

The **Bible** Unpacked

Intermediate Study Series

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

paul mallison

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

Part B. God and the World: Basics

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 eight booklets in the series, based on the eight parts of the book *The Bible Unpacked - Intermediate Edition*. Each booklet has five chapters, with two sections each. These ten sections can be used for ten 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 lead 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?

6. God's Creation

I. General

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I. General

The formation of the universe is the most astonishing thing that has ever occurred. The Bible claims that God not only created the universe, but that he also created everything in it. Moreover, it claims that God continues to maintain the universe. If we believe that God is capable of doing this, then we should have little trouble in accepting the other claims that the Bible makes about God.

God Made All Things

God made the heavens and earth – and everything in them

You are the only LORD. *You made the heavens, even the highest heavens, with all the stars. You made the earth and everything on it, the seas and everything in them; you give life to everything.*

NEHEMIAH 9:6A NCV™

All that God made is very good

God saw all that he had made – and it was very good! GENESIS 1:31A

God Maintains Creation

Every creature's life is dependent on God

The life of every creature and the breath of all people are in God's hand. JOB 12:10 NCV™

God provides food for all creatures

[DAVID, TO GOD:] *Everything looks to you in anticipation, and you provide them with food on a regular basis.* PSALMS 145:15

God regulates all aspects of the weather

For to the snow he says, 'Fall to earth,' and to the torrential rains, 'Pour down.' JOB 37:6

He makes the clouds rise from the far-off horizons. He makes the lightning flash out in the midst of the rain. He unleashes the wind from the places where he stores it. JEREMIAH 10:13B

God maintains nature

[GOD:] *“While the earth continues to exist, planting time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, and day and night will not cease.”*

GENESIS 8:22

God's promise that these things will continue is indicative of his control over them, regulating and maintaining them.

How God Made and Maintains Creation

God made all things with his wisdom

How numerous are your works, O LORD! In wisdom you have made them all; the earth is filled with your creations. PSALMS 104:24 ISV

The LORD created the earth by his wisdom; by his knowledge he set the sky in place.²⁰ His wisdom caused the rivers to flow and the clouds to give rain to the earth. PROVERBS 3:19–20 GNT

God made all things with his power

[GOD:] *I made the earth, its people, and all its animals with my great power and strength.* JEREMIAH 27:5A NCV™

God made all things by his word

By the word of God heaven was made, and the earth was made from water and with water. 2 PETER 3:5B NCV™

God made and sustains all things through Jesus Christ . . .

All things were created by him [Christ], and apart from him not one thing was created that has been created. JOHN 1:3

He is the one through whom God created the universe, the one whom God has chosen to possess all things at the end.³ He reflects the brightness of God's glory and is the exact likeness of God's own being, sustaining the universe with his powerful word. HEBREWS 1:2B–3A GNT

. . . The Holy Spirit also has a role

[A PSALMIST, TO GOD:] *When you send forth your Spirit, they [creatures] are created, and you renew the face of the ground.* PSALMS 104:30 ESV

Implications of God Being Creator

Because he made everything, all things belong to God

The LORD owns the earth and all it contains, the world and all who live in it. ²For he set its foundation upon the seas, and established it upon the ocean currents. PSALMS 24:1–2

Because he made everything, God is sovereign over all things

The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth. ACTS 17:24A ISV

Because he has made all things, God has the right of sovereignty over all things. God's almighty power and incomparable wisdom enable him to enforce his sovereignty.

Creation shows God's power and wisdom to be incomparable

[JOB, SPEAKING OF GOD:] *He is wise in heart and mighty in strength – who has resisted him and remained safe? ⁵He who removes mountains suddenly, who overturns them in his anger; ⁶he who shakes the earth out of its place so that its pillars tremble; ⁷he who commands the sun and it does not shine and seals up the stars; ⁸he alone spreads out the heavens, and treads on the waves of the sea; ⁹he makes the Bear, Orion, and the Pleiades, and the constellations of the southern sky; ¹⁰he does great and unsearchable things, and wonderful things without number.* JOB 9:4–10

Do you believe that God created the world? Why or why not?

How should we respond to the teaching that everyone's life is dependent on God?

How or in what sense does God provide food for all creatures?

Jesus Christ has a major role in God's making and maintaining of creation. What does this illustrate about how God interacts with his world?

What does God being the creator of us and our environment mean for our relationship with him?

II. God's Creation of People

Arguably the most significant part of God's creation is his creation of people. God not only gives people life and a spirit, he has made people quite unique amongst all creatures. Also, of all his creatures, it is primarily to people that God reveals himself and relates.

Life and Death

God creates people . . .

The rich and the poor are alike in that the LORD made them all.

PROVERBS 22:2 NCV™

. . . God gives people life and breath

He gives life, breath, and everything else to all people. ACTS 17:25B CEV

People's lives are very brief

[DAVID, TO GOD:] *You made my life short, so brief that the time means nothing to you. "Human life is but a breath, ⁶and it disappears like a shadow.* PSALMS 39:5–6A CEV

As many old people would affirm, in a relative sense life is very brief.

Each person is destined to die

It is better to go to a funeral than a feast. For death is the destiny of every person, and the living should take this to heart. ECCLESIASTES 7:2

The Human Spirit

God has made people with a spirit

The LORD – who spread out the heavens, laid the foundation of the earth, and *forms the spirit in a person* – says, . . . ZECHARIAH 12:1B GW

The spirit is at the core of one's being

A person's spirit is the lamp of the LORD; it searches through all of one's innermost being. PROVERBS 20:27 ISV

People are dead without their spirit

For just as *the body without the spirit is dead*, so also faith without works is dead. JAMES 2:26

People's spirits exist after death

They [Jews] continued to stone Stephen while he prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!" ACTS 7:59

Here also are the spirits of those good people who have been made perfect. HEBREWS 12:23B CEV

The reference is to the spirits of righteous people who had died.

The Uniqueness of People

God has made people in his own image

Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, after our likeness, so they may rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move on the earth." ²⁷*God created humankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them.* GENESIS 1:26–27

That God has made people in his own image is evident in that they reflect such things as his personal traits – e.g. aspects of his character and intellect – and that they have a spirit. Additionally, it is noteworthy that although God essentially is spirit, some descriptions of visions or manifestations of God speak of him in terms of a human-like form (cf. Ezekiel 1:26–28; Daniel 7:9).

God has given people an able mind – with which they can think and reason intelligently

Who has *put wisdom in the heart*, or has *imparted understanding to the mind*? JOB 38:36

And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days *he reasoned with them from the Scriptures*, ³*explaining and proving* that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ."

ACTS 17:2–3 ESV

People have the moral capacity to know good from evil

And the LORD God said, “Now that *the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil*, he must not be allowed to stretch out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever.”

GENESIS 3:22

People are to care for and act responsibly towards creation

A righteous person cares for the life of his animal ... PROVERBS 12:10A

[GOD, TO THE BABYLONIANS:] *For you will pay in full for your violent acts against Lebanon; terrifying judgment will come upon you because of the way you destroyed the wild animals living there.*

HABAKKUK 2:17A

The Babylonians’ desolation of the forests of Lebanon (cf. CEV, GNT, NLT) and their destruction of animals contravened humankind’s responsibility towards nature – and they would be punished for it.

Epilogue: God’s Self-Revelation to People

God reveals himself to people

Then the LORD again appeared in Shiloh, for it was in Shiloh that *the LORD had revealed himself to Samuel through the word of the LORD.*

1 SAMUEL 3:21

God reveals himself by what he does

[GOD:] I acted for the sake of my reputation, so that I would not be profaned before *the nations among whom they lived, before whom I revealed myself by bringing them out of the land of Egypt.* EZEKIEL 20:9

By delivering the Israelites out of Egypt, God revealed himself to the surrounding peoples.

Creation perpetually evidences and reveals God to all people

[PAUL, SPEAKING OF WICKED PEOPLE:] *For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them.* ²⁰*For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made.* So they are without excuse. ROMANS 1:19–20 ESV

What is one way that the brevity of our lives should affect our thinking and/or our actions?

What is our "spirit"?

How should the fact that people are made in God's image influence us?

What motivation does Scripture give you to care for the environment?

How could you present (to a non-Christian) the world and how it continues to exist, as evidence for God's existence?

7. God's Sovereignty

I. God's Supreme Authority

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I. God's Supreme Authority

As the one and only God, God reigns supreme in the world. He has supreme power over all things. As such, God defeats his enemies and he fulfills his plans. A realization of this produces submission to and worship of the one and only God.

The LORD Is God – the Only God

Note that God stated that the “LORD” was the name by which he was to be known (cf. Exodus 3:12–15).

The LORD is God

Know that the LORD is God. PSALMS 100:3A NCV™

Now, *O sovereign LORD, you are the true God!* 2 SAMUEL 7:28A

He is God of all people

I am the LORD, the God of all humankind. JEREMIAH 32:27A

Hezekiah prayed before the LORD: “LORD God of Israel, who is enthroned on the cherubs! *You alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth.* 2 KINGS 19:15A

He is the one and only God

[GOD:] *And there is no other god besides me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none besides me.*^{22c} Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! *For I am God, and there is no other.* ISAIAH 45:21B–22 ESV

His deeds show that he is the only God

[DAVID, TO GOD:] *For you are great and do amazing things. You alone are God.* PSALMS 86:10

[GOD:] *See, I am the only God. There are no others. I kill, and I make alive. I wound, and I heal, and no one can rescue you from my power.*

DEUTERONOMY 32:39 GW

God Reigns Supreme

God rules over all

O LORD, you are great, mighty, majestic, magnificent, glorious, and *sovereign over all the sky and earth! You have dominion and exalt yourself as the ruler of all.* ¹²You are the source of wealth and honor; *you rule over all.* You possess strength and might to magnify and give strength to all. 1 CHRONICLES 29:11–12

As such, God rules over all authorities

The glorious God is the only Ruler, *the King of kings and Lord of lords.* 1 TIMOTHY 6:15A CEV

God rules over the earth in righteousness

He rules the world with righteousness; he judges the nations with justice. PSALMS 9:8 GNT

God will reign forever

But *you, O LORD, reign forever; your throne endures from generation to generation.* LAMENTATIONS 5:19

God will impose his absolute rule on all

[JOHN, DESCRIBING A VISION:] Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven saying: *“The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever.”* ¹⁶Then the twenty-four elders who are seated on their thrones before God threw themselves down with their faces to the ground and worshiped God ¹⁷with these words: *“We give you thanks, Lord God, the All-Powerful, the one who is and who was, because you have taken your great power and begun to reign.* REVELATION 11:15–17

The proclamation in v. 15 and the final phrase “have begun to reign” (v. 17) may mean that at this point God has begun to impose his rule on all – the actualization of the kingdom (v. 15) implemented with the imposition of God’s great power (v. 17). Alternatively the past tense may be used here to indicate the certainty of God doing so in the future.

God Defeats His Enemies

No one can effectively oppose God

But he alone is God, and who can oppose him? God does as he pleases, ... JOB 23:13 CEV

[GOD:] *For there is no one like me, and there is no one who can call me to account. There is no ruler who can stand up against me.*

JEREMIAH 49:19B

God destroys his enemies

But he will pay back those people who hate him. He will destroy them, and he will not be slow to pay back those who hate him.

DEUTERONOMY 7:10 NCV™

God Fulfills His Plans

God carries out his plans

[GOD:] *“Be sure of this: Just as I have intended, so it will be; just as I have planned, it will happen.* ISAIAH 14:24B

God does not change his plans

God is not a human being, and he will not lie. He is not a human, and *he does not change his mind. What he says he will do, he does. What he promises, he makes come true.* NUMBERS 23:19 NCV™

No one can thwart God’s plans

Indeed, *the LORD who commands armies has a plan, and who can possibly frustrate it? His hand is ready to strike, and who can possibly stop it?* ISAIAH 14:27

God works everything for his plans

In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of *him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, ...* EPHESIANS 1:11 ESV

God works all things that occur for the fulfillment of his plans.

How should God being the only God affect our attitudes and thoughts?

What reasons are there to believe that God reigns supreme in the world?

Choose a verse that impresses on you the supremacy of God's power. Say why you choose it.

Who are God's enemies and how do they oppose him? What do we know of their defeat?

What plans has God carried out - in the world and/or in the lives of people you know?

II. God's Control over the World

God has power over everything. This includes control over evil powers, nature, the nations of the world and each person's life. Comprehending this is vital to having a sound understanding of God and of his relationship to the world – including his relationship with ourselves.

God Has Control over Evil

God exerts control over evil

[JACOB, REFERRING TO HIS GREEDY UNCLE:] Yet he has cheated me and changed my wages ten times. *But God did not let him harm me.*

GENESIS 31:7 GNT

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] No temptation has overtaken you that is unusual for human beings. *But God is faithful, and he will not allow you to be tempted beyond your strength. Instead, along with the temptation he will also provide a way out, so that you may be able to endure it.* 1 CORINTHIANS 10:13 ISV

God has control over any temptation, whether it originates from Satan or our own sinful nature. This is indicative of his control over evil.

God even uses evil to fulfill his purposes

For God has put into their minds to carry out his purpose by making a decision to give their royal power to the beast until the words of God are fulfilled. REVELATION 17:17

This speaks of kings or world powers of the end times cooperating with the beast or anti-Christ, to unwittingly accomplish God's purpose.

God Has Control over Nature

God directs nature

He loads the clouds with moisture; he scatters his lightning through the clouds. ¹²The clouds go round in circles, wheeling about according to his plans, to carry out all that he commands them over the face of the whole inhabited world. JOB 37:11–12

He sends his command through the earth; swiftly his order reaches its destination. ¹⁶He sends the snow that is white like wool; he spreads the frost that is white like ashes. ¹⁷He throws his hailstones like crumbs. Who can withstand the cold wind he sends? ¹⁸He then orders it all to melt; he breathes on it, and the water flows. PSALMS 147:15–18

God can perform miracles of nature

The LORD's angelic messenger appeared to the woman and said to her, "You are infertile and childless, but you will conceive and have a son. ... ²⁴Manoah's wife gave birth to a son and named him Samson. JUDGES 13:3, 24A

[ELIJAH:] *For this is what the LORD God of Israel says, 'The jar of flour [that was about to run out] will not be empty and the jug of oil will not run out until the day the LORD makes it rain on the surface of the ground.'*" ¹⁵*She [a widow] went and did as Elijah told her; there was always enough food for Elijah and for her and her family. ¹⁶The jar of flour was never empty and the jug of oil never ran out, just as the LORD had promised through Elijah.* 1 KINGS 17:14–16

God Has Control over the Nations

God is in control of the nations

[A PSALMIST, TO GOD:] *For you execute justice among the nations, and govern the people living on earth. (Selah)* PSALMS 67:4B

[GOD:] *This is the plan I have devised for the whole earth; my hand is ready to strike all the nations.*" [Isaiah:] ²⁷*Indeed, the LORD who commands armies has a plan, and who can possibly frustrate it? His hand is ready to strike, and who can possibly stop it?* ISAIAH 14:26–27

What God determines for the whole world does take place, for his power to impose his will extends over all nations. For God "controls every nation" (CEV) – none can prevent him from implementing his purposes concerning them.

God has been in control of the nations throughout history

From one human being he created all races on earth and made them live throughout the whole earth. He himself fixed beforehand

the exact times and the limits of the places where they would live.

ACTS 17:26 GNT

God establishes all ruling authorities

Let every person be subject to *the governing authorities*. For *there is no authority except by God's appointment, and the authorities that exist have been instituted by God.* ROMANS 13:1

God Has Control over Each Person

God has control over people's hearts and minds

When Saul turned to leave Samuel, God changed Saul's heart.

1 SAMUEL 10:9A NCV™

The LORD caused the Egyptians to think well of them, and the Egyptians gave the people everything they asked for. So the Israelites took rich gifts from them. EXODUS 12:36 NCV™

God has control over people's actions . . .

[DANIEL, TO KING BELSHAZZAR:] *But you have not glorified the God who has in his control your very breath and all your ways!* DANIEL 5:23B

. . . Despite people's plans, their steps are directed by God

A person plans his course, but the LORD directs his steps. PROVERBS 16:9

God controls all that happens to people

Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that everything comes – both calamity and blessing? LAMENTATIONS 3:38

[A WISE TEACHER:] *In times of prosperity be joyful, but in times of adversity consider this: God has made one as well as the other, so that no one can discover what the future holds.* ECCLESIASTES 7:14

How should the teaching that God has control over evil influence us?

Is there anything that makes you conscious of God's control over nature? If so, what and why?

To what degree does God impose his control over the nations? What does he do?

How can we reconcile the existence of oppressive regimes with the teaching that God establishes all ruling authorities?

How is God in control of individual lives? To what extent are people's plans subject to God's will?

8. God's Word

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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.

What God’s Word Comprises

God’s word primarily is Scripture

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

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

Every Scripture passage is inspired by God. 2 TIMOTHY 3:16A 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

*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. EXODUS 34:27, 28B GNT

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

God’s word includes his laws

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

God’s word includes his prophecies

[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.* JEREMIAH 36:2

This refers to prophecies (of God’s word) regarding nations.

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

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

Jesus Christ is “the Word of God”

[JOHN, DESCRIBING A VISION OF CHRIST:] He is dressed in clothing dipped in blood, and *he is called the Word of God*. REVELATION 19:13

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.

Note: God has given his word by the Holy Spirit

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

Characteristics of God's Word

God's word is holy, righteous and good

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

God's word is true . . .

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

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

. . . and so what God's word foretells comes true

[JEREMIAH TO JERUSALEM'S PEOPLE:] *The LORD has done what he purposed; he has carried out his word, which he commanded long ago; he has thrown down without pity; he has made the enemy rejoice over you and exalted the might of your foes*. LAMENTATIONS 2:17 GW

God's word is living and active

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

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.

God’s word is powerful

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. HEBREWS 4:12 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

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.* 1 PETER 1:24–25A

Functions of God’s Word

God’s word brings spiritual and eternal life

[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.* ...⁶⁸ Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom would we go? *You have the words of eternal life.* JOHN 6:63, 68

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.

God’s word gives light

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

God’s word gives “light” – guidance and spiritual insight.

God’s word gives hope

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

God had given the psalmist hope by his word, or promise.

God’s word gives joy

The LORD’s precepts are fair and make one joyful. PSALMS 19:8A

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

In what ways do you think God speaks today?

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

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

How can you draw hope and/or joy from God's word?

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, the nation of 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.

God's Covenant with Abraham

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

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.” GENESIS 17:3–8

God made an everlasting covenant with the Israelite's ancestor Abraham, aspects of which were included in God's later covenant with 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 would be blessed through Abraham

[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.* GENESIS 12:3 ESV

Abraham believed God, and was accredited with righteousness

[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.* GENESIS 15:5B–6 ESV

God's Covenant with Israel and the Law

(⇒ I. Jesus Christ and the Law's Diminished Role, in Part C)

God made a covenant with Israel, based on his law

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.* EXODUS 34:27–28

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

[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.* JEREMIAH 11:4B

According to the terms of the covenant, Israel was to obey 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.

Laws for the people's relationship with God

[GOD, TO THE ISRAELITES:] *“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. EXODUS 20:2–11 ISV

The commands in this and the following section are the Ten Commandments. These form the fundamentals of the whole law that God gave through Moses (referred to as the Mosaic Law).

Laws for relationships with other people

“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.”*

EXODUS 20:12–17

By obeying all the law, the Israelites would have righteousness

[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.* DEUTERONOMY 6:25 ISV

God's Dealings and Covenant with David

David was chosen by God, as ruler over Israel

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

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

David became a great and strong ruler, because the LORD All-Powerful was on his side. ... ¹²*David 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.* 2 SAMUEL 5:10, 12 CEV

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

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

[THE PROPHET NATHAN, TO DAVID:] *The LORD declares to you that he himself will build a dynastic house for you.* ¹²*When 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.* ¹³*He will build a house for my name, and I will make his dynasty permanent.* ¹⁴*I 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.* ¹⁵*But my loyal love will not be removed from him as I removed it from Saul, whom I removed from before you.* ¹⁶*Your house and your kingdom will stand before me permanently; your dynasty will be permanent.* 2 SAMUEL 7:11B–16

In vv. 11b, 16 “house” refers to a royal dynasty that God would build for David, in response to David’s desire to build a “house” (v. 13) or temple for God. The “descendant” spoken of in vv. 12–15 refers initially 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.

What is the importance of God's covenant with Abraham to us?

Is God's covenant with Israel relevant in any way to God's relationship with his people today? If so, how?

Which of the Ten Commandments do you need to be more mindful of? How would doing so affect you and your life?

What difference/s was there between the righteousness granted to Abraham and that made available to Israel through the law?

What has God done to fulfill his promise to David that David's dynasty would last forever?

9. The Problem of Sin

I. General

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I. General

Knowing what sin is and what its consequences are is vital to understanding God's relationship with humankind and to appreciating the need for Jesus Christ's mission. It also helps us not to sin by: clarifying what sin is (which this chapter does in general terms); and providing great motivation to avoid sin.

Sin Is Breaking God's Law

Breaking God's law is sin

Whoever sins is guilty of breaking God's law, because sin is a breaking of the law. 1 JOHN 3:4 GNT

As such, all wrongdoing is sin . . .

Doing wrong is always sin ... 1 JOHN 5:17A NCV™

. . . and not doing what we should do is sin

So whoever knows what is good to do and does not do it is guilty of sin. JAMES 4:17

Sin Is against God

Sin is action against God

[MOSES, TO THE ISRAELITES:] *If anyone sins unintentionally by breaking any of the LORD's commands, he is guilty and must pay the penalty. ...* ¹⁹*It is a repayment offering for the sin he committed against the LORD.* LEVITICUS 5:17, 19 GNT

Sin is rebellion against God

[DAVID, TO GOD:] *Drive them out of your presence because of their many sins and their rebellion against you.* PSALMS 5:10B GNT

Thus, sin is hated by God

For I, the LORD, love justice and hate robbery and sin. ISAIAH 61:8A

Sin Is Universal

All people have sinned . . .

All of us have sinned and fallen short of God's glory. ROMANS 3:23 CEV

All fail to measure up to a standard compatible with God's glory.

. . . No one is righteous before God

[DAVID, TO GOD:] Do not enter into judgment with your servant, for *no living person is righteous in your sight.* PSALMS 143:2 ISV

People in fact have a sinful nature

And those who belong to Christ Jesus have put to death *their human nature with all its passions and desires.* GALATIANS 5:24 GNT

Sin Has Intrinsic III Effects

Sin brings spiritual defilement

They became filthy because of what they did. PSALMS 106:39 GW

Sin results in separation from God

[ISAIAH, TO THE PEOPLE OF JUDAH:] *But your sinful acts have alienated you from your God; your sins have caused him to reject you and not listen to your prayers.* ISAIAH 59:2

Sin brings spiritual death

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *When you were spiritually dead because of your sins and because you were not free from the power of your sinful self,* God made you alive with Christ, and he forgave all our sins. COLOSSIANS 2:13 NCV™

Spiritual death involves being cut off from God – “dead to God” – without his Holy Spirit, who brings spiritual life.

Sin also brings enslavement to sin

Jesus answered them, “I tell you the solemn truth, *everyone who practices sin is a slave of sin.* JOHN 8:34

Sin Brings God’s Anger and Death

Sin makes one subject to God’s anger

Actually *all of us were like them and lived according to our natural desires, doing whatever suited the wishes of our own bodies and minds*. In our natural condition *we, like everyone else, were destined to suffer God’s anger*. EPHESIANS 2:3 GNT

Here Paul refers to how all people have lived sinful lives, making them subject to God’s anger.

Sin results in physical death

Therefore, just as *sin entered the world through one man [Adam], and death through sin, so death spread to everyone, because all have sinned*. ROMANS 5:12 ISV

People may experience God’s wrath and judgment for sin in various forms during their lifetime, but common to all is the judgment of physical death. Note that the verse makes reference to death initially coming as a consequence of Adam’s original sin.

Furthermore, sin brings the prospect of eternal “death”

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] So what benefit did you then reap from those things that you are now ashamed of? For *the end of those things is death*. ... ²³*For the payoff of sin is death*, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. ROMANS 6:21, 23

Particularly in view of the contrast with “eternal life” (v. 23), “death” (vv. 21, 23) appears to primarily refer to or at least encompass what is sometimes referred to as eternal “death”. Because of his justice God demands that unforgiven sin be punished with eternal “death” or destruction, involving eternal separation from God in hell. A complementary reason for this “death” is that sin makes separation from God necessary, because of his holiness.

Give a definition of sin.

In what way/s is our nature a “sinful” nature?

What are some consequences that people experience because of their own sin?

What does it mean to be “spiritually dead” (Col 2:13)?

Choose one aspect of the teaching on sin in this study which you think people often overlook. If people took this to heart, how might it change them?

II. The Law's Provision for Israel's Sin

(► I. Jesus Christ and the Law's Diminished Role, in Part C)

In the law on which his covenant with Israel was based, God made provision for atonement to be made for anyone who sinned, and so for the sinner to be forgiven. This allowed the Israelites to remain in their covenant relationship with him, providing that they did not actually give up following God and his laws, as per the terms of the covenant.

The NT contains numerous references to the Mosaic Law's provision for Israel's sin. An understanding of what this provision involved enables us to more fully comprehend why Jesus Christ came and the significance of his work. For many of the concepts involved in Jesus Christ's work have their origin in the law's stipulations for making offerings for atonement for sin. These aspects of the law actually foreshadowed – and would be superseded by – what Jesus Christ would do and implement.

Offerings for Atonement for Sinners

An animal was offered to make atonement for one who sinned

If any person sins unintentionally, then he must bring a yearling female goat for a purification offering. ²⁸And the priest must make atonement for the person who sins unintentionally — when he sins unintentionally before the LORD — to make atonement for him, and he will be forgiven. NUMBERS 15:27–28

When a person sinned the person had to bring an animal for a priest to sacrifice as an offering of a life to make atonement for them. Biblical atonement is where God accepts such an offering or sacrifice of a living being as a substitute for the life of a person who has sinned – the person's life otherwise being required as punishment for their sin. As such, God accepts the sacrifice as payment for the person's sin. The result is that sin is taken away – and so the sinner is forgiven, pronounced righteous and reconciled to God.

Animals brought as offerings were to be without defect

If this person [who had sinned] brings a lamb as his offering for sin, he must bring a female that has nothing wrong with it. LEVITICUS 4:32 NCV™

The sinner laid hands on the offering, signifying it as a substitute

He must lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it will be accepted for him to make atonement on his behalf. LEVITICUS 1:4

This practice appears to have signified that the animal was a substitute for the sinner. Moreover, it may also have signified the transfer of the person's sins to the animal (cf. Leviticus 16:21–22).

The Blood of the Offerings

The blood of the offerings for sin featured in making atonement

Then *the high priest must bring some of the blood of the bull to the Meeting Tent,*¹⁷ *and that priest must dip his finger in the blood and sprinkle some of the blood seven times before the LORD toward the front of the veil–canopy.*¹⁸ *He must put some of the blood on the horns of the altar which is before the LORD in the Meeting Tent, and all the rest of the blood he must pour out at the base of the altar of burnt offering that is at the entrance of the Meeting Tent.*¹⁹ Then the priest must take all its fat and offer the fat up in smoke on the altar.²⁰ He must do with the rest of the bull just as he did with the bull of the sin offering; this is what he must do with it. *So the priest will make atonement on their behalf and they will be forgiven.*

LEVITICUS 4:16–20

As this passage illustrates, the blood of animals sacrificed as offerings to make atonement for sinners featured prominently in the instructions given for presenting the offerings. The reason was the correlation of blood with life (as discussed in the following subsection). The blood signified the life of the animal, given as a substitute for the life of the sinner (as reflected in the previous subsection).

For the life of a creature is in its blood

[GOD:] ... *for the life of every living thing is in the blood. So I myself have assigned it to you on the altar to make atonement for your lives, for the blood makes atonement by means of the life.* LEVITICUS 17:11

Blood sustains life and so is often correlated with life.

The Role of the Priests

God designated Aaron and his descendants as priests

[GOD, TO MOSES:] And you, *bring near to you your brother Aaron and his sons with him from among the Israelites, so that they may minister as my priests – Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar, Aaron’s sons.* EXODUS 28:1

[GOD, TO MOSES:] *And the priesthood shall be theirs by a statute forever.* Thus you shall ordain Aaron and his sons. EXODUS 29:9B ESV

When God made his covenant with Israel, he instituted the Aaronic or Levitical priesthood as an integral aspect of the covenant law, in particular in regard to the regulations concerning the people’s relationship with himself.

The priests made the offerings for people when they sinned, to make atonement for them

And the priest shall make atonement for him [a person who had sinned] with the ram of the guilt offering before the LORD for his sin that he has committed, and he shall be forgiven for the sin that he has committed. LEVITICUS 19:22 ESV

The high priest made atonement yearly for Israel as a whole

“The priest who is anointed and ordained to act as high priest in place of his father is to make atonement. He is to put on the linen garments, the holy garments,³³ and he is to purify the Most Holy Place, he is to purify the Meeting Tent and the altar, and he is to make atonement for the priests and for all the people of the assembly.³⁴ This is to be a perpetual statute for you to make atonement for the Israelites for all their sins once a year.” LEVITICUS 16:32–34A

The Day of Atonement was to be observed once each year, for the high priest to cleanse the nation as a whole of all sin. It was the most important observance of the OT rituals, the only time the high priest could enter the Most Holy Place.

Note that the Most Holy Place was where the ark of the covenant was kept. The ark was a box-like structure which contained the stone tablets on which were written the Ten Commandments, the basis of God’s covenant with Israel. The ark signified God’s presence amongst the Israelites.

However, Israel did not keep God's law and broke his covenant

Samaria [the capital city of northern Israel] fell because *the Israelites did not obey the LORD their God, but broke the covenant he had made with them and disobeyed all the laws given by Moses, the servant of the LORD. They would not listen and they would not obey.*

2 KINGS 18:12 GNT

Despite the law's provision for Israel's sin, the Israelites as a whole persisted in sin – rebelling against God and breaking his covenant with them. This showed that ultimately the law was not sufficient to deal with sin.

Explain as simply as you can the concept of making atonement for a person who has sinned.

What was the significance of blood being shed in offerings for sin?

Why was there a need for a priest to offer a sacrifice to God on behalf of a person?

Why do you think that the Israelites persisted in sin and broke God's covenant with them?

How are God's people today better able than the Israelites to resist sin?

10. God's Judgment

I. Basics

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I. Basics

The fact that God does and will judge us is one of the Bible's key teachings, without which the significance of other key Bible teachings is lost – notably that of salvation. An understanding of it is also vital to understanding God himself. Additionally, bear in mind that God's judgment – being just and righteous – actually gives his people much reason to be encouraged.

God Is the Judge of the World

God is judge – of the whole earth

The heavens declare his fairness, for *God is judge*. PSALMS 50:6

[ABRAHAM, TO GOD:] *You are the judge of all the earth ...* GENESIS 18:25B CEV

As such, God makes judgments in the world

He is the LORD our God; *he carries out judgment throughout the earth*. 1 CHRONICLES 16:14

God makes himself known by his judgment

[GOD, TO THE PEOPLE OF EDOM:] I will deal with you according to your anger, and according to your envy, by which you acted spitefully against them [the people of Israel]. *I will reveal myself to them when I judge you*. EZEKIEL 35:11B

Reasons for God's Judgment

God's judgment is to punish sin and unfaithfulness . . .

[DANIEL, TO GOD:] *All Israel has broken your law and turned away by not obeying you. Therefore you have poured out on us the judgment solemnly threatened in the law of Moses the servant of God, for we have sinned against you*. DANIEL 9:11

[GOD, PRONOUNCING JUDGMENT ON KING ZEDEKIAH:] *I will bring him to Babylon and judge him there because of the unfaithfulness he committed against me*. EZEKIEL 17:20B

. . . and God's judgment is to discipline God's people

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] But *when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined* so that we may not be condemned with the world.

1 CORINTHIANS 11:32

God's judgment is to punish the wicked

But by the same word the present heavens and earth have been reserved for fire, by being kept for *the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly*. 2 PETER 3:7

God's judgment is also to reward God's people

[ELDERS IN HEAVEN, TO GOD:] The nations were enraged, but your wrath has come, and *the time has come for the dead to be judged, and the time has come to give to your servants, the prophets, their reward, as well as to the saints and to those who revere your name, both small and great*, and the time has come to destroy those who destroy the earth. REVELATION 11:18

As well as punishment for wrongdoing, God's judgment includes reward for godliness.

God's Judgment Is Just

God judges righteously and justly

This is evidence of God's righteous judgment, to make you worthy of the kingdom of God, for which in fact you are suffering.

2 THESSALONIANS 1:5

For he has fixed a day in which *he will judge the whole world with justice* by means of a man he has chosen. ACTS 17:31A GNT

God judges people with knowledge of all their deeds

[JEREMIAH, TO GOD:] *You see everything people do. You reward each of them for the way they live and for the things they do*. JEREMIAH 32:19B

One reason why God's judgment is just is that he judges people with knowledge of all their deeds – as well as of all their thoughts and motives (as per the following subsection). As such he can make judgments with knowledge of all the relevant information.

God takes into account thoughts and motives

[JEREMIAH:] So I said to the LORD, “O LORD who rules over all, *you are a just judge! You examine people’s hearts and minds.* JEREMIAH 11:20A

God judges and repays people according to what they do

[PAUL:] But because of your stubborn and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath, *when God’s righteous judgment will be revealed.* ⁶For *he will repay everyone according to what that person has done:* ... ROMANS 2:5–6 ISV

God gives fair warning, allowing for judgment to be avoided

[GOD:] *There are times, Jeremiah, when I threaten to uproot, tear down, and destroy a nation or kingdom.* ⁸*But if that nation I threatened stops doing wrong, I will cancel the destruction I intended to do to it.* JEREMIAH 18:7–8

What is said here regarding nations is also applicable to individuals.

How should the assertion that God is the judge of the world encourage us?

In what ways does God discipline and cleanse his people today?

What aspects of the above teaching show God's judgment to be just and fair?

How does knowing that we will be judged and repayed according to what we have done, influence what you do?

If God did not judge us, would there have been any need for Jesus Christ to die?

II. The Manifestation of God’s Judgment

➔ *I. Jesus Christ’s Return and the Final Judgment, in Part C)*

The topic of God’s judgment – particularly its manifestation – is often avoided, as it contains much that is anything but “nice”. However it contains some of the most awe-inspiring teaching, and even reason for hope for God’s people.

Means of God’s Judicial Retribution

The following list is by no means exhaustive.

Angels

[A PSALMIST, REFERRING TO GOD:] *He inflicted his burning anger, wrath, indignation, and distress, sending destroying angels among them.* PSALMS 78:49 ISV

Nature

The LORD sent darkness and made the land dark, but the Egyptians turned against what he said. ²⁹So he changed their water into blood and made their fish die. ³⁰Then their country was filled with frogs, even in the bedrooms of their rulers. ³¹The LORD spoke and flies came, and gnats were everywhere in the country. ³²He made hail fall like rain and sent lightning through their land. ³³He struck down their grapevines and fig trees, and he destroyed every tree in the country. ³⁴He spoke and grasshoppers came; the locusts were too many to count. ³⁵They ate all the plants in the land and everything the earth produced. PSALMS 105:28–35 NCV™

Nations

[GOD:] *Look, I am about to empower the Babylonians, that ruthless and greedy nation. They sweep across the surface of the earth, seizing dwelling places that do not belong to them. ... ¹²...*
 [Habakkuk:] *LORD, you have made them your instrument of judgment. Protector, you have appointed them as your instrument of punishment.* HABAKKUK 1:6, 12B

Characteristics of God's Judicial Retribution

Note that not all instances of God's judicial retribution display all of the following characteristics – certainly not to the extent of which they are spoken of here. Much of the judgment spoken of in this section is conclusive in its purpose, bringing the finality of death – as opposed to God's disciplinary judgment.

Awesome power

The sounds of battle will resound to the ends of the earth. For the LORD will bring charges against the nations. He will pass judgment on all humankind and will hand the wicked over to be killed in war.' The LORD so affirms it! ³²The LORD who rules over all says, 'Disaster will soon come on one nation after another. A mighty storm of military destruction is rising up from the distant parts of the earth.'

JEREMIAH 25:31–32

Inescapable

[PAUL:] *And do you think, whoever you are, when you judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself, that you will escape God's judgment?* ROMANS 2:3

Terrifying

Destruction, devastation, and desolation! Their hearts faint, their knees tremble, each stomach churns, each face turns pale! NAHUM 2:10

For if we choose to go on sinning after we have received the full knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, ²⁷but only a terrifying prospect of judgment and a raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. HEBREWS 10:26–27 ISV

Horrific consequences

[GOD, CONCERNING PHARAOH:] *I will throw you into an open field, where birds and animals will come to feed on your body. ⁵I will spread your rotting flesh over the mountains and in the valleys, ⁶and your blood will flow throughout the land and fill up the streams.*

EZEKIEL 32:4–6 CEV

The Wicked and God’s Pending Judgment

Questioning of God’s apparent lack of judgment on the wicked

[JEREMIAH:] LORD, you have always been fair whenever I have complained to you. However, *I would like to speak with you about the disposition of justice. Why are wicked people successful? Why do all dishonest people have such easy lives?* JEREMIAH 12:1

However, the situation of the wicked is precarious . . .

These people [the wicked] may prosper, but they will never feel secure about life. ²³*God may let them feel confident and self-reliant, but his eyes are on their ways.* JOB 24:22B–23 GW

. . . In due time God does take action against the wicked

[GOD:] *To me belong vengeance and recompense. In due time their feet will slip, because their time of calamity is near and the things prepared for them draw near.* DEUTERONOMY 32:35 ISV

Moreover, the wicked reap what they sow, brought down by their own evil

[ELIPHAZ:] Even as I have seen, *those who plow iniquity and those who sow trouble reap the same.* JOB 4:8

The violence done by the wicked will drag them away because they refuse to do what is right. PROVERBS 21:7

The future of the wicked contrasts with that of the righteous

[A PSALMIST, SPEAKING OF A RIGHTEOUS PERSON:] *For he will never be upended; others will always remember one who is just.* ⁷*He does not fear bad news. He is confident; he trusts in the LORD.* ⁸*His resolve is firm; he will not succumb to fear before he looks in triumph on his enemies.* ⁹*He generously gives to the needy; his integrity endures. He will be vindicated and honored.* ¹⁰*When the wicked see this, they will worry; they will grind their teeth in frustration and melt away; the desire of the wicked will perish.* PSALMS 112:6–10

Although a righteous person may fall seven times, he gets up again, but the wicked will be brought down by calamity. PROVERBS 24:16

God's Judgment of Israel – and His Mercy

Israel failed to keep God's laws and broke his covenant . . .

[GOD:] *They have gone back to the evil ways of their ancestors of old who refused to obey what I told them. They, too, have paid allegiance to other gods and worshiped them. Both the nation of Israel and the nation of Judah have violated the covenant I made with their ancestors.* JEREMIAH 11:10

Despite the Mosaic Law's provision for Israel's sin, the Israelites as a whole persisted in sin – rebelling against God and breaking his covenant with them. This showed that ultimately the law was not sufficient to deal with sin.

. . . Eventually God decided to destroy unfaithful Israel

[GOD:] *My people, you abandoned me and walked away. I am tired of showing mercy; that's why I'll destroy you ⁷by scattering you like straw blown by the wind. I will punish you with sorrow and death, because you refuse to change your ways.* JEREMIAH 15:6–7 CEV

But God promised to spare a remnant of Israel

[ISAIAH, SPEAKING A MESSAGE FROM GOD:] *Those who remain in Judah will take root in the ground and bear fruit. ³¹For a remnant will leave Jerusalem; survivors will come out of Mount Zion. The intense devotion of the sovereign LORD to his people will accomplish this.*

2 KINGS 19:30–31

Note that “Judah” was the name of the southern Israelite kingdom and that “Mount Zion” alludes to Jerusalem, with Zion originally being the name of one of the hills on which Jerusalem was built.

How do you think God may carry out his judicial retribution in the present time? Are there any happenings that you think may be a manifestation of God's judgment?

What do you think about God's judgment at times involving horrendous consequences? Do you think it is fair?

Why do you think that God's judgment of the wicked is not more immediate?

Explain the concept of "reaping" what one "sows".

What lessons can we learn from Israel and its experience of God's judgment and mercy?

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Overview of *The Bible Unpacked*


There are seven editions of *The Bible Unpacked*, as shown below. Each edition is an abbreviated version of the next longest edition. As such they have similar structures. Four of the editions have studies based on them, with the same text along with questions. For more details and free downloads of all the material, go to www.thebibleunpacked.net.

 **Two-Minute Edition:** Key Bible teachings for people “on the run”
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 **Pocket Edition:** Key Bible teachings for seekers of truth
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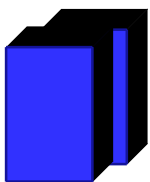
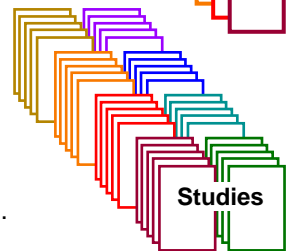
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An Appeal on Behalf of Persecuted Christians

Over 200 million Christians in at least 60 countries are denied basic human rights solely because of their faith. (Source: World Evangelical Alliance) Every year many Christians are killed because of their faith.

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.

Barnabas Fund – www.barnabasfund.org

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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