries of the Apostles Peter and Paul,

the many miracles performed through them and how people became Christians in the early church.

3. *The Epistles*: The Greek word "epistles" means "letters." There are 21 epistles in the New Testament. The epistles of the New Testament can be divided into 2 groups: The epistles of Paul, or Pauline Epistles, and the general epistles. The apostle Paul wrote 13 of the 21 epistles.
 - a. *The Pauline Epistles* are letters written to several specific churches, to present the official Christian doctrine and expected practices associated with those doctrines. Paul wrote Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, and Philemon. Some believe Paul also wrote the book of Hebrews.
 - b. *The General Epistles* compliment the Pauline Epistles with additional teaching and application. They are as follows James, 1 and 2 Peter, 1, 2, and 3 John, and Jude.
4. *The Book of Revelation* is a prophetic book that reveals the events that will occur in the *End Times* and was written by John.

As the Old Testament applies to the Jews, the New Testament applies to Christians. In the words of the writer of the book of Hebrews, the Old Testament is the shadow (Heb 10:1); the New Testament is the reality. Much of the Old Testament contains prophetic types and statements pointing to the coming of a *better* covenant based upon better *promise*, all found in Jesus Christ (Heb 8:6).

New Testament Historical Perspective

In terms of a timeline, the New Testament opens in the Gospels with the birth of John the Baptist, a cousin of Jesus. John will become the prophetic forerunner of the Messiah,

or the Christ, proclaiming that the Messiah (Jesus) was coming soon. Jesus' birth takes place soon after John's birth. Other than Jesus' miraculous birth and an episode in the Temple when He was 12 years old, not much is known about Jesus until He reached the age of 30 and began His earthly ministry.

The life of Christ. John the Baptist was an adult when he was described as a prophet (Luke 7:28), proclaiming the coming of the Messiah (Luke 3:4-6), after 400 years of silence. He was the first to recognize the divine nature of Jesus when he saw Jesus coming to him to be baptized (John 1:29-34). Jesus' earthly ministry began at His baptism, by John the Baptist; then He was filled with the Holy Spirit (Luke 4:1), tempted by the Devil in the wilderness (Luke 4:1-13), and anointed to fulfill His mission or assignment of the ministry (Luke 4:18-19).

Jesus' supernatural ministry is filled with signs, wonders, and miracles. Each of the four Gospels presents eye-witness accounts with a perspective unique to each writer. While there are four Gospel writers; there is only *one gospel*. The gospel, or *good news*, is found in Jesus' words, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). The *way* is the way of grace, "For by *grace* you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast" (Eph 2:8-9).

The four Gospels record Christ's ministry to the four groups or types of people then and applies even to those types of people today.

Matthew, a Jew, ministered to the Jews who were well versed in the Scriptures and the prophecies of God. Matthew spoke to the Jews about the Kingdom and Jesus Messiah as the King.

Mark was a Jew and spoke to the Romans. The Romans were the military and political leaders of the day and they controlled most aspects of life in Israel. They knew nothing

of Scriptures but respected power. Mark emphasized the power and authority of Jesus Christ and His ministry.

Luke was a Greek and his message was to the Greeks. The Greeks loved culture, beauty and philosophical ideas. Luke wrote from a perspective that the Greeks could identify with- the pursuit of truth.

John was a Jew, but he wrote to a general audience. Everyone, then and even now, has that empty space in their heart that only Jesus can fill. In John's Gospel, we see the incarnate Christ, God in the flesh and the message of hope, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

Each book of the Gospels ends with the words of Jesus in what is known as the "Great Commission" (Matt 28:19, Mark 16:15, Luke 24:47, John 20:21). The commission is the charge and responsibility, as believers and disciples, to make the gospel known to every man, woman and child on the earth.

Here is an important point to consider. The New Covenant would not be initiated until the crucifixion, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Therefore, Jesus, being a Jew, was ministering to the Jews of the day and fulfilling all of the requirements of the Law. Jesus' death upon the Cross closed out the Covenant of Law (Mosaic), His resurrection initiated the New Covenant. "For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second" (Heb 8:7). God's grace is necessary and sufficient, and that grace is represented in at least three important ways. Salvation as a free gift of faith (Eph 2:8-9), being born again, and the Holy Spirit living in the believer (John 3:3-7).

How to become a Christian. The book of Acts reveals that the instrument that God would use to accomplish the Great Commission is the "*church*", empowered by the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8). The church, not as an institution,

organization or denomination, but as the “body of Christ” (Col 1:18) made up of people, people like you and me. The book of Acts gives us examples of ordinary men and women, Jews and non-Jews accepting Jesus as Lord and Savior, becoming disciples, and doing extraordinary things.

How to live the Christian life. The rest of the Epistles, or letters, are correspondences to the churches outlining the truths to adhere to (doctrines) and the practices that confirm the doctrines of God. The presence of the Holy Spirit in the believer’s life would help insure that a believer would be progressively changed from the inside out; being transformed by a change of heart, rather than being conformed to outward expectations as in the Covenant of Law (Rom 12:1-2).

New Testament Message or Theme

The message of the Old Testament was primarily about how to please God and receive His blessings of peace, prosperity, and the preeminence of the Kingdom of Israel.

The New Testament has, as its central focus, the Kingdom of God as a present reality to be experienced in everyday life. Jesus came preaching the kingdom (Matthew 4:17). The kingdom Jesus preached was a spiritual kingdom found in the hearts of redeemed men and women, “Now when He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, “The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, ‘See here!’ or ‘See there!’ For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you.” (Luke 17:20-21). Jesus was speaking of a spiritual kingdom over which He was the ultimate Lord and Savior!

Another important aspect of this spiritual kingdom is the anticipation of the King returning to earth again. This is known as the “Second Coming” or Advent of Christ.

20 The New Covenant

The New Covenant is called “new” in contrast to the “Old Covenant” or the Mosaic Covenant (Jer 31:32; Heb 8:6-13). *The new replaces the old* because the old Mosaic Covenant was limited. The Old Covenant could only *point* to the things that the New Covenant actually fulfilled; the child of God living a victorious life consistent with the righteous commands and character of God.

The New Covenant fulfilled (consummated, completed) all previous covenant revelations. It also established something infinitely greater, a Savior! Thus, it exceeded all previous covenants. All that was promised by God, all that had been revealed in the previous covenants by prophetic foreshadows, was now completed and embodied in the Person of Jesus Christ. There was much that the prior covenants could not do, or were inadequate to perform. The prior covenants could not:

1. Open a way of salvation as a free gift to *all* people.
2. Change a person’s heart and nature.
3. Give every recipient of God’s salvation the power, ability and gifting, through the Holy Spirit. This would enable them to lovingly obey God, be transformed from within, and live victoriously.

All that could *not* be accomplished by the prior covenants is now *fully realized* in the New Covenant. It is *all* available through Jesus Christ and the person of the Holy Spirit now living within every believer!

Prophecy of a New Covenant

The New Covenant is the eighth and last of the *theocratic covenants* and it is unconditional in nature. This means that

God will keep His word even if man does not (2 Tim 2:13). Jeremiah, an Old Testament prophet, prophesied the New Covenant and spoke of it as a future event. The fulfillment of that prophecy came when Jesus, the "Lamb of God" (John 1:29), gave His life on the Cross of Calvary.

For the purpose of context, let's take a moment to examine the books of the five major prophets, which are favorite readings for so many: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, and Daniel.

Isaiah was alive before and during the destruction of the Northern Kingdom of Israel and their subsequent exile. His prophetic words were a message of warning for Israel to "turn around" and repent. His prophetic words fell on deaf ears. He also "sounds the alarm" for the Southern Kingdom of Judah, to no avail. As you know, both Israel and Judah are conquered and taken into exile. The Northern Kingdom of Israel was conquered by the Assyrians and the Southern Kingdom of Judah was conquered by the Babylonians.

Jeremiah, a contemporary of Ezekiel and Daniel, speaks God's warnings to Judah. Of course, they refuse to "turn around" and repent of their ways. They suffer the same fate as Israel. It is through Jeremiah that God reveals His plan to establish a "New Covenant".

The book of Lamentations is actually written by Jeremiah as he laments the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in Judah by the Babylonians.

Ezekiel and Daniel are written from the perspective of life in exile for Judah, and the hope that God has not forgotten His promises to His people.

The New Covenant

Now we are ready to look more closely at Jeremiah's prophecy concerning the New Covenant. It is found in Jeremiah 31:31-34:

Verse 31: "Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel

and with the house of Judah.”

1. The New Covenant is “new” in contrast to the former covenant with Moses, which is called “old.” “For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second” (Heb 8:7).

Verse 32: “...not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the Lord.”

1. The New Covenant fulfilled (Matt 5:17, 18) and thus eliminated the need for the Old Covenant: “In that He says, ‘A new covenant,’ He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away” (Heb 8:13).
2. The New Covenant will not be like the Old Covenant (Mosaic). Man will no longer live by the letter of the Law. Instead, man can live by both the power and leading of God’s Holy Spirit: “...who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life” (2 Cor 3:6; see also Romans 8:14; Galatians 5:18).

Verse 33: “But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.”

1. The New Covenant will provide for a super-natural regeneration: a new nature as a result of a new birth (Titus 3:5).
 - “Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God’” John 3:3.
 - “Jesus answered, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is

born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (John 3:5,6).

2. God will put His law in their innermost being and write it in their hearts. No longer will a walk with God be founded upon external commandments and rules; now the commandments will be written on the heart of a believer.

- “Clearly you are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart” (2Cor 3:3).

Verse 34: “No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.” The New Covenant will release the personal ministry of the Holy Spirit; people will be taught, guided and led by the Holy Spirit (God).

1. “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you” (John 14:26). “However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come” (John 16:13).
2. “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God” (Rom 8:14).

The New Covenant provides for full justification; the sins of people will be forgiven and completely removed, and they will be declared innocent by God.

1. “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 5:1).

2. "And by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the Law of Moses" (Acts 13:39).
3. "And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses" (Col 2:13).

New Covenant of Grace

A dominant theme in each of the Old Testament covenants is man's failure to fulfill the covenant conditions. God, in His foreknowledge, gave each one of these covenants knowing the outcome; that man would break His covenant and fail. You might ask, "Why would God do that?" The answer is clear:

1. Man needed to experience the failure that his own "works" would bring so that man would have no excuse for his sin. Innocence (Edenic), conscience (Adamic), human government (Noahic), promise (Abrahamic) and the Law (Mosaic) were all insufficient to overcome the sin nature of mankind (Gal 2:21; 3:21).
2. In the case of the Law, man would learn that laws and rules actually brought to the surface the rebellion in his heart. Man continually wants his own way and it was impossible for man to keep the Law (Rom 7:13-24).
3. Ultimately, these failures would bring man to the realization that *mankind needed a Savior* (Gal 4:4-7).

These covenant "failures," step by step, pointed to the only possible way mankind could be saved and restored to relationship with a holy God; the way of grace that was mediated by a Savior, Jesus Christ. The promise of a "new and living way" (Heb 10:20) was given to men by God

when He spoke through the prophet Jeremiah of the coming New Covenant (Jer 31:31-34).

The New Covenant has been paid for and established by the blood that Jesus shed on the Cross of Calvary. His shed blood provides forgiveness of all sins for every person who believes in Christ for salvation. Jesus' payment for sin is *more than enough* to cancel out the sins of all who believe in Him. There is no person who is so evil, or whose sins are so numerous, as to exclude him from the forgiveness Christ gives. *Everyone* is forgiven when they repent of their sin and believe on Jesus Christ for salvation! Praise the Lord! This is a message of rejoicing for us all! That is why the salvation message is called the Gospel or *Good News*.

Our Position as Sons

The ministry of Paul was characterized by the personal trait of confidence and assurance. This assurance was more than a boldness or recklessness; this assurance was born out of Paul's understanding of who he was in Jesus Christ. Paul understood that being a believer in Jesus meant more than conquering sin and death. Paul understood that being a believer meant that *he was called to live in a new position* for the rest of his life. This new position in life *was to live as a son!* A son whose father is God.

1. Jesus is the Son of God and we are His brothers which makes us sons too. "For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. 11 For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren" (Heb 2:10-11).
2. We are adopted as sons. The understanding of adoption in Jesus' day was total and absolute. It was as if you were born, or born again, into a new

family, and all relationships with the “old family” were dissolved. “Having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will,” (Eph 1:5). “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name” (John 1:12).

3. As a result of our son-ship position, we have access to God the Father. “For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father” (Eph 2:18).
4. As sons we are called to serve our Father. No greater example can we find than that of Jesus Himself. “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). In biblical times the terms father and son spoke of a relationship of obedience and not necessarily of blood relation. We know that Jesus is God and He came to earth, in the form of a man, to show us the way back to the Father. So when Jesus is referred to as the Son of God, it is not the physical birth by Mary that makes Him a son in this case. It was His unflinching dedication and commitment to obeying the Father that made Him the Son of God.

We often define ourselves by what we do for a living. If asked, “who are you”? some would answer, “I am a farmer, a plumber, a mother, a business man, teacher or minister”. Paul did not define himself by what he did for a living or his ministry, but he defined himself by what God said of him. *God said he was a son* and therefore Paul chose to live as a son! Paul saw himself as a son who chose to serve his Father. Isn't this what Jesus demonstrated for us, throughout His life, in His obedience to Father God? “And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself

and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross" (Phil 2:8).

Let's take a closer look, at God's idea, that we are sons in Galatians 3:26-29. "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise".

Verse 28, God makes no distinction of social or economic position, gender, status or reputation. All that is required is to be in Christ! God does not distinguish between male or female. That means that son-ship is not about gender, but *position* in Christ. It may seem odd to us, but it is perfectly acceptable to God that a *female can be a son in position!*

Verse 29, The position of son-ship is a legal issue in that only sons are declared to be heirs. That means we have access to the promises of God because as sons, only sons inherit.

Paul continues to teach about son-ship in Galatians 4:4-7 "But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, to redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, 'Abba, Father!' Therefore, you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ".

Assurance in your relationship with God happens when you understand your identity is to live by faith as a son! You are not defined by what you do for a living or what you do for God, but by what God says of you, and He says you are a son (in position)!

Here is an illustration of taking God at His word. In the early 1800's there was a story about Nicolas Chauvin, a private in Napoleon Bonaparte's army. Private Chauvin was

standing at attention while the King, Napoleon, reviewed the troops riding on his white horse. For some reason the horse became startled, Napoleon dropped the reins and the horse ran out of control with Napoleon still on the horse. Immediately, Private Chauvin ran after the King grabbed the reins, calmed the horse and brought Napoleon to safety.

Napoleon said, "What is your name soldier"? To which Chauvin said, "My name is *Private* Chauvin, sir". The King then said, "Thank you *Captain* Chauvin". Immediately Chauvin went to his quarters, took off his enlisted uniform and replaced it with an officer's uniform, that of a Captain! His fellow soldiers began to ridicule him and challenged his right to wear the uniform of an officer. To which Captain Chauvin said, "I have the right to wear this uniform because My King has called me Captain"!

Your *King* calls you a *son*! Male or Female, in your position as a son, you inherit the promises of God because your Father is God (Matt 5:16, Matt 5:48, Matt 6:1, Matt 6:8, Mark 11:25, Luke 6:36). As a result of this relationship you have access to the Throne Room of God (John 14:6, Eph 2:18, Eph 3:12).

The Body of Christ

The Body of Christ. In each of the seven Covenants of the Old Testament, there were always two covenant-heads. One, of course, was God; the other was a man beginning with Adam, then Noah, Abraham, Moses, Joshua and David. The result of the Old Testament covenants was the realization that man was unable to fulfill his side of the covenant.

The New Covenant also has two covenant-heads, *God the Father* and *Jesus Christ*. Man is not a covenant-head in this case. Man is part of the covenant-body through the Head, Jesus Christ. We know that God the Father, Jesus the Son and the Holy Spirit are not three Gods, but One. The mystery, then, is that God essentially made a covenant

with Himself! As a result, *the New Covenant can never fail or be broken* because God cannot fail!

As a person we may fail, but our God will never fail. And even if we do fail, that failure can never nullify the New Covenant between the Father and Jesus (2 Tim 2:11-13; Heb 6:13-20). God the Father cannot turn His back on a person who identifies with Jesus as Lord and Savior, because Jesus, as a covenant-head, represents every believer to the Father. As a believer in Jesus you become part of the "covenant-body of Christ", inextricably connected to the Head who is Christ (1 Cor 12:27, Eph 1:22-23).

21 A Covenant of Grace

Grace is an attribute of God that is foreign to our natural experience, because God's grace is perfectly selfless and motivated by love. The trials and tribulations of life can make us wary of expressions of perfect love. We may not know how to react or respond to this expression of grace.

1. Some people feel unworthy of God's grace and try to run away and hide from God.
2. Others try to understand God's grace by attempting to intellectually comprehend Him; the result is a very small concept of God.
3. Still others try to earn the right to "deserve" God's grace by being "good", but who can ever be good enough?
4. Finally, there are those who set up rules and regulations, and make legalistic sacrifices, so that they might try to "earn" God's grace. A true gift cannot be earned.

God's grace is an *unconditional promise*. It is His free-will gift motivated by pure love. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

The availability of this kind of grace depends entirely on the one who offers it. God offers His grace to all of mankind (the world), the just and the unjust alike. Grace is not offered on the basis of merit or deeds, but only upon God's divine decision and invitation to love and bless His creation.

The New Covenant is often referred to as the *Covenant of Grace*, or the "better" Covenant (Heb 8:6; Heb 7:22). This is because the New Covenant is *unconditional* in its nature.

It is called the Covenant of Grace because the terms of the covenant are *a free gift* of God. The provisions of this New Covenant are undeserved and unearned. What mankind deserves and has earned is death (Rom 3:23; 6:23), but through faith in Jesus Christ we now have life (2 Cor 3:6).

We cannot gain salvation or eternal life by our works (or the Law), or by a combination of works and grace. It is by *grace alone* that we receive eternal life and salvation (Acts 13:39; Rom 3:20; Gal 2:16; 3:21). Jesus did it all for us! The only thing we can do is to put our faith (belief and trust) in Jesus Christ: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast" (Eph 2:8, 9). There is nothing and no one who can add to or replace what Jesus has already done and provided (Rom 4:1-5).

As has been stated, the New Covenant was ushered in by the finished work of Jesus Christ on the Cross of Calvary: "So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, 'It is finished!' And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit" (John 19:30). Jesus fully completed what He was sent to earth to do (John 3:16). As a result of His work, He accomplished the following for each of us:

1. Jesus replaced the Old Covenant (Law) with a New Covenant (Grace); "In that He says, 'A new covenant,' He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away" (Heb 8:13).
2. He provided a way to the *Father* who is holy and righteous. "Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me'" (John 14:6).
3. Jesus cleansed us from our sins. Sin is what has kept us apart from God the Father. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

4. He has prepared an eternal place in Heaven for us. "In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you" (John 14:2).
5. Jesus exchanged our old sinful nature for a new nature able to resist sin. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new" (2 Cor 5:17).
6. He sent the Holy Spirit to empower us to live for Christ. "Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you" (John 16:7).
7. Jesus destroyed the works of the devil; "... For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8).

What Jesus accomplished on the Cross of Calvary, in obedience to the Father, was something totally new. He guaranteed salvation to all who would put their trust in Him (Rom 10:13). He also gave the Holy Spirit to every believer as a *sign, or seal*, of being born again (2 Cor 1:21, 22).

The Holy Spirit makes it possible for believers to live the life they are called to by God. The Holy Spirit gives power and help for a believer to be both *willing and obedient* (Phil 2:13). It is the person of the Holy Spirit that makes the difference in the life of a New Covenant believer (Acts 1:8).

The Holy Spirit is also given as a "guarantee" of God's full redemption of our lives; spirit, soul and body (2 Cor 5:1-5; Eph 1:13,14). Those who believe in Christ for salvation can be assured of that salvation and live with great faith. We can know that we are empowered to live the life here on earth and that we have a place reserved for us in Heaven.

A Better Covenant

The book of Hebrews was written to Jewish believers in Jerusalem. Hebrews was written at about AD 65; Jerusalem was destroyed in AD 70. Jerusalem and the Levitical system were being done away with. The purpose of the book of Hebrews was to demonstrate that everything the Jews trusted in had passed away and that something better was in place; a better Covenant, better sacrifice, better temple, and better promises.

The key word in the Book of Hebrews is faith, but the second key word is the word, *better*. The New Testament (Grace) is better than the Old Testament (Law). The word better is more properly understood as *stronger*, and is used 12 times in Hebrews: Heb 1:4, Heb 6:9, Heb 7:7, Heb 7:19, Heb 7:22, Heb 8:6, Heb 9:23, Heb 10:34, Heb 11:16, Heb 11:35, Heb 11:40, and Heb 12:24.

The Old Covenant of Law was important and significant; but it was a covenant that could result only in death and not life (Rom 8:2). Remember, the Old Covenant proved this, the Law was impossible for man to keep. While the commands of God are righteous and true (Matt 5:19; Gal 3:19-21), the Law did not give man the power to obey! Rather, it only revealed how desperately we needed a Savior (Gal 3:22-25). The Law, with its rituals, rules, and sacrifices for sin, was not sufficient to deal with the source of man's problem – sin (Heb 10:1-10).

The Better Covenant is a covenant of life! "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree'), that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith" (Gal 3:13, 14).

Better Promises

The promises in the Old Covenant were primarily about the present life and material blessings. They were promises that included: long life; increase in numbers; seed time and

harvest; national privileges; and extraordinary peace, abundance, and prosperity.

In the New Covenant, however, the promise of *spiritual* blessings becomes the central benefit of our faith in Christ. Those spiritual blessings are available because of the free gift of the Holy Spirit living in us (1 Cor 6:19), who will teach us and lead us (John 16:13) in an overcoming life on earth (Rom 8:37).

In the New Covenant, our Lord *does* promise to provide for our needs (Matt 6:25-34), but our hearts are also directed toward Heaven. We are reminded of the temporary nature of this life, and that this is not our eternal home. Our souls are at peace with the assurance of eternal life, the favor (grace) of God and the anticipation of Heaven.

Old Versus New

People, in their natural way of thinking, often cling to old ways of doing things because those ways are familiar and comfortable. The same can be true of learned traditions or religious beliefs that are not rooted in the New Covenant. They are familiar, so it can be difficult to change them to fit the requirements of the New Covenant. If we are not careful we can develop strong convictions based on false or erroneous teachings!

The New Covenant requires a radical change in thinking about life in God and salvation; which is very different from the Law of the Old Covenant and the religious traditions of that day. Jesus often addressed this issue with the Pharisees. In one encounter, Jesus confronted the religious leaders, the Pharisees, regarding their love of rituals and traditions as opposed to the truth (Luke 5:33-39). Sadly, many of the practices and beliefs of the Pharisees were not based on the Law as given by God, but were based on traditions developed over many years and considered equal to God's laws (Mk 7:1-8).

Today, as in Jesus' day, preferring the old rituals can keep people from embracing the New Covenant promises and the free salvation Jesus gives to us. Jesus understood that the old can often seem good enough because it is familiar: "And no one, having drunk old wine, immediately desires new; for he says, 'The old is better'" (Luke 5:39). The familiar can make one reluctant to let go of old ideas, traditions or beliefs.

Beliefs that are based on traditions of men and not on the Word of God become like chains of bondage. Trying to serve the terms of the Old Covenant today can also be like chains of bondage, especially in light of the freedom Jesus purchased for us: "Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, 'If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free'" (John 8:31, 32). Jesus came "full of grace and truth" (John 1:14) to set His people free!

There are some who are suspicious of the message of grace. They see grace as weakness, or as "permission" to sin. Nothing could be further from the truth! "Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?" (Rom 6:1, 2). Grace is not a license, or liberty, or excuse to sin. As a matter of fact, Jesus makes clear that *grace demands even more of us than did the Law* (Matthew 5:20-48). For instance, the Law says to not murder; grace says to not even get angry at someone. The Law says to not commit adultery; grace says to not even *look* at another with lust in your heart.

Grace requires more because Jesus seeks to *transform our hearts*, to change us from the inside out (Matt 15:1-20; 23:25-28). We are not to be "actors" who know how to go through outward religious motions or just follow rules. We are to be *Christians*, those who follow Christ and His ways, who *from our hearts* do what He would do and say what He would say!

No Condemnation

Sin always has consequences; sin always places obstacles in our relationship with God. A significant change between Law and Grace is that the *condemnation for sin has been removed* by the work of Jesus on the Cross. When we, as believers, stumble and sin, we are not cast away or rejected by God. We are still His sons and daughters! "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death" (Rom 8:1, 2).

Our walk to become holy or righteous is a process that will continue throughout our lifetime. When children are learning to walk, they stumble and fall. As parents, we do not reject or abandon our children because they fall down! In the same way, God will not abandon you if you fall as you are learning to walk with Him. God's expectation is that you repent, learn from the experience, and endeavor to do better.

While grace is a wonderful gift from God, *it is never to become an excuse* to live a fleshly (carnal) life or ignore the teachings of Scripture. Our goal should always be to do our best to live in a manner that is obedient and pleasing to God. We might fall into a pit along the way, but we should not return to or stay in that sinful pit!

God expects us to *mature* as Christians. As we learn and grow in the Word of God, and mature in following Christ, we should no longer be stumbling or falling into temptations or sin. "When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things" (1 Cor 13:11). Immature children may stumble. However, the things we stumble over in our immaturity should not still cause us to stumble when we are more mature.

Now, as a Christian, if we sin, the Holy Spirit will convict us of our sin. We will feel “a godly sorrow” and a need to *repent*. If instead we feel like running away from God and trying to hide our sin, that is “worldly sorrow” (2 Cor 7:8-10) and leads only to shame, guilt and condemnation. “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). Our confession and genuine repentance is the process to receive God’s forgiveness when we stumble. When we repent (turn around), and ask God to forgive us, three things happen:

1. We face our sin and take responsibility for it, no excuses.
2. The feelings of guilt, shame or fear are removed as we confess our sin to God.
3. Our open relationship with God can continue, and the sin no longer creates a sense of estrangement from Him.

Repentance has the added benefit of helping us admit our weaknesses to ourselves and to God. This will teach us to ask for God’s help and to rely on the Holy Spirit for the strength to avoid that sin in the future.

The Sin of Presumption

The grace of God does not permit us to presume on God’s forgiveness. If we are practicing a life of sin as a believer, we are in terrible danger! There are real consequences to violating God’s moral laws. (See the warnings in Hebrews 6:4-8; 10:26-31.) Just look at the history of Israel in the Old Testament and all they endured when they got out from under God’s blessings because of sin.

The Bible reveals that if we are truly born of God (born again) we will not actively pursue a sinful life (1 John 3:4-9). That does not mean a born-again person will never again stumble and sin (1 John 1:10). As a Christ-follower,

an act of sin should be the *exception*. Sin should never be passively allowed or intentionally practiced (1 John 3:1-3).

Grace Is God's Idea

If you have any ideas about what grace is (or is not), and those ideas are contrary to what is in God's Word, you must abandon those ideas! Embrace God's Word, embrace His grace: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth... For the Law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (John 1:14, 17).

22 Syncretism

The word “syncretism” is a word that is probably not used in everyday language, but it means to merge two different or opposing thoughts, philosophies or religions into one. It is a technical word for compromise or, in today’s language, “political correctness”. Syncretism was a major problem for the Jews when the early Christian church began, and it also became a problem for the Christian church when they separated from Judaism.

Jesus’ ministry was primarily to the Jews; Jesus was a Jew (Tribe of Judah) and all of the early followers of Jesus were Jews or proselytes (those who converted to Judaism). Jesus and His disciples ministered in the synagogues and took part in the observance of Jewish feasts and events.

As a result of the strongly held traditions and their legalism, many of the Jewish leaders were blinded to the fact that Jesus was the long awaited “Messiah” foretold to them by the Scriptures, “You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life” (John 5:39-40). Instead of embracing Jesus, the Jewish leaders saw the teachings of Jesus as a threat to Judaism, an attempt to “water down” the Law of Moses. This was syncretism from the *Jewish perspective*, the “new” trying to replace or subvert the “old”.

The Jewish leaders tried to solve this problem of syncretism by eliminating the leader of this new movement, Jesus! The Jewish leaders would not compromise and over time forced the early Christian community out of the synagogues. We must give some credit to the Jews for not

compromising what they believed, but their rigidity was probably more about maintaining power and position than seeking the truth. Therefore, they were unable to see that God was doing a new thing based on their Scriptures.

The time period when the Apostles were leading the church was known as the "Apostolic Period". This period of time followed the resurrection of Jesus and the "outpouring of the Holy Spirit" known as Pentecost (Acts 1-2). Jesus ascended to the Father in Heaven and the promised Holy Spirit descended to earth to reside in the believers. This event in the upper room (Acts 1:13) also marked the birth of the Christian church in Jerusalem. By the way, the term *Christian* was not first used in Jerusalem, but was used to describe the followers of Jesus in the region of Antioch, located in modern Turkey (Acts 11:26).

The early Christian church followed the patterns of the synagogue services; prayer, intercession, fasting, hymns, Scripture readings, and fellowship. The early Christian communities were considered heretical by the leaders of Judaism. As a result, they were forced out of the synagogues and into homes, and our first home groups were started. As more and more Gentiles (non-Jews) responded to the Gospel message, the Christian church began to be viewed as a gentile religion. Two great Apostles, Peter and Paul, were charged with the responsibility of reaching these two populations of Jews and Gentiles; Peter was called to the Jews; Paul was called to the Gentiles.

Since so many members of the early Christian church were Christian Jews, it wasn't long before some of the Jewish Christians wanted to apply certain aspects of the Mosaic Law, in particular circumcision to the Gentile Christians. These Jewish factions were known as "Judaizers". The Judaizers believed that Jesus was the Messiah, but also believed that they were still under the Covenant of Law and therefore had to be circumcised as a

sign of the covenant. From the Christian perspective, the Judaizers were attempting to syncretize the new church, trying to add the “old” to the “new”.

This problem of the Judaizers came to a head in Acts 15:1-30. “And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, ‘Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved’” (Acts 15:1). In response to this kind of teaching a Council was convened by the Apostles in Jerusalem and the issue was settled... “Peter rose up and said to them: Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us, and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they” (Acts 7-11).

The conclusion of the apostles was that salvation is a gift of grace received by faith in Jesus Christ and Him alone. No other *work of the Law* could be added to *His finished work* of the Cross.

New Wine in Old Wineskins

Since so much of the Old Testament is about the Mosaic Law, a common error among Christians then, and even now, is to try and blend the Old Covenant of Law (Mosaic Covenant) with the New Covenant of Grace found in the New Testament. This is a form of syncretism. An important point to remember is that the Old Covenant of Law was just a shadow or a type that pointed to the New Covenant. The Old Covenant points us to the ultimate Truth, the One Who fulfilled the Law and made possible the New Covenant, Jesus Christ.

The Old Covenant of Law could not change the heart motivations. The Law used a system of laws, ordinances, rules, regulations, and procedures so that one could “*legally*” observe the Law. Legalism cannot be substituted for observing the “*spirit*” of the Law. The spirit of the Law was always about *being willing and obedient* to God, and to be blessed and a blessing as a result. “He has shown you, O man, what is good; And what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8).

The Law focused on works of obedience which is contrary to a *gift* of grace; grace cannot be earned. Still many people believe that *their works* or efforts are needed to “earn” salvation from God. You cannot have both salvation by grace *and* salvation by works. One will cancel out or nullify the other. “And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work” (Rom 11:6). It is God, “who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began” (2 Tim 1:9).

In three of the Gospels, Jesus cautions us to not put “new wine into old wineskins” (Matt 9:16-17; Mark 2:21-22; Luke 5:36-39). If we do, the results will be disastrous: “And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; or else the new wine will burst the wineskins and be spilled, and the wineskins will be ruined” (Luke 5:37). New wine will expand as it ferments and matures. If you put new wine into an old, dry, stiff wineskin, it will rupture the old wineskin and the new wine will be lost.

Many people still try to put the New Covenant of Grace (new wine) into the Old Covenant of the Law, also known as legalism (old wineskin). The “wineskin” of the Old Covenant is not big enough or strong enough to contain the life, power and freedom provided by the New Covenant!

23 Covenant Elements

As we read the New Testament, we are reminded of the important covenant elements seen in the previous seven covenants. Let us now look at some of those Old Testament terms in light of the New Covenant.

Sacrifice and Shedding of Blood

Jesus is "*the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world*" (John 1:29). He is the Sacrifice that purifies and atones for our sins. We are justified, sanctified, made righteous and holy because of His *finished* work at the Cross of Calvary.

We are set free from the Law and the accompanying sacrificial system. A system that required endless sacrifices for sin even though those sacrifices could not purify our hearts, transform us or set us free from sin (Heb 10:1-4).

The sacrifice of Jesus was *once and for all* and need never again be repeated. His sacrifice is truly *sufficient to set us free* from sin and condemnation – set free to serve the only true God! "By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Heb 10:10; see also Romans 6:10; Hebrews 7:27; 9:11-15).

Throughout the Old Testament we see that the covenants always had some form of worship of God. From Adam and Eve to the time of the Law, part of the worship always involved an offering or sacrifice. It wasn't until the Mosaic Covenant that a "system" of sacrifices of animals was defined and carried out by the Levitical priesthood. The point is that with the sacrifice always came the shedding of blood. Christianity has no requirements for the shedding of blood because Jesus shed His blood, once and for all (Heb 7:26-

27). No other sacrifice is required or needed for the removal of sin.

Let there be no doubt of God's love for us: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). It is God alone who sent His own Son to die in our place, even though mankind is sinful and rebellious (Rom 5:6-10). The phrase "He gave His only begotten Son" can seem to understate the fact that Jesus was bruised, battered and rejected for us (Isa 53:4-6). Jesus shed His own blood to initiate the New Covenant. His sacrifice provided for us full forgiveness of sin, an overcoming life here on earth and a blessed hope of a future eternal life with Him. "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace" (Eph 1:7, Rev 1:5).

The Name

We have been given a name above every other name. It is a name that we are able to declare with boldness and faith; the *name of Jesus*! The name of Jesus is filled with His power and authority. Christians around the world know the power of His Name! Realize that when we use the name of Jesus it is not a *magic incantation*, but it is the realization that we, as believers, have authority to speak in His Name. Just as an ambassador of a nation has the authority to speak for the leader of his or her nation, we have that same authority to speak for our King (2 Cor 5:20).

1. "...that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil 2:10, 11).
2. "And this she did for many days. But Paul, greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, 'I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of

her.' And he came out that very hour"" (Acts 16:18).

3. Even the demons tremble at His Name: "You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe – and tremble!" (Jas 2:19).

The Great Exchange

In all covenants with God, an exchange takes place. As covenants are made and kept, God, as the stronger party, gives blessing, provision, protection, wisdom and more to the weaker party, which is man. In our study of covenants, there is no better example of this *exchange* than the New Covenant. The exchange is so clear, and what we receive is so glorious and abundant, that it is known by some Bible teachers as "*The Great Exchange*." Let us look at some examples of the exchange provided by the New Covenant:

1. Jesus took our lack of power and gave us His authority; "Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you" (Luke 10:19). (Note: Serpents and scorpions are symbolic of demonic forces.)
2. Jesus took our sickness that we might have health; "Who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness – by whose stripes you were healed" (1 Pet 2:24; see also Isa 53:5).
3. Jesus took our sin and gave us forgiveness; "For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor 5:21).
4. Jesus took our poverty that we might have eternal riches; "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich" (2 Cor 8:9).

5. Jesus took our lost and homeless condition and gave us an eternal home; "In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you" (John 14:2).
6. Jesus took our weakness and gave us strength; "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8; Eph 3:14-16).
7. Jesus took our turmoil and confusion and gave us His peace; "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14:27).
8. Jesus experienced hell that we might experience heaven; "Now this, 'He ascended' – what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things" (Eph 4:9, 10; see also Ps 16:10).
9. Jesus took our death that we might have life; "For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life" (Rom 5:10; see also Heb 2:9).

Of all the exchanges and agreements that have taken place since the beginning of time, the most important exchanges by far are those we have received from Jesus. He truly provided for us The Great Exchange!

As believers we gave Jesus our sins, failures, guilt, shame, and past. In return, Jesus: extends His friendship to us (John 15:14); makes us joint-heirs with Him (Rom 8:17); wipes away our sins and our past (2 Cor 5:17); gives us a hope and a future for this life and eternity (John 14:1-3; Col 1:27; 1 Pet 1:3). Let us thank God for Jesus

and the New Covenant which is far better than any prior covenant!

The Covenant Meal as a Memorial

Jesus said, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood" (Matt 26:28, 1 Cor 11:25). What a powerful statement this is from Jesus! Jesus first spoke these words as He celebrated the Passover meal with His disciples: "And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, 'Take, eat; this is My body.' Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins'" (Matt 26:26-28). What makes this statement of Jesus even more remarkable is that He spoke these words *prophetically* – He had not yet gone to the Cross! His body had not yet been broken, nor His blood shed for us.

It is one thing to lose your life because of circumstances that cannot be avoided. It is quite another to know you are going to die a painful and shameful death alone, but still choose to lay down your life. "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends" (John 15:13). How wonderful it is to be considered a friend to Jesus! (See also John 15:14-18.)

As His disciples, we are instructed to recreate the covenant meal as a remembrance and celebration of Jesus' love for us. Paul the apostle relates the Last Supper events that took place in the upper room (1 Cor 11:23-26) by way of a personal revelation from Jesus (Gal 1:11, 12). The communion remembrance is also our reminder that *we are in a covenant relationship with Jesus*: "And when He had given thanks, He broke the bread and said, 'Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.' In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup is the *new Covenant* in My blood.

This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.' For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes" (1 Cor 11:24-26).

Jesus carries the eternal scars (John 20:27) in His hands, and on His feet and His side as a memorial. These scars remind us of the fact that Jesus paid the price for us to enter the New Covenant. He also carries on His back the stripes or scars for our spiritual, physical and emotional healing (1 Pet 2:24).

As believers in Jesus Christ, we are in a covenant relationship with Him. "And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, 'Abba, Father'" (Gal 4:6). Abba is a Hebrew term that translates as "Papa". How privileged we are that we can call the Creator of this universe, our Papa.

24 New Covenant Perspectives

Let us now look at some important terms as they apply to the New Covenant. This will help us to better understand what God has accomplished through Jesus Christ and the New Covenant.

Divine Enablement

God is sovereign and, in His wisdom, knows that man cannot save himself. The failure of mankind to keep all of God's past covenants both reveals and proves this point. So, in the "new and better Covenant," God makes His grace available to humanity in the Person of Jesus Christ. As we believe on Christ for salvation, it is by His grace we are saved (Eph 2:8, 9).

The grace of God in Christ becomes our *divine enablement* by which we can live victorious, overcoming lives (Rom 5:1, 2). This divine grace also gives us the means of escape from the righteous judgment of God upon all sin (Rom 5:8-10).

The only thing one must do to receive this grace is to believe that it is available in Christ, and act upon it. This believing and acting upon the grace that is offered is called *faith*. The focus of our faith is not upon the gift, but on the *One* Who gives us the free gift of grace – Jesus!

Faith

Hebrews 11:1 and 6, tells us that "faith is the substance of things hoped for, the assurance of things unseen" and that it is "impossible to please God without faith". The Old

Testament was always about what was hoped for. Jesus is that hope, not an emotional hope, but a continuous series of decisions to trust God and His Word. Faith, in a sense, is the spiritual currency that is used in the Kingdom of God. Faith is action! The action of obedience! Faith in action is the reason for the "Hall of Fame" of heroes in Hebrews 11. It was written to show that all the men and women we admire in the Bible operated by faith. Our faith must not be in faith itself, but faith in Jesus, who is "the author and finisher of our faith" (Heb 12:2).

The Old Testament gives an example of God's grace and faith working together (Num 21:4-9). While Moses was leading the people in the wilderness, they began to complain about their circumstances – as they had often done before. God had provided for all their needs but the people still complained and grumbled. As a consequence of their rebellion, God sent fiery serpents (snakes) to bite them as punishment. Some people began to die from the bites of the serpents. Others, when witnessing God's wrath, began to *repent* and asked Moses to *intercede* before God on their behalf. As Moses interceded God responded: "Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live.' So Moses made a bronze serpent, and put it on a pole; and so it was, if a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived" (Num 21:8-9).

Though the people were unworthy, God made a provision for escape from His wrath. God provided grace or favor in this situation and instructed Moses to make a bronze serpent. This act of grace from God *required the people to respond* and do what was necessary to receive that grace.

Suppose you were bitten by one of these serpents and dying. What would you do? You might think, "A bronze serpent on a stick, how can that save me? What a foolish idea!" But, *if you believed what God said* about the bronze

serpent on a pole, you would drag yourself to that location and place your gaze on it. That is what faith is! *Faith is believing in what God says and acting in response to that belief.*

Those who believed in what God provided, and who acted upon that belief, were saved from death. "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:14-15). Today, those *who believe upon Jesus* for salvation, and who act upon that belief *in faith* by receiving and following Him, are saved!

It is worth repeating that Scriptures tell us that it is impossible to please God without faith (Heb 11:6). Obviously, faith is important to God, but, what is faith? Faith is believing – but not just believing in anything. Biblical *faith is belief in what God says or reveals*. The Bible defines faith like this: "*Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen*" (Heb 11:1). By God's definition, His kind of faith goes beyond the natural realm into the "invisible realm", or the "spiritual realm". God is spirit (John 4:24); His Word, the Bible, is spiritual (2 Tim 3:16); and His Holy *Spirit* lives in us (John 14:16,17), therefore we are spiritual.

There is a beautiful passage in 1 Corinthians 2 about *spiritual communication* between God and man. This entire chapter reveals that God has given us spiritual eyes to see, spiritual ears to hear, and a heart to comprehend spiritual things. He has given us the "*mind of Christ*" (v16). God has always sought a spiritual relationship and fellowship with mankind. We were created by Him and for Him (Rev 4:11), but to have a relationship requires communication, two-way communication or dialogue.

Too often when we pray (talk to God), we get up when we have finished making our needs known, and go our way. We do not take the time to wait on the Lord and listen to

what He would say to us. We study God's Word in the Bible, but we may not take the time to ask, "Lord what are you saying to me today through Your Word?" We may be looking for an obvious "burning bush" experience, and not be willing to wait for the "still small voice" of the Master (1 Kings 19:12).

Faith is not just a hope or a wish using our natural, earthly thoughts. Genuine faith in God *is a spiritual hope based upon knowing the will of God*. We can know God's will! God has communicated His will to us through the Scriptures and leads us by His Holy Spirit. Someone once said, "Faith is impossible unless the will of God is known". Herein we see an important key: *Grace is activated by our faith when we do the will of God*. In other words, when we step out in faith to do God's will, our action will be accompanied by God's grace (divine enablement) to perform all that He has called us to do.

Works

The word "works" in the Pauline writings has a unique and specific meaning. In Paul's contexts, "works" refers to deeds of the Law performed in order to be accepted by God. Works of this kind are in direct contrast to faith in Christ. Faith in Christ is the only way the sinner is saved (justified). There are *no human works possible that can accomplish salvation*.

1. "Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith. Therefore, we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law" (Rom 3:27, 28).
2. "...knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of

the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified" (Gal 2:16).

Works are man's attempt to make oneself acceptable to God, but God has made it clear that faith in Him is the only way to His heart (Heb 11:6).

Faith and Works

The book of James speaks of justification by "works" and "faith" (James 2:14-26). However, in this case, James is referring to works that *demonstrate* or are an *outcome* of a faith that is real and vital. In other words, because we believe in God, we do what He instructs us to do. Our works then demonstrate our faith in God. Works cannot make us acceptable or approved of by God. Only faith in Christ can do that. If we have true faith in Christ, it will be revealed and validated by our actions, words, attitudes, thoughts, conduct, and behavior. Obedience to the Lordship of Christ and the Father's will in our lives is *essential*, and is the direct fruit of our genuine faith in and love for the Lord (John 14:15, 21; 15:10; Heb 5:8, 9). The biblical expression "dead works" refers to those works that are not motivated by faith and therefore do not originate with God.

Reconciliation

Reconciliation (or atonement) is the process by which God and mankind are restored to relationship. There is a play on the word atonement which is "at-one-ment", which is what it means. The Bible teaches that God and man are alienated from one another because of man's sinfulness, which is not compatible with God's holiness. This alienation started in the Garden of Eden and continues to this day.

Although God loves the sinner, His righteousness and holiness cannot be compromised. Thus, God must and will judge all sin (Rom 1:18; 1 Pet 4:5), but our hope is in His compassion and mercy. His Word reveals to us the reason for our hope: "But God demonstrates His own love toward

us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom 5:8). Through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, man's sin is reconciled or atoned for and God's judgment and wrath upon sin are appeased. Thus, a broken relationship of hostility, alienation and judgment can be exchanged into one of peace, harmony and fellowship for those who believe on Christ for salvation.

God *took the initiative* in reconciling with mankind. His plan to restore mankind to a relationship with Him was put in motion when man first rebelled and rejected Him (Gen 3:1-7). Then, while we were still sinners and enemies of God, Christ died for us (Rom 5:8, 10). Therefore, reconciliation is God's own completed act. God moved toward us first, and what He has done is the groundwork which allows the human actions of confession and repentance to follow. "And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled" (Col 1:21). God Himself "has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ" (2 Cor 5:18).

Justification

Christianity is unique among all religions because of its teaching of *justification by faith* through grace: "Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Rom 3:24). In essence, an individual is declared innocent when identified with Christ (Rom 6:1-14; Gal 2:20). In modern Criminal Law a "pardon" is an official act of forgiving a crime. "A pardon may be granted under the executive powers of a governor or the President. By granting a convicted person a pardon, the conviction is eradicated from the records, the person is freed from further punishments and penalties, and may not be retried for the same offense" (US Legal Forms). God's justification is even better than a pardon because justification is as if you had never sinned. As a matter of fact, there is an

expression that is a play on the word justified; “just-as-if-I’d” never sinned!

Justification is God's declaration that the demands of His Law have been fulfilled in the righteousness of His Son. Jesus is righteous; so, if we are in Christ we, too, are found righteous! Paul reveals that, “...God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation” (2 Cor 5:19).

God’s justification covers *all* sin: “For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified” (Heb 10:14). Justification is based on the work of Christ, accomplished through His blood (Rom 5:9) and brought to His people through His resurrection (Rom 4:25). When God justifies, He charges the sins of mankind to Christ and credits the righteousness of Christ to the believer (2 Cor 5:21). Thus, there is *an exchange*... “through one Man's righteous act, the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life” (Rom 5:18). Christ takes our sin and unrighteousness, and gives us His righteousness. What a glorious and free gift our great God has bestowed upon us! The Lord Jesus has paid the price for our justification. It is through *our faith* in Him that we receive Him, and experience and enjoy His righteousness (Rom 3:25-30).

As a result of God’s justification, we are saved *from* condemnation and the experience of His wrath (Rom 5:9). We are *saved to*:

1. Experience His glory (Rom 8:30).
2. Experience His peace (Rom 5:1).
3. Experience His purpose (Rom 8:28, 2 Tim 1:9).
4. Experience continued access to God's grace (Rom 5:2).
5. Experience the redemption of the body (Rom 8:23).
6. Experience an eternal inheritance (Rom 8:17; 1 Pet 1:4).

Sanctification

The Old Covenant could not change or transform man's essential sinfulness. However, in the glorious New Covenant, we are *being changed* from "glory to glory" (2 Cor 3:18). This process is called *sanctification*.

Sanctification is the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives to produce holiness and righteousness. It is more than a moral rehabilitation of character brought about by the power of the truth. Sanctification *is the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit* which brings our entire nature more and more into conformity to the image of Jesus (Rom 8:29).

The process of sanctification will result in separating us from sin, and helping us become more dedicated to God's holiness and righteousness.

1. "And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace" (Rom 6:13, 14).
2. "But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth" (2 Thes 2:13).

Perfect holiness is God's command and purpose (1 Thes 4:7; 1 Pet 1:15, 16). As Paul prayed: "Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely" (1 Thes 5:23). Sanctification is a process that is *continual throughout our lifetime* as believers (Phil 1:6; Heb 10:14). Only after death are the saints (believers) referred to as "perfect" or completely mature (Heb 12:23).

Holiness

In the Bible, Christians are regularly called “holy” or “saints.” Most often, these words are used in a moral and spiritual sense – to describe the life and conduct that is taught by the Scriptures. However, another important concept for the word “holy” is *a separation* from the world and *a consecration* unto God. Just as Israel (under the Old Covenant) was a chosen people, so the Church (Gk. Ecclesia, or called out ones) becomes a holy nation (1 Pet 2:9). The Christian individual, as one of the elect (chosen) people, is to become a holy man or woman (Eph 1:4, Col 3:12, 1 Thess 5:23-24).

To be holy and separated from the world does not mean that we are to run away or hide from the world. It is true that we are not to participate in the sinful attitudes or behavior *of* the world. However, the Lord has a purpose for each one of us as we live out our life of faith and grace *in* this world. Just as Jesus was sent from the Father with a purpose, in like manner Jesus sends each one of us out with a purpose. Jesus said, “As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world” (John 17:18), Jesus was referring to you and me.

We are to be a holy people with a holy purpose, which means we are fulfilling the Great Commission by word and deed (Matt 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-18; Luke 24:44-48);

1. To share the Good News (Luke 9:1-6; 10:1-20); being a witness to Jesus by our *words*.
2. To be light and salt (Matt 5:13-15); being a witness to Jesus by our good *deeds*, and to serve the less fortunate (Matt 25:31-46; James 1:27);
3. To heal the sick and cast out demons (Mark 16:17-18); being a witness to Jesus by *signs and wonders*.
4. To be more like Jesus in *character and integrity* every day (Rom 8:29; 2 Cor 3:18).

Righteousness

The word *righteousness* comes from a root word that means "straightness". This conveys the idea of aligning with a fixed or unchanging standard. This certainly describes God's standard as revealed in the Scriptures. Righteousness involves both thinking and doing the things that please God out of a motivation of love for Him. Some would define righteousness as holy and upright living in accordance with God's standards.

Righteousness is a moral concept that is defined by God's character. Therefore, man's righteousness is defined in terms of God's righteousness. In practical terms, righteousness are thoughts and deeds that are right in God's eyes (1 Ki 15:5; 2 Ki 15:11; 2 Chron 14:2). The following are three examples to consider:

1. For Adam and Eve, what was right in God's eyes was their obedience to His command: Do not eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. His commands were the standard for their behavior. Thus, Adam and Eve would have acted righteously if they had obeyed God.
2. The Ten Commandments and related laws given by God defined Israel's relationship with Him and all people. To obey God's Law was to act righteously. Such obedience maintained the covenant relationship between God and His people.
3. The Cross of Jesus is a public demonstration of God's righteousness. God puts to our account, or transfers to us, the righteousness of Christ when we trust in Him for salvation (Rom 4:3-22; Gal 3:5-7; Phil 3:9). We do not become righteous because of our inherent goodness; God sees us as righteous only through our identification by faith with His Son, Jesus Christ.

When a person receives God's grace by faith in Christ, and not by works, he/she is:

1. Reconciled with God;

2. Justified by faith in Jesus;
3. Sanctified by the Holy Spirit;
4. Continually being made holy and righteous.

This is what it means to be “saved” or born again (John 3:3-7) in the New Covenant of Grace. What no prior covenant could do, God did for us through the New Covenant. Jesus accomplished this for us, once and for all!

A Work in Progress

Paul used the words “holy” or “saints” to describe believers, but that did not mean the believers were walking in perfect, godly character. As a matter of fact, the first letter to the Corinthian church was written to address their carnal and unchristian behavior. Yet even then, Paul addressed them this way: “To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours” (1Cor 1:2). Paul was not ignoring or making excuses for bad behavior. Paul understood that holiness (sanctification) is a *process*. We have been sanctified and made righteous before God through Christ Jesus, and His work is complete. Becoming holy is a work of the Holy Spirit throughout our lifetime, moving us toward completion.

We are all on a spiritual journey in this life. Our ultimate *goal* is “perfection” (complete maturity) – a goal we will realize only when we get to Heaven. “And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight” (Col 1:21, 22).

The Holy Spirit lives within all born-again believers. The work of the Holy Spirit is continual within each of us. We also have the sure expectation in the New Covenant that God makes us able, by His Spirit, to live up to the moral qualities that a holy God requires of His people. “I beseech

you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service" (Rom 12:1).

Grace has a very personal meaning for each one of us. We were all at one time in bondage to sin, which results in death, but in Christ, we are *free*! We are free from sin and death, and able to live for Jesus! We are forgiven and the power of sin is broken (Rom 6:18).

Freedom is the heart of the message of the Gospel. We need to embrace and live in the freedom that Christ died to give us. When we do, we can then effectively present that message of freedom to others. You cannot give what you don't possess!

Our freedom is a unique type of freedom; it is not a freedom to do anything we *want*. That is the way of the unredeemed world. Rather, in Christ our freedom is to do as we *ought* to do, to obey the living God and walk in daily relationship with Him. Jesus says very clearly that if we live in Him, and He in us, we will be free! "Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, 'If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. Therefore, if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed'" (John 8:31-32, 36).

A Christian living in bondage to guilt, shame and fear is a very ineffective Christian. The chains of sin and bondage do not belong in the life of a believer! Nor should they ever be used by any leader as tools to manipulate or control others. Jesus came to give life and life more abundantly to all (John 10:10). We must seek the Lord for His wisdom and deliverance in our own lives, and then lead others to freedom in Christ.

1. "For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, Abba, Father" (Rom 8:15).

2. "Because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God" (Rom 8:21).
3. "Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (2 Cor 3:17).

This new freedom in Christ was bought with His priceless and precious blood (1 Pet 1:18, 19). We have been set free! But free to do what? Christ has a purpose for each one of us. He set us *free* so that we can be *sent* by Him (John 17:18; 20:21). Every believer has a mission or assignment to fulfill. Our Lord has a purpose for each and every person who, in faith, follows Him. Every believer has a mission or assignment; it may be in their current job or position, in the home or neighborhood or the Lord may want to send them around the world. What is *your* mission?

Mission

A *mission statement* is a statement of how one fulfills a vision or a *call* upon his/her life. Both Jesus and the Apostle Paul had clear mission statements that guided their lives. The same principles that guided their ministries should guide us as well.

Jesus' mission statement is found in Luke 4:18-19: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord". To sum up the preceding Scripture in a phrase, "Jesus came to set the captives free!" How can we do anything less? That is our mission; that is our message!

Before Paul was known as an apostle, he was called and commanded by Jesus to bring the Gospel to the Gentiles "... to whom I now send you, to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and

an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me" (Acts 26:16-18).

Stop and meditate on those words Jesus spoke to Paul. Allow them to sink into your spirit. Paul was sent to open spiritual eyes so that the people might:

1. See the truth.
2. Have the power of Satan broken over their lives.
3. Receive forgiveness of all of their sins.
4. Gain a present and eternal reward.
5. Be sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

Let us all imitate Paul and in so doing, imitate our Lord Jesus. "Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ" (1 Cor 11:1). You have been bought with a price (1 Cor 6:20; 7:23) and set free to serve the living God. Your mission from God may take you across the street or across the sea. Wherever you go, preach the Gospel to the unsaved! "Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching" (2 Tim 4:2). You have a mission, now let your faith arise and go fulfill it!

25 A More Excellent Way

The Gifts of God

Our Father in Heaven is a gift-giving God (James 1:17), therefore it follows that Jesus is a gift giver as is the Holy Spirit. The Father has given us the gift of Jesus (John 3:16), Jesus has given us the gift of the Holy Spirit (John 14:26, 15:26, 16:7), and the Holy Spirit has given us spiritual gifts (Acts 1:8, 1 Cor 12:1-11).

The Father's gift of His Son has settled the question of eternity for us: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

Jesus' gift of His Holy Spirit enables us to live the Christian life: "And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever, the Spirit of Truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you" (John 14:16,17).

The Holy Spirit has given us spiritual gifts of power, authority and abilities because He knew that we would need them in order to fulfill the Great Commission. How can we then refuse any one of these gifts as we build the Christian life?

The Way of Jesus Christ

Jesus is the *perfect sacrifice* (purifier) of the New Covenant. He is also the *mediator* (intercessor) of that better Covenant. "Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us" (Rom 8:34). "But now He has obtained a more excellent

ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better Covenant, which was established on better promises" (Heb 8:6).

More Excellent Ministry. This speaks of service of a higher order, or a more exalted nature, than the priesthood of the Old Covenant. The ministry of the Levitical priest (Law) was just a shadow of the real thing. Jesus' ministry is the real and substantial service. The new ministry pertains to heavenly and eternal things, while the old was concerned with the earthly Tabernacle or Temple that would eventually vanish (Heb 9:11, 12).

Mediator. Jesus Christ is the Mediator between God and man, according to the arrangements of the New Covenant. By definition, a mediator can intercede, reconcile, even settle differences.

In the Old Testament, the imperfect Levitical priesthood mediated between God and man. In the New Covenant, Jesus Christ is in the highest position of representing the needs, requirements and desires of both parties- God and mankind with equal zeal. His divinely-appointed position requires Him to be the ultimate Priest and Servant. As the *Eternal High Priest*, Jesus brought to us this new and better Covenant.

The heart of our loving heavenly Father is revealed to us when Jesus established God's unbreakable promises of salvation through grace by faith. Jesus accomplished all of this by becoming the *ultimate Servant*. He established these promises with His own blood (Heb 9:12, 14) shed for us at the Cross. By this act, Jesus serves God's loving and age-old desire to reconcile mankind to Himself (2 Cor 5:18, 19). In the same act of sacrifice, Jesus also serves mankind (Matt 20:28) by opening the way of salvation and restored relationship to our almighty Creator and heavenly Father (1 Tim 2:5, 6).

Moses, as a mediator for Israel under the Old Covenant (Exo 19:2-8), gave the Law as God had commanded it (Gal

3:19). The temple priests mediated for Israel through the sacrifice of bulls and goats. The Old Covenant of the Law and the sacrifices were insufficient and inadequate to save man. We now have an eternal High Priest, Jesus, who is sufficient! He can and will “*save to the uttermost*” all those who call upon Him as Lord and Savior (Heb 7:18-28).

The Law clearly reveals the human problem that is common through all of the covenants: mankind is unwilling and unable to completely obey God. Mankind often chooses to do what they want or what is right in their own eyes, rather than what God says is right. God desires our obedience as an expression of love for Him (John 14:15, 21, 23; 15:10; 1 John 2:4-6).

Some people may obey God, but sadly it is often out of fear of punishment. Human nature resists obeying God from a heart of love for Him. “Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the *flesh* cannot please God” (Rom 8:7-8).

New Life in the Holy Spirit

The New Covenant introduces to mankind something entirely new. The New Covenant gives us the “Helper, Comforter, the Spirit of Truth”, who is the Person of the Holy Spirit and He came to live within us (John 14:16, 17).

In Old Testament times, the Holy Spirit would “come upon” or “be with” someone, but in the New Covenant, the Holy Spirit lives “*within*” the believer. Christ-followers are the temple or home for the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:19).

The Holy Spirit comes with power and authority over the devil (1 John 4:4). As we surrender our lives to God, we have the Holy Spirit’s power to conquer our selfish will. He helps us live the Christian life as we learn to be led (guided, directed, influenced) by the Spirit. “But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you” (Rom 8:11).

Our new life in the Spirit is what Jesus addressed when speaking with Nicodemus (John 3:1-17). As we learn to walk in the Spirit, we will overcome the desires of the flesh: "I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law" (Gal 5:16-18).

This new life in the Spirit requires a new way of thinking and doing things. The Bible instructs us to "...be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness" (Eph 4:23, 24).

We also have the following promise: "For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God" (Rom 8:13, 14). Putting to death the deeds of the body has to do with putting to death those habits and patterns of thinking that are contrary to God's righteousness, and replacing those habits and patterns of thinking with godly habits and godly thoughts. This is where the Holy Spirit's help is crucial for He is able to reveal truth, remind us of the Scriptures and speak encouragement to us.

Being Led by The Holy Spirit?

"And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit" (Eph 5:18). The word "filled" (Gk. Pleroo) in this case means just that, completely filled up or supplied and it also means to be influenced by. This requires our submitted will to cooperate with the Spirit's influence. The tense of the Greek for "be filled" makes clear that such a Spirit-filled condition does not stop with a single experience, but is maintained by continually

being filled, as commanded here. In other words, we are to be influenced by the Holy Spirit and not controlled or influenced by other things in the natural or spiritual world. This is what Christians commonly refer to as being *Spirit-filled* or *Spirit-led*.

When we examine this concept of being influenced or led by the Spirit of God, we see more clearly the need to learn how to hear, recognize and follow the Holy Spirit. Jesus says, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me" (John 10:27). At this point we should agree and be assured by the Word of God that we have the ability to hear the Lord's voice. The purpose of hearing His voice is so that we can follow Him.

It is one thing to describe or be taught about the work of the Holy Spirit. It is quite another matter to understand the "how" of walking by the leading of the Holy Spirit. Added to that is the necessary cooperation with the Holy Spirit that is also required on our part.

We cannot "study" the work of the Holy Spirit as an outsider looking in. As a matter of fact, the Scriptures tell us that it is impossible to discern or understand the things of the Spirit unless we are spiritual. "But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor 2:14). One cannot discern or see the things inside a living human cell without "special eyes" (a microscope). We cannot see the detail in distant stars and celestial bodies without "special eyes" (a telescope). In the same way, we cannot see the things of the Spirit with our natural eyes; we need "special eyes" – spiritual eyes to "see" (understand) the spiritual realm.

The things of the Spirit are spiritually appraised. We are not going to get understanding of the Spirit and His ways by leaning on our own ability to comprehend. We will

become familiar with spiritual things as we learn to “walk in the spirit” with the Holy Spirit of God.

Our first consideration is that *we are spiritual*, not natural. This truth may require a major change in perspective or view; but once it is embraced, everything that is spiritual becomes more clear. As someone stated, “We are not human beings who are having a temporary spiritual experience; we are spiritual beings who are having a temporary human experience.”

At the Cross, Jesus fulfilled the requirement that released the “promise of the Father”, the Holy Spirit living or dwelling in the believer. “And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, ‘which,’ He said, ‘you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now’” (Acts 1:4, 5). The word “baptized” means that we are to be completely submerged in the Spirit, not simply a sprinkle or touch of the Spirit!

One needs to understand, by faith, the awesome and powerful nature of this truth. The Holy Spirit is no longer just “with” or “on” a person, but now can dwell within the born-again believer! This is a truth that may not be fully understood in our minds. However, it *must be fully embraced by faith* if we are to truly walk by faith in the Spirit!

Hearing the Voice of God

We read in the Scriptures and hear from Christians phrases like, “God spoke to me”, “I heard the Lord say”, or “I am being led”. These kinds of expressions may give a new believer the impression of a physical voice, contact or communication between God and man. That may be the case, but more often than not, it is a *spiritual* contact or communication (1 Cor 9-16).

Just as God is triune God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Person of the Holy Spirit we are triune in nature also. We are spirit, soul and body (1 Thes 5:23, Heb 4:12).

1. Our *body* is our connection to the physical world.
2. Our *soul* is our connection to our will (decision making), emotions, and intellect/mind.
3. Our *spirit* is our connection to the spiritual realm (God, human spirit, demonic spirit).

The Body-Soul (mind) Connection. Until we are born again our only experiences in life were a result of the body-soul connection. All that we know has come through our five senses. The five physical senses are: hearing, sight, taste, touch, and smell. From a biological point of view each sense has physical receptors: eardrum, retina, taste buds, pressure/pain receptors and olfactory receptors. All of these receptors convert the physical contact/stimulus into electrical impulses, which are carried by neurons and nerves to the brain. It is the brain that converts these signals into perception. For example, when one hears someone say "Go", the process goes like this: sound waves strike the eardrum, the physical vibrations are converted into electrical impulses and transmitted to the brain, the brain perceives the "sound" and translates it in our "mind", into a word we understand and we "hear" "Go". The process is so fast and seamless that when someone says, "Go", we immediately hear the word "Go".

The Spirit-Soul (mind) Connection. After being born again the Holy Spirit is able to directly connect to our spirit which also connects to our soul (mind). When this happens, we call it illumination or revelation. Illumination in Scripture, for instance, is when we don't understand the meaning of a passage and then it is made urgent, relevant or clear; in a sense, what was obscured is illuminated (Luke 24: 45). Revelation is when God, through the Holy Spirit,

gives us understanding of who He is, His purpose and plans, but not through intellectual understanding; it is a sudden flash of insight from the Father (Matt 16:17; Luke 24:16, 31).

Now the Holy Spirit is able to speak in an audible voice (Luke 3:22), after all, the Holy Spirit is God and nothing is impossible with God. More often than not, the Holy Spirit puts thoughts in our mind without going through the physical stimuli receptors of the body. So, when the Holy Spirit says "Go" no physical stimuli are required. Our natural ears are not involved. The spirit *implants* the word "Go" into our minds. In a real sense, we are hearing with our spiritual ears, seeing with spiritual eyes and comprehending with our spiritual mind (1 Cor 2:9-16).

The mind cannot discern whether the stimuli is from a physical receptor or from the spirit. The mind simply processes the stimuli and perceives "Go". As we learn the character and nature of God we will begin to recognize the source of the communication. That is why reading the Scriptures, prayer, and worship, are so important; through these practices we are developing a relationship with God. In time, we will recognize God's voice and be able to discern what is of Him, what is of our own mind, and what is of demonic spirits. Relationship produces assurance and trust in Him.

Being Spirit-Filled or Spirit-Led then, is learning to distinguish between the body-soul (natural) or *spirit-soul* (*spiritual*) connections; choosing the, spirit-soul connection and then following through with obedience to God. Most believers who hear the voice of God in this way often describe it as a "knowing" deep inside the heart.

God has provided everything we need for life and godliness (2 Pet 1:3); He has provided His Son who has made a way for us through the Cross, the Holy Spirit to empower us to live the Christian life, and He has placed us

into the covenant-body of Christ based upon a New Covenant which cannot be broken.

26 Conclusion

Most of the Old Testament concerned itself with the Law and the covenants between God and Israel. The testing, trials, tribulations, victories, and defeats were meant to provide instruction for the Jews, and later for all believers in the New Covenant. The Apostle Paul made a statement saying as much, "Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted. Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come" (1 Corinthians 10:6, 11).

What value is there in the Old Testament? The Old Testament has inestimable value in terms of the examples that "were written for our admonition (warning)". Here are at least six important lessons we learn from the Old Testament:

1. The progressive revelation of the character and nature of God who is holy and righteous.
2. The revelation of God's universal moral code embodied in the Ten Commandments.
3. The progressive revelation of the character and nature of mankind, self-centered and selfish. His mind is always on the temporal.
4. The progressive revelation that mankind is unable to save himself nor is he able to work his way into a relationship with God.
5. The progressive revelation of God's tutoring of mankind, removing every excuse as a means for justification (innocence, conscience, government, promise and legalism of the Law).

6. The progressive revelation that man needs a Savior!

As we have said in the very beginning of this book, "Seeing The Forest for The Trees", is an expression which means don't get caught up in the details (the trees), that you miss the "big picture" (the forest). The "big picture" is that the Bible is about God's plan of redemption for mankind, which culminates in the Person of Jesus Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit, made available through the New Covenant.

As in the story of Abraham, when God asked him to take his son, Isaac, up Mount Moriah to be sacrificed, each step of the way was a step of faith for Abraham. Each step was a step in anticipation that God would provide a sacrifice other than his own son. In the same way, the old covenants represent steps towards the New Covenant, where the perfect sacrifice would be provided: The *Lamb of God* Who takes away the sins of the world. Abraham took a three-day journey up the mountain and each step forward was necessary to learn that God was his provider, *Jehovah Jireh*. In the same way, each of the covenants were steps forward up the mount known as "Golgotha" where God *provided* His Son for all that would receive Him.

The New Testament represents the fulfillment of "God's Promises Revealed"; no longer shadows and types, but fulfillment of the New Covenant. It is when we view the New Covenant through the canon, biblical history and the message of the Old Covenant that we see the fullness of God's grace towards mankind. The New Testament is a record of the instrument God would use, the Church, as the means of propelling the Gospel message throughout the world. The message is that the Old has passed away and been replaced by the New, a New Covenant of Grace: A grace that was purchased at great price, the life-blood of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

We are motivated to be like Christ, in character and integrity, out of love, not out of legalism. Grace challenges us to not sin because we love Him (who first loved us); whereas legalism challenges us to not sin as a result of fear of punishment, loss of blessing, or simply pleasing others.

The love motivation allows us to live free. There will always be people who will try to put us into the "legalism box". That is why it is important to become individually strong in our relationship with the Lord, and at the same time corporately motivated to serve the Lord through His church. The Apostle Paul cautions us in the following way: "Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power" (Col 2:8-10).

The finished work of Jesus Christ has brought us into relationship with God as "sons". As a result of our "position as sons" we are reconciled with God, justified before God, being sanctified by the Holy Spirit, made Holy and Righteous. In spite of all of these great provisions we are still a "work in progress" and that is why it is so important to "study the Bible", learn to be "led by the Holy Spirit", and "to walk by faith and not by sight".

The Apostle Paul speaks of a more excellent way: "But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way" (1 Corinthians 12:31), the way of love. It is by a faith that is activated and energized through love that we become more and more like our Lord.

God desires a relationship with you. He wants your fellowship, and He wants you to have the blessing and freedom that comes from living life on His terms. He desires your obedience to His ways from a heart of love for Him, and He has made all of that possible through the provisions of Jesus Christ and the New Covenant.

This message of the New Covenant is not for you alone. God wants you to live in and to be a minister of His New Covenant. Take this message of salvation and hope to others, for the blessing of God's people, and for His glory!

Author's Note:

The attempt of this book has been to "bring the cookie jar" off of a high shelf onto the kitchen table, where all could reach it. My prayer for you is that what has been written will help you grow in your relationship with Jesus, and the "forest" has been made a little bit more clear in spite of all the trees. VT

About the Author

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After four years in the Marine Corp, Vic went to Hofstra University and became a high school chemistry teacher. He taught in the Hudson Valley of NY state and during that time, he was also an adjunct instructor of Chemistry for Syracuse University.

After almost 25 years of teaching, he left public education to begin his calling as the pastor of a church in upstate New York. He has been a successful Senior Pastor for almost 25 years. In that time, he also partnered with two ministries: World MAP and Harvest Preparation International Ministries. Both ministries are involved in training pastors and leaders in the emerging nations.

As a conference speaker, he has traveled to almost 25 countries and has authored a number of articles relating to leadership and Christian spiritual principles.

He and his wife, Dee, have two grown children and a grandson. Vic and Dee reside in Hyde Park, New York.

