

The **Bible** Unpacked

Comprehensive Study Series

A compilation of the Bible's teaching
for believers established in the faith

paul mallison

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Comprehensive Study Series

A compilation of the Bible's teaching
for believers established in the faith

8. God's Word

Composed by Paul Mallison

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A Quick Word

This series of studies aims to present a compilation of the Bible's teachings in a clear and readable order. There are 40 booklets in the series, based on the 40 chapters of the book *The Bible Unpacked - Comprehensive Edition*. Each booklet has two sections, which can be used for two or more studies.

See *Topics in This Series* towards the end of this booklet for a full listing of all the topics. Note that studying booklets alternatively from the two major sections (*What to Know* and *What to Do*) would add variety.

The material contains Bible verses. Before the verses are headings, which reflect what the verses say – in particular the parts of the verses in *italics*. The verses are sometimes followed by a comment.

The verses often have a brief introduction. Usually these state who is speaking and often who they are speaking to. Apart from God and Jesus Christ, the main speakers are:

- Moses – who led the Israelites out of Egypt and taught them God's laws;
- David – Israel's greatest king who wrote many of the psalms, most of which are essentially prayers;
- Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel and other prophets – who spoke to the people of Israel on God's behalf; and
- Paul, Peter, John and other leaders of the early church – who spoke to various groups and wrote letters to believers.

Much care has been taken in order to correctly interpret the verses. Nevertheless, if you encounter a verse that is used to teach something that is contrary to or goes beyond your understanding, assess its use by doing such things as: reading the passage it is from; and considering how its teaching fits in with Scripture as a whole (e.g. interpret OT teaching in the light of NT teaching).

For more information on *The Bible Unpacked* and free downloads, go to the website: www.thebibleunpacked.net

Suggestions for Study Groups

Preliminary matters:

- Beforehand the leader should: check the context of any verses they are not familiar with; and review the questions. If need be, they should compose questions more applicable to the group.
- Each person should have a Bible, for things such as checking a verse's context. It would also be helpful to have Bible commentaries on hand.
- Pray before beginning the study. Ask God for help in understanding the meaning of the verses and to affect your lives through them. Also pray together at the end.

Doing the study:

- Ideally, read the material and answer the questions prior to the meeting. Then share answers and discuss any issues arising from the material in the meeting.
- Alternatively, read the material and answer the questions in the meeting – reading either aloud as a group or individually (prior to sharing answers). If reading as a group, **try having one person read the headings, another read the verses and another read the comments.** Additionally, a fourth person could read the Bible references.
- Answers need not be limited to only what is mentioned in the material.
- The group should feel free to diverge from the study if related issues arise.

General or concluding questions:

If time permits, conclude with one or more of the following questions:

- What is something that you either: **did not know** before; gained **greater insight** into; or **needed reminding** of?
- What verse would be helpful to memorize and bear in mind during the next week?
- In taking the verses seriously, is there anything you should change in:
 - (a) how you relate to God or to other people; or
 - (b) any other area of your life (e.g. attitudes, values or behavior)?

If so, are there any specific steps you could take to do this?

I. General

God's word is our window to God. For through it we learn about God and his relationship with us. Moreover, its unique characteristics and functions have the imprint of God.

a) What God's Word Comprises

God's word primarily is Scripture

JOHN 10:35 If he [God] called them gods to whom *the word of God* came—and *Scripture* cannot be broken— ... ESV

This speaks of Scripture as “the word of God”.

2TIM 3:16A *Every Scripture passage is inspired by God.* GW

Here Paul is effectively saying that every verse of Scripture comes from God, i.e. Scripture “is God's Word” (CEV).

God's word includes his covenants

EX 34:27, 28B *The LORD said to Moses, “Write these words down, because it is on the basis of these words that I am making a covenant with you and with Israel.”* ²⁸ ... He wrote on the tablets *the words of the covenant*—the Ten Commandments. GNT

This speaks of words of God forming God's covenant with Israel.

God's word includes his promises

2SAM 7:28 [DAVID:] Now, O sovereign LORD, you are the true God! *May your words prove to be true! You have made this good promise to your servant!*

God's word includes his laws

PS 147:19 [A PSALMIST, REFERRING TO GOD:] *He speaks his word to Jacob, his laws and judicial decisions to Israel.* GW

God's word includes his prophecies

JER 36:2 [GOD, TO JEREMIAH:] *Get a scroll. Write on it everything I have told you to say about Israel, Judah, and all the other nations since I began to speak to you in the reign of Josiah until now.*

Here Jeremiah is told to write down prophecies spoken by God regarding the future of nations. Daniel 9:2b below tells of the prophecy in God's word that Israel's exile would last 70 years.

DAN 9:2B I, Daniel, noted in the Scripture the total years that were assigned by the word of the LORD to Jeremiah the prophet for the completion of the desolations of Jerusalem: 70 years. ISV

God's word also includes the gospel, proclaimed by his people

ACTS 13:5A When they [Barnabas and Saul] arrived in Salamis, *they began to proclaim the word of God in the Jewish synagogues.*

This reference to God's word is clearly speaking of the gospel message.

Note: Jesus Christ is the Word of God

REV 19:13 [John, describing a vision of Christ] He is dressed in clothing dipped in blood, and *he is called the Word of God.*

Jesus Christ is called the "Word of God" in part because much of what God says and does, he says and does through Jesus Christ.

Should we accept every verse of Scripture as God's word? What dangers are there in not doing so?

List at least two ways that God's prophecies – past and present – benefit his people?

Why is Jesus Christ called the "the word of God"?

b) God's Communication of His Word

Note that the last two subsections in the preceding section are also pertinent to this section.

God has given his word by the Holy Spirit

2PET 1:20–21 Above all, you do well if you recognize this: *No prophecy of scripture ever comes about by the prophet's own imagination,* ²¹*for no prophecy was ever borne of human impulse; rather, men carried along by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.*

God gave his law through Moses

JOHN 1:17 *God gave the Law through Moses,* but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. GNT

God has spoken through prophets . . .

HEB 1:1 In the past *God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets many times and in many different ways.* NCV™

. . . and God has spoken through visions and dreams

MIC 1:1 During the time that Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah were kings of Judah, *the word of the LORD came to Micah, who was from Moresheth. He saw these visions about Samaria and Jerusalem.* NCV™

JOB 33:14–16 *For God speaks,* the first time in one way, the second time in another, though a person does not perceive it. ¹⁵*In a dream, a night vision, when deep sleep falls on people as they sleep in their beds.* ¹⁶*Then he gives a revelation to people, and terrifies them with warnings, . . .*

God's word was spoken by Jesus Christ

LUKE 5:1 Now Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, and *the crowd was pressing around him to hear the word of God.*

JOHN 3:34 *For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God,* for he does not give the Spirit sparingly.

Note that the last clause probably means that God gave to Jesus Christ the Spirit without any limit (cf. CEV, GNT, NCV, NLT).

Explain as best you can the Holy Spirit's role in the writing of the Scriptures.

In what ways do you think God speaks today?

How can we know if God was speaking through a vision or a dream – either one of our own or another person's?

c) Characteristics of God's Word

God's word is holy, righteous and good

ROM 7:12 So then, *the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous, and good.*

God's word is true . . .

PS 33:4 *The words of the LORD are true* and all his works are dependable. GNT

JOHN 17:17 [JESUS, TO GOD:] Set them apart in the truth; *your word is truth.*

. . . and so what God's word foretells comes true (God fulfills it)

LAM 2:17 [JEREMIAH TO JERUSALEM'S PEOPLE:] *The LORD has done what he planned; he has fulfilled his promise that he threatened long ago: He has overthrown you without mercy and has enabled the enemy to gloat over you; he has exalted your adversaries' power.*

God's word is living and active . . .

HEB 4:12A *For the word of God is living and active . . .*

Two reasons for describing God's word as "living" are that it never ceases to be pertinent and it keeps on influencing and affecting people. The latter reason also shows it to be active.

. . . and God's word is powerful

HEB 4:12 *What God has said isn't only alive and active! It is sharper than any double-edged sword. His word can cut through our spirits and souls and through our joints and marrow, until it discovers the desires and thoughts of our hearts.* CEV

God's word can penetrate to the very depths of our inner-selves, exposing our thoughts and attitudes for what they really are.

God's word is everlasting

1PET 1:24–25 For all flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of the grass; the grass withers and the flower falls off,²⁵ but *the word of the Lord endures forever*. And this is the word that was proclaimed to you.

Note: God's word surpasses everything of this world

Ps 138:2 [DAVID, TO GOD:] I bow down toward your holy temple and give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness, for *you have exalted above all things your name and your word*. ESV

What can we say to non-believers to help them see that God's word is true?

In what ways is God's word shown to be powerful? (Do not limit your answer to just what is mentioned in the study.)

What is one characteristic of God's word that you find particularly striking or encouraging? Why?

d) Functions of God's Word (I): General

God's word makes known his commands

ISA 1:10 [ISAIAH, TO JERUSALEM'S PEOPLE:] *Hear the word of the LORD, You rulers of Sodom; Give ear to the law of our God, You people of Gomorrah: ...* NKJV

The proclamation of God's word makes known his law with its commands, as God's law/commands are a key component of his word.

God's word makes known his plans

ISA 38:4–6 *Then the word of the LORD came to Isaiah: ⁵“Go and say to Hezekiah, Thus says the LORD, the God of David your father: I have heard your prayer; I have seen your tears. Behold, I will add fifteen years to your life. ⁶I will deliver you and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria, and will defend this city.* ESV

God's word plays a role in salvation

1COR 15:1–2 [PAUL, TO THE CORINTHIAN BELIEVERS:] Now I want to make clear for you, brothers and sisters, *the gospel that I preached to you, that you received and on which you stand, ²and by which you are being saved, if you hold firmly to the message I preached to you – unless you believed in vain.*

2TIM 3:15 [PAUL, TO TIMOTHY:] From infancy you have known *the Holy Scriptures that are able to give you the wisdom you need for salvation through faith in the Messiah Jesus.* ISV

God's word plays a role in sanctification

JOHN 17:17 [JESUS, TO GOD:] *Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.* NKJV

Here Jesus effectively prays that God would sanctify his people by his word. Note that sanctification refers to the process in which believers are made holy. This is primarily achieved through Jesus Christ's sacrificial death. Additionally, believers are continually

being transformed by God, becoming more like Jesus Christ and increasingly devoid of sin.

God’s word helps people avoid sin

Ps 119:9, 11 [A PSALMIST, TO GOD:] *How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word. . . .*¹¹*I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.* ESV

God’s word helps people learn to fear God

DEUT 31:13 [MOSES, TO THE ISRAELITES:] Their children, who don’t know *these teachings, must hear them and learn to fear the LORD your God* as long as you live in the land that you are going to take possession of when you cross the Jordan River. GW

God’s word encourages people

ROM 15:4 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through *the encouragement of the Scriptures* we might have hope. ESV

Note: God acts by his word

Ps 147:15–18 *He sends out his command to the earth; his word runs swiftly.*¹⁶*He gives snow like wool; he scatters hoarfrost like ashes.*¹⁷*He hurls down his crystals of ice like crumbs; who can stand before his cold?*¹⁸*He sends out his word, and melts them; he makes his wind blow and the waters flow.* ESV

ISA 55:11 [GOD:] *My word, which comes from my mouth, is like the rain and snow. It will not come back to me without results. It will accomplish whatever I want and achieve whatever I send it to do.* GW

The references to God’s “word” in the above verses are essentially speaking of his command. These verses imply that God merely needs to command things to be done for them to happen.

In what ways do you find God's word helpful?

How can we use God's word to keep from sinning?

How do the Scriptures encourage us?

e) Functions of God's Word (II): Blessings

Life, . . .

DEUT 8:3 [MOSES, TO THE ISRAELITES:] And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that *man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.* ESV

The supernatural provision of manna by God through his command or word, demonstrated that it is God's word which is the ultimate source of life's sustenance – a truth with application to both physical and spiritual life.

. . . notably, spiritual and eternal life

JOHN 6:63, 68 [JESUS:] The Spirit is the one who gives life; human nature is of no help! *The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life.* . . . ⁶⁸Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom would we go? *You have the words of eternal life.*

In v. 63b Jesus appears to be saying that his words are spiritual, producing spiritual or eternal life. Jesus seems to be implying that it is by the Holy Spirit (v. 63a) that his words produce this life.

Light

Ps 119:105 [A PSALMIST, TO GOD:] *Your word is a lamp to walk by, and a light to illumine my path.*

God's word gives "light" in that it gives insight, as reflected in the following pair of subsections. Also bear in mind that God's word also gives "light" in the sense that it leads to well-being or salvation, turning the darkness of one's circumstances to light.

Knowledge . . .

ISA 51:7A [GOD:] Listen to me, *you who know what is right, you people who are aware of my law!*

God's word, here in particular his law, gives knowledge of what is right.

. . . and wisdom

Ps 119:98–100, 104 [A PSALMIST, TO GOD:] *Your commandments make me wiser than my enemies, for I am always aware of them.* ⁹⁹*I have more insight than all my teachers, for I meditate on your rules.* ¹⁰⁰*I am more discerning than those older than I, for I observe your precepts. . . .* ¹⁰⁴*Your precepts give me discernment. Therefore I hate all deceitful actions.*

Hope

Ps 119:49 [A PSALMIST, TO GOD:] *Remember your word to your servant, for you have given me hope.*

God had given the psalmist hope by his word, or promise (cf. AMP, CEV, GNT, NCV, NLT).

Joy

Ps 19:8A *The LORD'S precepts are fair and make one joyful.*

Freedom

Ps 119:45 [A PSALMIST, TO GOD:] *I have gained perfect freedom by following your teachings, . . .* CEV

The psalmist had freedom from things that ordinarily confine or burden a person. Possibly sin and its effects are in view (cf. John 8:31–32 ↓), but in the context it is more likely the burdens and oppression that hard times often bring.

JOHN 8:31–32 Then Jesus said to those Judeans who had believed him, *“If you continue to follow my teaching, you are really my disciples”* ³²*and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”*

This is probably primarily referring to freedom from sin, but freedom from bondage to the law may also be in view.

Note: Rejecting God's word brings his judgment

JER 6:19 [GOD:] *Hear, O earth; behold, I am bringing disaster upon this people, the fruit of their devices, because they have not paid attention to my words; and as for my law, they have rejected it.* ESV

JOHN 12:48 [JESUS:] *The one who rejects me and does not accept my words has a judge; the word I have spoken will judge him at the last day.*

How does God's word light our way (cf. Ps 119:105)?

How can you use God's word to gain more wisdom? What steps can you start taking in regard to this?

How does God's word – including his instructions (cf. Ps 19:8a) – bring joy?

II. Key Old Testament Covenants

A covenant is a solemn agreement made between two parties. As indicated earlier, God's covenants are a key aspect of his word – along with his commands, prophecies and promises.

God's covenants with people were all initiated by God. They generally confirmed his relationship with the persons concerned – who were or who became his people. The covenants included binding promises by God of blessings for his people, reflecting his purposes for them. In some cases God's covenants also outlined what God required of his people and how they were to relate to him.

God's covenants with Abraham, Israel and David are prime instances of the role of God's word, expounding pivotal promises and (in the case of the covenant with Israel) laws of God. These covenants form the background of God's relationship with his people today. Learning about them enables us to better understand the significance of much of the NT's teachings.

a) God's Covenant with Abraham

God called Abraham to go to the land of Canaan – and Abraham went

GEN 12:1, 4–5 *The LORD said to Abram, “Leave your country, your relatives, and your father’s family, and go to the land I will show you. ...⁴So Abram left Haran as the LORD had told him, and Lot went with him. At this time Abram was 75 years old.⁵He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, and everything they owned, as well as all the servants they had gotten in Haran. They set out from Haran, planning to go to the land of Canaan, and in time they arrived there.* NCV™

Note that Abraham’s name was initially “Abram”. God later changed it to “Abraham” (cf. 17:5 ↓).

Subsequently, God made a covenant with Abraham, promising him: countless descendants; the land of Canaan; . . .

GEN 17:3–8 Abram bowed down with his face to the ground, and *God said to him,⁴“As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of a multitude of nations.⁵No longer will your name be Abram. Instead, your name will be Abraham because I will make you the father of a multitude of nations.⁶I will make you extremely fruitful. I will make nations of you, and kings will descend from you.⁷I will confirm my covenant as a perpetual covenant between me and you. It will extend to your descendants after you throughout their generations. I will be your God and the God of your descendants after you.⁸I will give the whole land of Canaan – the land where you are now residing – to you and your descendants after you as a permanent possession. I will be their God.”*

God made an everlasting covenant with the Israelite’s ancestor Abraham, aspects of which were included in God’s later covenant with the nation of Israel. In the covenant God promised Abraham that if he obeyed, God would: give him numerous descendants (vv. 5–7); give his descendants the land of Canaan (v. 8); and bless all nations through him (as per the following subsection). In conjunction with this, God would be Abraham’s and his descendants’ God (v. 7).

... and that all peoples on earth would be blessed through Abraham

GEN 12:3 [GOD, TO ABRAHAM:] I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and *in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.* ESV

Abraham believed God, and God credited this to him as righteousness

GEN 15:5B–6 [GOD, TO ABRAHAM:] “Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.” *Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.”*⁶ *And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.* ESV

God confirmed the covenant and promises with Abraham’s descendants

Ps 105:8–11 *He remembers his covenant forever, the word that he commanded, for a thousand generations,⁹ the covenant that he made with Abraham, his sworn promise to Isaac,¹⁰ which he confirmed to Jacob as a statute, to Israel as an everlasting covenant,¹¹ saying, “To you I will give the land of Canaan as your portion for an inheritance.”* ESV

What things are remarkable about Abraham's life?

How has God fulfilled his promise to Abraham that all peoples on earth would be blessed through him?

In what way should believers emulate Abraham's belief in God's covenant promises?

b) God's Making of Israel as His People

God made the nation of Israel . . .

ISA 43:1 Now, this is what *the LORD* says, *the one who created you, O Jacob, and formed you, O Israel*: “Don’t be afraid, for I will protect you. I call you by name, you are mine.

. . . The people of Israel were Abraham’s descendants

ISA 41:8 [GOD:] But *you, Israel my servant, you are the people that I have chosen, the descendants of Abraham, my friend.* GNT

The people of Israel were Abraham’s descendants through Isaac, his second son, and then Jacob, Isaac’s second son. Israel gets its name from Jacob who was renamed “Israel”. (As such, Israel is also sometimes referred to as “Jacob”.) Making the nation of Israel from Abraham’s descendants was a key part of God’s fulfillment of his covenant promise to Abraham that he would give him countless descendants.

God redeemed the Israelites out of Egypt to take them as his own

2SAM 7:23–24 [DAVID, TO GOD:] And *who is like your people Israel, the one nation on earth whom God went to redeem to be his people, making himself a name and doing for them great and awesome things by driving out before your people, whom you redeemed for yourself from Egypt, a nation and its gods? ²⁴And you established for yourself your people Israel to be your people forever.* And you, O LORD, became their God. ESV

By redeeming the Israelites from enslavement in Egypt, God in a sense bought them as his own, making them his people.

God chose Israel out of all the nations to be his holy people

DEUT 7:6 [MOSES, TO THE ISRAELITES:] For *you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.* ESV

Note: Foreigners were accepted into Israel and able to worship God

NUM 15:14–15 [MOSES, TO THE ISRAELITES:] From now on if foreigners who live among you want to make offerings by fire so the smell will be pleasing to the LORD, they must offer them the same way you do. ¹⁵The law is the same for you and for foreigners, and it will be from now on; you and the foreigners are alike before the LORD. NCV™

In making Israel his own people or nation, God did not exclude other people from living among them and worshiping him.

Why do you think God chose to take one nation as his own people?

Why did God choose Israel as his special people?

What do people mean nowadays if they speak of someone “redeeming” themselves? What does “redeem” mean in the Bible?

c) God's Covenant with Israel and the Law

(⇒ I. Jesus Christ and the Law's Diminished Role, in 14. The New Order)

God made a covenant with Israel, based on his law . . .

Ex 34:27–28 *The LORD said to Moses, “Write down these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel.”* ²⁸So he was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights; he did not eat bread, and he did not drink water. He wrote on the tablets *the words of the covenant, the ten commandments.*

. . . If the Israelites obeyed God, then they would be his people and he would be their God

JER 11:4B [GOD, TO THE ISRAELITES:] *Obey me and carry out the terms of the agreement exactly as I commanded you. If you do, you will be my people and I will be your God.*

If Israel kept the covenant by obeying God's commands, then under the covenant they would be God's people and he would be their God.

The core of the law: The Ten Commandments

Ex 20:1–11 Then God spoke all these words: ²“I am the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. ³“*You shall have no other gods besides me.* ⁴“*You shall not make for yourselves an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above, or on earth below, or in the water under the earth.* ⁵*You shall not bow down to them in worship or serve them; because I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the iniquity of the parents, to the third and fourth generations of those who hate me,* ⁶*but showing gracious love to thousands who love me and keep my commandments.* ⁷“*You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, because the LORD will not leave the one who misuses his name unpunished.* ⁸“*Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.* ⁹*Six days you shall labor and do all your work,* ¹⁰*but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. And you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male or female servants, nor your livestock, nor the alien who is within your gates.*

¹¹For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth and the sea, and all that is in them, and he rested on the seventh day. Therefore, the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. ¹²sv

Ex 20:12–17 *“Honor your father and your mother, that you may live a long time in the land the LORD your God is giving to you. ¹³“You shall not murder. ¹⁴“You shall not commit adultery. ¹⁵“You shall not steal. ¹⁶“You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor. ¹⁷“You shall not covet your neighbor’s house. You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that belongs to your neighbor.”*

The Ten Commandments form the fundamentals of the law that God gave through Moses (sometimes referred to as the Mosaic Law). The first four commandments (vv. 1–11 ↑) concern one’s relationship with God. The remaining six (above) concern one’s relationships with other people.

By fully obeying the law, the Israelites would have righteousness and life . . .

DEUT 6:25 [MOSES, TO THE ISRAELITES:] *It will be righteousness for us, if we’re careful to obey all the law before the LORD our God, as he commanded.* ¹sv

LEV 18:5 [GOD, TO THE ISRAELITES:] *So you must keep my statutes and my regulations; anyone who does so will live by keeping them.* I am the LORD.

. . . By obeying, the Israelites would have life and prosperity in the promised land

DEUT 5:33 [MOSES, TO THE ISRAELITES:] *Walk just as he has commanded you so that you may live, that it may go well with you, and that you may live long in the land you are going to possess.*

If they broke the covenant, there would be dreadful consequences – culminating in exile from the land

LEV 26:25, 32–33 [GOD, TO THE ISRAELITES:] *I will bring war on you to punish you for breaking our covenant, and if you gather in your*

cities for safety, I will send incurable diseases among you, and you will be forced to surrender to your enemies. ... ³²I will destroy your land so completely that the enemies who occupy it will be shocked at the destruction. ³³I will bring war on you and scatter you in foreign lands. Your land will be deserted, and your cities left in ruins. GNT

Which of the Ten Commandments do you find the most challenging or need to be reminded of the most?

State some of the differences between the “righteousness” and also the “life” promised in God’s covenant with Israel, and that promised in God’s new covenant with believers.

In what way/s is God’s covenant with Israel relevant to God’s relationship with his people today?

d) The Ark of the Covenant and God's Presence

The construction of the ark of the covenant

Ex 37:1, 6–7 *Bezalel [a skilled craftsman] made the ark of acacia wood; its length was three feet nine inches, its width two feet three inches, and its height two feet three inches. ... ⁶He made an atonement lid of pure gold; its length was three feet nine inches, and its width was two feet three inches. ⁷He made two cherubim of gold; he made them of hammered metal on the two ends of the atonement lid, ...*

The ark was made in accordance with the instructions God had given to Moses (cf. Ex 25:10–20). Note that cherubim (v. 7) are understood to be one of the highest orders of angels.

The ark contained the stone tablets of the covenant

Ex 40:20 *He [Moses] took the testimony and put it in the ark, attached the poles to the ark, and then put the atonement lid on the ark.*

The “testimony” refers to the two stone tablets with the Ten Commandments written on them, which were essentially the terms of the covenant. As such the stone tablets bore “testimony” to God’s covenant with Israel.

The ark signified God’s presence amongst the people, where God would meet with Moses

Ex 25:22 [GOD, TO MOSES:] *I will meet with you there, and from above the atonement lid, from between the two cherubim that are over the ark of the testimony, I will speak with you about all that I will command you for the Israelites.*

The ark brought great power and dreadful effects

JOSH 4:6–7 [JOSHUA, TO THE ISRAELITES:] *The stones will be a reminder to you. When your children ask someday, ‘Why are these stones important to you?’ ⁷tell them how *the water of the Jordan stopped flowing before the ark of the covenant of the LORD. When it crossed the Jordan, the water of the Jordan stopped flowing.* These stones will be a lasting memorial for the Israelites.*

1SAM 5:11 So they [the people of the Philistine city of Ekron] assembled all the leaders of the Philistines and said, “*Get the ark of the God of Israel out of here! Let it go back to its own place so that it won’t kill us and our people!*” *The terror of death was throughout the entire city; God was attacking them very severely there.*

The Philistines had captured the ark and suffered severely as a result.

The ark was kept in the Most Holy Place, shielded by a curtain . . .

EX 26:31–34 [GOD, TO MOSES:] *You are to make a special curtain of blue, purple, and scarlet yarn and fine twisted linen; it is to be made with cherubim, the work of an artistic designer.* ³²*You are to hang it with gold hooks on four posts of acacia wood overlaid with gold, set in four silver bases.* ³³*You are to hang this curtain under the clasps and bring the ark of the testimony in there behind the curtain. The curtain will make a division for you between the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place.* ³⁴*You are to put the atonement lid on the ark of the testimony in the Most Holy Place.*

The Most Holy Place was the inner sanctuary of the tabernacle and later the temple.

. . . Access into the Most Holy Place was greatly restricted

HEB 9:6–8 When everything in the Tent was made ready in this way, the priests went into the first room every day to worship. ⁷*But only the high priest could go into the second room, and he did that only once a year. He could never enter the inner room without taking blood with him, which he offered to God for himself and for sins the people did without knowing they did them.* ⁸*The Holy Spirit uses this to show that the way into the Most Holy Place was not open while the system of the old Holy Tent was still being used.* NCV™

Note that the mention of “the system of the old Holy Tent” (v. 8) refers to the covenant that God made with Israel, of which a marked feature was the tent (or tabernacle) structure and its special configuration.

Containing the ark, the tabernacle and later the temple signified God's presence

Ex 25:8–9 [GOD, TO MOSES:] *Let them make for me a sanctuary, so that I may live among them.* ⁹According to all that I am showing you – the pattern of *the tabernacle* and the pattern of all its furnishings – you must make it exactly so.

1Ki 8:6, 10–13 *The priests brought the ark of the LORD's covenant to its assigned place in the inner sanctuary of the temple, in the most holy place, under the wings of the cherubs. ...* ¹⁰Once the priests left the holy place, *a cloud filled the LORD's temple.* ¹¹*The priests could not carry out their duties because of the cloud; the LORD's glory filled his temple.* ¹²*Then Solomon said, "The LORD has said that he lives in thick darkness.* ¹³*O LORD, truly I have built a lofty temple for you, a place where you can live permanently."*

Note that the term "thick darkness" (v. 12) refers to the dark cloud of God's presence (vv. 10–11).

How did the ark signify God's presence amongst his people?

What was the point of the ark being shielded by a curtain?

In comparison to God's relationship with his people today, what were the advantages and disadvantages of God's presence being tangibly associated with one specific place amongst his people?

e) God's Faithfulness to His Covenant with Israel

The following subsections show that God was faithful to his covenant with Israel, keeping the promises he made with it.

God faithfully led Israel through the desert and provided for them

NEH 9:19–21 [LEVITES, TO GOD:] *Due to your great compassion you did not abandon them in the desert. The pillar of cloud did not stop guiding them in the path by day, nor did the pillar of fire stop illuminating for them by night the path on which they should travel.* ²⁰*You imparted your good Spirit to instruct them. You did not withhold your manna from their mouths; you provided water for their thirst.* ²¹*For forty years you sustained them. Even in the desert they never lacked anything. Their clothes did not wear out and their feet did not swell.*

God promised that none of Israel's enemies would withstand it – which he fulfilled

DEUT 11:25 [MOSES, TO THE ISRAELITES:] *Nobody will be able to resist you; the LORD your God will spread the fear and terror of you over the whole land on which you walk, just as he promised you.*

JOSH 21:44 *The LORD made them secure, in fulfillment of all he had solemnly promised their ancestors. None of their enemies could resist them.*

Conquering its inhabitants, God gave the promised land of Canaan to Israel – as an inheritance

Ps 78:55A *He forced nations out of their way and gave them the land of the nations as their inheritance.* GW

JOSH 21:43 *So the LORD gave Israel all the land he had solemnly promised to their ancestors, and they conquered it and lived in it.*

God duly cared for Israel in the promised land

2CHR 32:22 *The LORD delivered Hezekiah and the residents of Jerusalem from the power of King Sennacherib of Assyria and from all the other nations. He made them secure on every side.*

So, God was faithful to his covenants and promises with Abraham and Israel

Ps 105:8–11, 42 *He remembers his covenant forever, the word that he commanded, for a thousand generations, ⁹the covenant that he made with Abraham, his sworn promise to Isaac, ¹⁰which he confirmed to Jacob as a statute, to Israel as an everlasting covenant, ¹¹saying, “To you I will give the land of Canaan as your portion for an inheritance.” ... ⁴²For he remembered his holy promise, and Abraham, his servant. ESV*

JOSH 21:45 *Not one of the LORD’s faithful promises to the family of Israel was left unfulfilled; every one was realized.*

How has God's faithfulness been evident in your own life? Is there any of God's promises that you have seen his faithfulness to?

What was the significance or importance of the promised land?

How is Joshua 21:45 (in the last subsection) applicable or relevant to believers today?

f) God's Dealings and Covenant with David

David was chosen and anointed by God, as ruler over Israel

1KI 8:16B [GOD:] *I've chosen David to rule my people Israel.* GW

2SAM 23:1 This was David's last composition: *The oracle of David, son of Jesse, an oracle by the valiant one who was exalted— anointed by the God of Jacob, the contented psalm writer of Israel.* ISV

David reigned over Israel, as a powerful and righteous king – undergirded by God

2SAM 5:10, 12 *David became a great and strong ruler, because the LORD All-Powerful was on his side. ... ¹²David knew that the LORD had made him king of Israel and that he had made him a powerful ruler for the good of his people.* CEV

2SAM 8:15 *David was king over all Israel, and he did what was fair and right for all his people.* NCV™

God's covenant with David, promising that David's royal dynasty would last forever

2SAM 7:11B–16 [THE PROPHET NATHAN, TO DAVID:] *The LORD declares to you that he himself will build a dynastic house for you. ¹²When the time comes for you to die, I [God] will raise up your descendant, one of your own sons, to succeed you, and I will establish his kingdom. ¹³He will build a house for my name, and I will make his dynasty permanent. ¹⁴I will become his father and he will become my son. When he sins, I will correct him with the rod of men and with wounds inflicted by human beings. ¹⁵But my loyal love will not be removed from him as I removed it from Saul, whom I removed from before you. ¹⁶Your house and your kingdom will stand before me permanently; your dynasty will be permanent.*

In vv. 11b, 16 “house” refers to a royal dynasty that God would build for David, in response to his desire to build a “house” (v. 13) or temple for God. The “descendant” spoken of in vv. 12–15 initially refers to David's son Solomon, but is generally understood to ultimately speak of the Messiah. As such this covenant

provided the people of Israel with the hope of a permanently secure kingdom (cf. vv. 10–11a) under a godly and powerful king.

Note: God chose Jerusalem, David’s city, as his dwelling place

Ps 132:13–14 *Certainly the LORD has chosen Zion [Jerusalem]; he decided to make it his home. ¹⁴He said, “This will be my resting place forever; I will live here, for I have chosen it.*

God chose the city of Jerusalem, from which David ruled, to be the place which signified his presence among his people – as consummately indicated by the building of God’s temple there. As such it was the center of worship of God. Note that “Zion” was originally the name of one of the hills on which Jerusalem was built, but came to be used to signify all of Jerusalem.

What parallels are there between David and his descendant Jesus Christ?

What parts of the prophecy in 2 Samuel 7:11b–16 are consummately fulfilled in Jesus Christ?

Of what significance is Jerusalem today?

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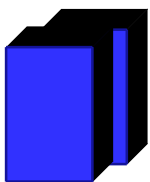
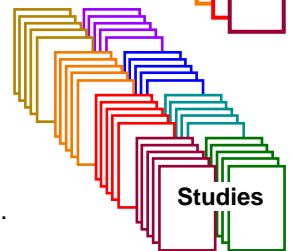
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Through prayer, encouragement and practical assistance we can assist and fellowship with persecuted Christians in their suffering. You can play a vital part in this through contacting one of the organizations listed below. Most produce regular news/prayer letters.

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It provides material and spiritual support in response to needs identified by local Christian leaders.

Christian Faith and Freedom – www.cffreedom.org

It advocates on behalf of and aids persecuted Christians.

Christian Solidarity International – www.csi-int.org

CSI works to defend religious liberty and help persecuted Christians.

Christian Solidarity Worldwide – www.csw.org.uk

It advocates for freedom of religion and justice for persecuted believers.

Compass Direct – www.compassdirect.org

This is a Christian news service providing news, reports, interviews and analyses of situations facing persecuted Christians.

Open Doors – sb.od.org; www.opendoors.org.au

It provides Bibles and other Christian materials, to prepare believers for persecution and equip them to maintain a witness to the Gospel.

Religious Liberty Commission – www.worldevangelicals.org/commissions/rlc/; www.ea.org.au/ea-family/Religious-Liberty.aspx

RLC defends and aids persecuted Christians. See also www.idop.org
Receive weekly updates by sending a blank email to join-rlpb@hub.xc.org.

The Bible League – www.bibleleague.org/persecuted; www.bibleleague.com

It supplies Bibles to persecuted Christians and also provides training.

Voice of the Martyrs – www.persecution.com; www.persecution.com.au

VOM provides Bibles, literature, radio broadcasts and other assistance to help persecuted Christians spread the gospel. They also send material aid.

Then the King will answer, 'I tell you the truth, anything you did for even the least of my people here, you also did for me.' Matthew 25:40 NCV

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