

Part D. God and His Own People

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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for believers growing in the faith

Part D. God and His Own People

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 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?

16. The Standing of God's People

I. Belonging to God

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I. Belonging to God

This chapter looks at the standing or position of God's people in relationship to God. Probably the most basic aspect of this is that they belong to God, as his people. As such the relationship between believers and God is both a strong one and a close one. This is underlined by them being his family and also his church.

Prologue: God Draws People to Himself

God chooses people (to be his people)

[JESUS:] If the Lord had not shortened those days, no one would be saved. But for the sake of *the elect whom he has chosen*, he has shortened those days. MARK 13:20 ISV

These verses illustrate that the Bible teaches that God chooses some people to be his, and so to be saved. Yet the Bible also teaches that God desires and provides for the salvation of all people (cf. God invites all people to come to him and be saved, in Part E). In coming to terms with this “tension” in Scripture, one should bear in mind that as the Bible teaches both “sides”, the truth lies in both of them, as opposed to a position that is a compromise of both.

God moves people to believe and turn to Jesus Christ

[JESUS:] *No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him*, and I will raise him up at the last day. JOHN 6:44

But among them [believers] were some men from Cyprus and Cyrene who came to Antioch and began talking to the Hellenistic Jews too, proclaiming the Lord Jesus. ²¹*The hand of the Lord was with them, and a large number of people believed and turned to the Lord.* ²²When the church in Jerusalem heard this news, they sent Barnabas all the way to Antioch. ²³When he arrived, *he rejoiced to see what the grace of God had done*, and with a hearty determination he continuously encouraged them all to remain faithful to the Lord. ACTS 11:20–23 ISV

The people's belief and turning to the Lord (v. 21b) is attributed to neither how the message was presented nor the people's own initiative, but to the “hand of the Lord” (v. 21a) – evidencing “the grace of God” (v. 23).

God's People Belong to God

God's people belong to him

[PETER, TO BELIEVERS:] However, you are chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, *people who belong to God*. 1 PETER 2:9A GW

For they are God's people . . .

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *God loves you and has chosen you as his own special people*. COLOSSIANS 3:12A CEV

. . . and God is their God

[ABIJAH, KING OF JUDAH:] *But as for us, the LORD is our God* and we have not rejected him. 2 CHRONICLES 13:10A

God's people likewise belong to Jesus Christ

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] If we live, it is for the Lord that we live, and if we die, it is for the Lord that we die. So *whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord*. ROMANS 14:8 GNT

God's People Are His Family

Each believer belongs to the family of God

[PAUL, TO NON-JEWISH BELIEVERS:] Now you who are not Jewish are not foreigners or strangers any longer, but are citizens together with God's holy people. *You belong to God's family*. EPHESIANS 2:19 NCV™

God is their Father

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] To all those loved by God in Rome, called to be saints: Grace and peace to you from *God our Father* and the Lord Jesus Christ! ROMANS 1:7

They are God's children

But to all who have received him [Jesus Christ] – those who believe in his name – *he has given the right to become God's children* ¹³–*children not born by human parents or by human desire or a husband's decision, but by God*. JOHN 1:12–13

Those who accept Jesus and believe in him (v. 12a) are enabled to become God’s children (v. 12b) – born of God (v. 13) into spiritual life.

As God’s children, they are also heirs of God

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *And if children, then heirs (namely, heirs of God and also fellow heirs with Christ)* – if indeed we suffer with him so we may also be glorified with him. ROMANS 8:17

God’s People Are His Church

(⇒ 26. *Being One Body*, in Part F)

God’s people form his church

[PAUL, TO THE EPHESIAN CHURCH LEADERS:] Watch out for yourselves and for all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to *shepherd the church of God* that he obtained with the blood of his own Son. ACTS 20:28

The term “church” denotes an assembly or body of believers that belong to God. Additionally, it can be used more generally of God’s people as a whole – the worldwide church.

The church is God’s temple, in which God dwells by his Spirit

[PAUL, TO THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH:] Do you not know that *you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you?* 1 CORINTHIANS 3:16

He [Jesus Christ] is the one who holds the whole building together and *makes it grow into a sacred temple dedicated to the Lord.* ²²*In union with him you too are being built together with all the others into a place where God lives through his Spirit.* EPHESIANS 2:21–22 GNT

Jesus Christ is the ruler of God’s church

But *Christ is faithful as a son over God’s house.* HEBREWS 3:6A

This speaks of Jesus Christ being “in charge” (CEV, GNT, NLT) of God’s house or church – i.e. its ruler or Lord.

What role does God play in a person becoming a Christian? What does the person do?

Why do Christians actually belong to God?

What is one significant way in which belonging to the family of God should affect our relationships with other Christians?

What are some key characteristics that mark the church as different from other organizations?

In what sense is the church God's temple? How should this affect the way we relate to one another in our church life?

II. Being ‘in’ Jesus Christ

Arguably the most fundamental change in the standing of God’s people in relationship to him that followed what Jesus Christ accomplished, is that they are now “in” Jesus Christ. Being “in” Jesus Christ involves the association or correlation of believers with Jesus Christ, by which God views them in association with his Son.

It is based on, or at least connected with, their spiritual union with Jesus Christ – in which they participate with him in such things as: his victory over sin and death; his life; and other blessings he has secured. (See also the comment below in *God’s people are united with Jesus Christ*.) As such it has great significance in the relationship of believers to God.

Note that expressions like “in Jesus Christ” sometimes have other meanings, such as “through Jesus Christ”. While the verses in this section have been interpreted here as using such expressions to speak of believers being “in” Jesus Christ, in some instances the meaning is debatable.

God’s People Are ‘in’ Jesus Christ

God’s people are “in” Jesus Christ

From Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints [in Ephesus], *the faithful in Christ Jesus*. EPHESIANS 1:1

Jesus Christ identifies himself with God’s people

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™

The King in this parable represents Jesus Christ himself. Commentators generally interpret “my people” to be referring to Christians.

God’s people live with Jesus Christ

[PAUL:] For we also are weak in him, but *we will live together with him*, because of God’s power toward you. 2 CORINTHIANS 13:4B

The Significance of Being 'in' Jesus Christ

Generally speaking at least, the spiritual standing and blessings that believers have are based on them being "in" Jesus Christ. As referred to earlier, this means that they are granted by God the standing and blessings that Jesus Christ has attained on behalf of those so associated with him.

"In" Jesus Christ God's people are redeemed and forgiven . . .

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] He delivered us from the power of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of *the Son he loves*, ¹⁴*in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.* COLOSSIANS 1:13–14

. . . "In" Jesus Christ they have righteousness

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] God made the one who did not know sin to be sin for us, so *that in him we would become the righteousness of God.* 2 CORINTHIANS 5:21

"In" Jesus Christ believers share in the righteousness of God (cf. GNT).

"In" Jesus Christ believers are identified with him in his death, resurrection and life

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *In him you also were circumcised* – not, however, with a circumcision performed by human hands, but *by the removal of the fleshly body, that is, through the circumcision done by Christ.* ¹²*Having been buried with him in baptism, you also have been raised with him through your faith in the power of God who raised him from the dead.* ¹³*And even though you were dead in your transgressions and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, he [God] nevertheless made you alive with him [Christ], having forgiven all your transgressions.* COLOSSIANS 2:11–13

Verses 11–12 speak of one's sinful nature being cut off through one being buried and raised with Christ. Following on from this, Paul speaks of believers being given life with Christ (v. 13).

God's People Are One Body 'in' Jesus Christ

All believers – including Jews and Gentiles, slaves and free – are one body “in” Jesus Christ

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female – for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.* GALATIANS 3:28

Oneness in Jesus Christ takes primacy over all distinctions. In him “there is no difference” (GNT, NCV) between contrasting groups such as Jews and Gentiles, slaves and free people, and males and females. For no group is spiritually superior to another, and all are equal before God (cf. Ephesians 6:8–9). Note that the use of “Greek”, as opposed to “Jew”, appears to denote all Gentiles.

The church is in fact the body of Christ

Now *the church is his body, the fullness of him* who fills all in all.

EPHESIANS 1:23

The description of the church as the “body” of Christ figuratively depicts the spiritual union of Jesus Christ with his people, and points to the oneness that his people have together in their relationship to Christ.

Jesus Christ is the head of the body

He is the head of the body, the church, as well as the beginning, the firstborn from among the dead, so that he himself may become first in all things. COLOSSIANS 1:18

Epilogue: God's People Relate to God through Christ

Jesus Christ's death and priesthood have opened the way into God's presence for God's people

[THE WRITER, TO BELIEVERS:] So, brothers and sisters, *we are completely free to enter the Most Holy Place without fear because of the blood of Jesus' death.* ²⁰*We can enter through a new and living way that Jesus opened for us. It leads through the curtain—Christ's body.* ²¹*And since we have a great priest over God's house,* ²²*let us come near to God with a sincere heart and a sure faith, because we*

have been made free from a guilty conscience, and our bodies have been washed with pure water. HEBREWS 10:19–22 NCV™

The reference to Jesus Christ's body as "the curtain" (v. 20) is drawing a parallel between: his death which opened a way for believers to confidently enter into God's presence; and the curtain which the high priest went through to enter the Most Holy Place of God's presence, in the tabernacle and later in the temple.

God's people have access to God through Jesus Christ – by the Holy Spirit

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *It is through Christ that all of us, Jews and Gentiles, are able to come in the one Spirit into the presence of the Father.* EPHESIANS 2:18 GNT

Verses such as this which speak of God's people relating to God (e.g. praying to him) "through" Jesus Christ, appear to have in view one or more of the following three concepts: Jesus Christ's death opening the way into God's presence; Jesus Christ's priesthood; and God's people being "in" Jesus Christ. All three are aspects of Jesus Christ's mediatory role in a believer's relationship with God.

What does being “in Jesus Christ” mean?

What are the implications or blessings of being “in Jesus Christ”?

In what sense do believers live with Jesus Christ?

What sorts of things should we do as working members of the body of Christ?

What do you think relating to God through Jesus Christ involves?

17. Keys to God's Interaction with His People

I. Basics

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I. Basics

This section looks at some basic factors underlying God's interaction with his people. They show that God's relationship with his people is not an aloof, impersonal one – far from it. God is always with his people and they can actually know him. Complementary to this is God's great love and steadfast faithfulness towards his people. Undergirding all God's interaction with his people is his truly amazing grace.

God Is Always with His People

God and Jesus Christ are always with their people

[GOD:] *Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you.* JOSHUA 1:5B ESV

[JESUS:] *And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.* MATTHEW 28:20B

Note that most of what this and the following chapters in *Part D. God and His Own People* say about God is also applicable to Jesus Christ.

God is with his people wherever they go . . .

Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for *the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.* JOSHUA 1:9B ESV

. . . and God also goes before them

The LORD himself will go before you. He will be with you; he will not leave you or forget you. Don't be afraid and don't worry. DEUTERONOMY 31:8 NCV™

God is with his people in trouble – and sees them through it

God is our refuge and strength, *an ever-present help in times of trouble.* PSALMS 46:1 GW

[GOD:] *When you pass through the waters, I am with you; when you pass through the streams, they will not overwhelm you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not harm you.* ISAIAH 43:2

God Knows His People

God and Jesus Christ know their people

The LORD said to Moses, “I will do this thing also that you have requested, for you have found favor in my sight, and *I know you by name.*” EXODUS 33:17

[JESUS, SPEAKING OF HIMSELF AS “THE GOOD SHEPHERD”:] *He calls his own sheep by name* and leads them out. ... ¹⁴“I am the good shepherd. *I know my own* and my own know me – ... JOHN 10:3B, 14

In Exodus 33:17, “I know you by name” indicates: intimate knowledge – “I know you very well” (GNT, NCV); and a personal relationship – “I know you personally” (AMP); “you are my friend” (NLT, cf. CEV). A similar comment could probably be made regarding the like expression in John 10:3b.

God and Jesus also know all their people's needs and troubles

Do not be like them, for *your Father knows what you need before you ask him.* MATTHEW 6:8

[JESUS CHRIST, TO THE CHURCH IN EPHESUS:] *I know the distress you are suffering and your poverty* (but you are rich). *I also know the slander against you* by those who call themselves Jews and really are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. REVELATION 2:9

God Loves and Is Faithful to His People

God loves his people greatly

[DAVID, TO GOD:] You are good to us and forgiving, *full of constant love for all who pray to you.* PSALMS 86:5 GNT

Wicked people have many troubles, but *the LORD's love surrounds those who trust him.* PSALMS 32:10 NCV™

God's love is with his people always

[GOD, SPEAKING OF DAVID:] *My steadfast love I will keep for him forever,* and my covenant will stand firm for him. PSALMS 89:28 ESV

God's love is “steadfast” – constant and reliable.

God is faithful to his people

The LORD always proves faithful and reliable to those who follow the demands of his covenant. PSALMS 25:10

God faithfully keeps his promises to his people

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

God Shows Grace to His People

What God does for his people is based on his “grace” – his free and undeserved favour. God’s grace in the believer’s salvation is discussed earlier (cf. *As such, we are justified and made righteous by God’s grace, through Jesus Christ – not by law . . . and . . . We are saved by God’s grace rather than by works*, in Part C). This section speaks of the ongoing role of God’s grace in his people’s lives.

God shows much grace towards his people

[PAUL, TO THE CORINTHIANS:] And in their [needy believers’] prayers on your behalf they long for you because of *the extraordinary grace God has shown to you.* 2 CORINTHIANS 9:14

Here Paul speaks of God’s grace in moving the Corinthians to generously give towards supporting needy believers.

By grace God’s people are given spiritual blessings

Out of the fullness of his [Christ’s] grace he has blessed us all, giving us one blessing after another. JOHN 1:16 GNT

By grace God’s people are strengthened

[THE WRITER, TO BELIEVERS:] Do not let all kinds of strange teachings lead you from the right way. *It is good to receive inner strength from God’s grace*, and not by obeying rules about foods; those who obey these rules have not been helped by them. HEBREWS 13:9 GNT

If we took the reality of God's presence with us to heart, how would it affect the way we think and act?

How do or how can God's people actually know God?

How does God show his love to you?

What is one of God's promises that you rely on (or try to rely on) in everyday life?

What does "grace" mean? Give a brief description of God's grace.

II. God’s Holy Spirit in His People

God’s incomparable gift of his Holy Spirit is critical to God’s relationship with each of his people – including God’s work in and through them. In part at least, this is due to the Holy Spirit being the prime means by which God renews and helps believers.

God Gives the Holy Spirit to His People

God gives his people his Holy Spirit, to live in them

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] And hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through *the Holy Spirit who was given to us*. ROMANS 5:5

[PAUL, TO TIMOTHY:] Protect that good thing [the truth] entrusted to you, through *the Holy Spirit who lives within us*. 2 TIMOTHY 1:14

Having the Holy Spirit shows a person is one of God’s people . . .

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] For you did not receive the spirit of slavery leading again to fear, but *you received the Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry, “Abba, Father.”* ¹⁶*The Spirit himself bears witness to our spirit that we are God’s children*. ROMANS 8:15–16

The Holy Spirit testifies to and assures believers that they are God’s children (v. 16). Accordingly, by the Holy Spirit believers can acknowledge or address God as “Abba” or Father (v. 15).

. . . and having the Holy Spirit indicates that God lives in them

[JOHN, TO BELIEVERS:] Now *by this we know that God resides in us: by the Spirit he has given us*. 1 JOHN 3:24B

Having the Spirit of God verifies that God himself lives in us.

The Holy Spirit is God’s seal, guaranteeing what is to come

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *When you believed in him you were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of God’s own possession, to his praise and glory*. EPHESIANS 1:13B–14 ISV

God’s “own possession” refers to believers, who have been marked as such by being given the Holy Spirit.

God Works in His People through the Holy Spirit

God saves his people through the Holy Spirit

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *God chose you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth.*

2 THESSALONIANS 2:13B

God teaches his people through the Holy Spirit

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] But just as it is written, “Things that no eye has seen, or ear heard, or mind imagined, are the things God has prepared for those who love him.” ¹⁰*God has revealed these to us by the Spirit.* For the Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. ¹ 1 CORINTHIANS 2:9–10

God works through his people by the Holy Spirit

[GOD, TO ZERUBBABEL WHO WAS A LEADER OF THE JEWS:] ‘Not by strength and not by power, *but by my Spirit,*’ says the LORD who rules over all.” ⁷*“What are you, you great mountain? Because of Zerubbabel you will become a level plain! And he will bring forth the temple capstone with shoutings of ‘Grace! Grace!’ because of this.”*

ZECHARIAH 4:6B–7

God would accomplish the work he was doing through Zerubbabel by his Spirit. Mountainous problems would be overcome and Zerubbabel would “bring forth the temple capstone” (v. 7b) signifying the completion of the work (the rebuilding of the temple).

The Holy Spirit Renews God's People

The Holy Spirit brings spiritual 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.*

JOHN 6:63

Particularly in light of the verse's first clause, the final statement may indicate that the words Jesus spoke were from (cf. CEV) or spoken through the Holy Spirit. As such they are words that the Holy Spirit uses to produce life – when people live according to them.

The Holy Spirit makes God’s people holy

[PETER, TO BELIEVERS:] God the Father decided to choose you as his people, and *his Spirit has made you holy*. 1 PETER 1:2A CEV

The Holy Spirit produces spiritual “fruit” in God’s people

But *the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness, and self-control*. Against such things there is no law. GALATIANS 5:22–23

The Holy Spirit Helps God’s People

The Holy Spirit helps them

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] In the same way, *the Spirit helps us in our weakness, for we do not know how we should pray, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with inexpressible groanings*. ROMANS 8:26

[JESUS, TO HIS DISCIPLES:] I will ask the Father, and *he will give you another Helper to be with you forever— ¹⁷the Spirit of truth*. JOHN 14:16–17A NCV™

The Holy Spirit leads God’s people

Those who are led by God’s Spirit are God’s children. ROMANS 8:14 GNT

The Holy Spirit may lead a person by an inner conviction or sense of assurance, by circumstances, or even by a discernible revelation. (Giving such a revelation to a person with a prophetic spiritual gift is one way the Holy Spirit leads and directs Christian groups.)

The Holy Spirit empowers God’s people to do God’s work . . .

[JESUS, TO HIS DISCIPLES:] *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the farthest parts of the earth*.

ACTS 1:8

Through the Holy Spirit the disciples would receive “power (ability, efficiency, and might)” (AMP), enabling them to witness for Christ far and wide.

. . . The Holy Spirit has a key role in what God's people say

[JESUS, TO HIS DISCIPLES:] You will be brought before governors and kings because of me, to testify to them and to the gentiles. ¹⁹When they hand you over, don't worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say, because *in that hour what you are to say will be given to you.* ²⁰*It won't be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.* MATTHEW 10:18–20 ISV

When they [the believers] had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken, and *they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God courageously.* ACTS 4:31

What is significant about having the Holy Spirit?

How can we be confident that we do have the Holy Spirit?

Choose one of the fruits of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5:22-23 (in *The Holy Spirit produces spiritual “fruit” in God’s people*) that you need to focus on nurturing in yourself. What steps could you take to do this?

How does the Holy Spirit help us?

What should we do in order to rely on the Holy Spirit’s help?

18. God's Transformation of His People

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I. General

God transforms his people by giving them the invaluable gift of spiritual life, in which they are “reborn” in a spiritual sense. Additionally, God makes them holy and accordingly begins to transform them to be like Jesus Christ and himself. God does this through such things as teaching and disciplining them.

God Makes His People Spiritually Alive

God’s people are given spiritual life

[JESUS, TO HIS FOLLOWERS:] *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.* JOHN 6:63

Jesus’ words together with the Holy Spirit bring life. This spiritual life involves being “alive to God” (Romans 6:11) and comes through having God’s Holy Spirit. Each believer has the Holy Spirit dwelling in them, renewing and nourishing them spiritually. Consequently believers have a spiritual consciousness that enables them to live in communion with and in dependence on God. As such they are “alive to God”.

In union with Jesus Christ, their sinful selves have “died” and they are now spiritually alive

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *We know that the persons we used to be were nailed to the cross with Jesus. This was done, so that our sinful bodies would no longer be the slaves of sin. ⁷We know that sin doesn’t have power over dead people. ⁸As surely as we died with Christ, we believe we will also live with him. . . . ¹¹... Christ Jesus has given life to you, and you live for God.* ROMANS 6:6–8, 11B CEV

In our union with Jesus Christ we are identified with him in his death and resurrection. In a spiritual sense our old sinful selves have died with him in his death and we have been made alive spiritually with him in his post-resurrection life.

As such, God’s people are spiritually reborn of God . . .

But to all who have received him [Jesus] – those who believe in his name – he has given the right to become God’s children ¹³– *children*

not born by human parents or by human desire or a husband's decision, but by God. JOHN 1:12–13

References to being born by God (v. 13) – or born again – refer to the spiritual rebirth people undergo when they come to faith, and by which they have spiritual life. It is accomplished by God through the work of the Holy Spirit within a person's heart or mind, along with exposure to God's word. This spiritual birth means that believers are in a real sense children of God. It also begins a process of growing more like God, as believers share in his Spirit which transforms them.

. . . God's people are a new creation

So then, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; what is old has passed away – look, what is new has come! 2 CORINTHIANS 5:17

God Makes His People Holy

Being made holy concerns being set apart for God - dedicated to him, for such purposes as doing his work and worshiping him. This involves them being made pure from sin.

Being made holy has a couple of phases or facets. Firstly, when a person comes to faith their sins are forgiven and as such they are holy. Secondly, believers are made holy in that they are continually being transformed by God, becoming more like Jesus Christ and increasingly devoid of sin. This process is often referred to as "sanctification".

God makes them holy

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] Now *may the God of peace himself make you completely holy and may your spirit and soul and body be kept entirely blameless* at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴He who calls you is trustworthy, and *he will in fact do this.*

1 THESSALONIANS 5:23–24

God's people are primarily made holy through Jesus' sacrifice

So Jesus also suffered outside the city to make his people holy with his own blood. HEBREWS 13:12 NCV™

God’s people are in fact being transformed to be like Jesus

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *We all show the Lord’s glory, and we are being changed to be like him.* 2 CORINTHIANS 3:18B NCV™

Paul has the development of the believer’s sanctification in view, with their characters growing more like Christ. As such believers increasingly reflect and even manifest Christ’s glory.

God Teaches His People

God also teaches his people how to live

He shows those who are humble how to do right, and he teaches them his ways. PSALMS 25:9 NCV™

[GOD:] *I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you.* PSALMS 32:8 ESV

God enables his people to know the truth

Then Jesus said to those Judeans who had believed him, *“If you continue to follow my teaching, you are really my disciples³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”* JOHN 8:31–32

God Disciplines His People

God disciplines his people as his children, who he loves

[THE WRITER, TO BELIEVERS:] And have you forgotten *the exhortation addressed to you as sons?* *“My son, do not scorn the Lord’s discipline or give up when he corrects you.”*⁶ *“For the Lord disciplines the one he loves and chastises every son he accepts.”*⁷ *Endure your suffering as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is there that a father does not discipline?*⁸ *But if you do not experience discipline, something all sons have shared in, then you are illegitimate and are not sons.* HEBREWS 12:5–8

God’s discipline is done in righteousness and faithfulness

[LEVITES, PRAYING TO GOD AND MAKING REFERENCE TO FOREFATHERS:] You prolonged your kindness with them for many years, and you

solemnly admonished them by your Spirit through your prophets. *Still they paid no attention, so you delivered them into the hands of the neighboring peoples.* ³¹*However, due to your abundant mercy you did not do away with them altogether; you did not abandon them. For you are a merciful and compassionate God. ...* ³³*You are righteous with regard to all that has happened to us, for you have acted faithfully. It is we who have been in the wrong!* NEHEMIAH 9:30–31, 33

As well as speaking of his patience and mercy, vv. 30–31 beautifully illustrate God's righteousness and faithfulness in his discipline and dealings with his people, affirmed in v. 33.

God's discipline and testing can be intense, but God brings his people through

[A PSALMIST, TO GOD:] *You have put us to the test, God; as silver is purified by fire so you have tested us.* ¹¹*You let us fall into a trap and placed heavy burdens on our backs.* ¹²*You let our enemies trample over us; we went through fire and flood, but now you have brought us to a place of safety.* PSALMS 66:10–12 GNT

Describe in your own words the “spiritual life” that believers have.

In what ways are Christians a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17)? What old things have gone?

What changes do you see in yourself, compared to before you became a Christian? How are you more like Jesus Christ?

Have you been conscious of God’s discipline or testing? What is one point or verse in this section that you would find encouraging during such times?

How does God teach his people?

II. Spiritual Attributes

The spiritual attributes that God bestows on his people far exceed anything that this world can offer. Attributes or blessings such as love, hope, joy, peace and wisdom are longed for by most people, and sought after in many ways. But it is only from God that they can be gained in their highest form.

Love, Faith and Hope

God and Jesus Christ give their people love and faith . . .

Peace to the brothers and sisters [believers], and *love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.* EPHESIANS 6:23

. . . God teaches his people to love

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *God has taught you to love each other.*
1 THESSALONIANS 4:9 GW

God gives his people hope by what he has done through Christ

[PETER, TO BELIEVERS:] Because of his [God's] great mercy *he has given us a new birth to an ever-living hope through the resurrection of Jesus, the Messiah, from the dead*⁴ and to an inheritance kept in heaven for you that can't be destroyed, corrupted, or changed. 1 PETER 1:3–4 ISV

Through Jesus Christ's resurrection, God has brought believers into an "ever-living hope" (v. 3). This encompasses the hope of their own resurrection and an everlasting inheritance in heaven (v. 4).

God's promises give his people hope

[THE WRITER, TO BELIEVERS:] *To those who were to receive what he promised, God wanted to make it very clear that he would never change his purpose; so he added his vow to the promise.*¹⁸ *There are these two things, then, that cannot change and about which God cannot lie. So we who have found safety with him are greatly encouraged to hold firmly to the hope placed before us.* HEBREWS 6:17–18 GNT

This indicates that "the hope placed before us" (v. 18) by God is based on his promise that is referred to and his confirmation of it with an oath – the "two things... that cannot change" (v. 18).

Peace

The OT speaks of God giving inner peace (including being at ease) and outer peace (the absence of war and adversity). In addition to peace with God, the NT speaks of God (and Jesus Christ) giving an inner, spiritual peace – even amidst adversity.

God gives his people peace . . .

... *the LORD blesses his people with peace.* PSALMS 29:11B NCV™

. . . Likewise, Jesus Christ gives them peace

[JESUS, TO HIS DISCIPLES:] *Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; I do not give it to you as the world does. Do not let your hearts be distressed or lacking in courage.* JOHN 14:27

[JESUS, TO HIS DISCIPLES:] I have told you these things so that *in me you may have peace*. In the world you have trouble and suffering, but take courage – I have conquered the world. JOHN 16:33

Because Jesus Christ has overcome the world, in him believers have peace amidst the trouble that the world causes them.

It is a great peace

The LORD gives perfect peace to those whose faith is firm. ISAIAH 26:3 CEV

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] Do not be anxious about anything. Instead, in every situation, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, tell your requests to God. ⁷*And the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*

PHILIPPIANS 4:6–7

Joy

God and Jesus Christ give joy to their people

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] Now *may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you believe in him, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.* ROMANS 15:13

[JESUS, TO HIS DISCIPLES:] *I have told you these things so that my joy may be in you, and your joy may be complete.* JOHN 15:11

It is an enduring joy . . .

[JESUS, TO HIS DISCIPLES:] So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and *your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy away from you.* JOHN 16:22

. . . It is present even in trouble

They [churches in Macedonia] have been severely tested by the troubles they went through; but their joy was so great that they were extremely generous in their giving, even though they are very poor.
2 CORINTHIANS 8:2 GNT

Wisdom and Knowledge

God gives his people wisdom and knowledge

But if anyone is deficient in wisdom, he should ask God, who gives to all generously and without reprimand, and it will be given to him.
JAMES 1:5

He [Jesus] answered them, "*You have been given knowledge about the secrets of the kingdom of heaven . . .*" MATTHEW 13:11A ISV

God's people are in fact given spiritual sight

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you spiritual wisdom and revelation in your growing knowledge of him, – *since the eyes of your heart have been enlightened* – so that you may know what is the hope of his calling, what is the wealth of his glorious inheritance in the saints,¹⁹ and what is the incomparable greatness of his power toward us who believe, as displayed in the exercise of his immense strength.
EPHESIANS 1:17–19

[A PSALMIST, TO GOD:] *Open my eyes so I can truly see the marvelous things in your law!* PSALMS 119:18

As suggested by the psalmist's request, God opens his people's eyes to spiritual truth.

Choose one of love, faith and hope - and say what is unique about the believer's experience of it.

What did Jesus mean in speaking of his disciples' joy being "complete" (cf. John 15:11)?

To what degree do you experience God's joy and peace? What things can we do to have more of this joy and peace?

What wisdom and knowledge does a Christian have that others do not have? How do Christians come to have such wisdom and knowledge?

Choose one verse or passage in this section that encourages you, and say why.

19. God's Care of His People

I. God's Saving of His People

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I. God’s Saving of His People

➔ 13. *Salvation through Jesus Christ*, in Part C)

God has the capacity to save his people always – no matter what the circumstances. Thus God can save his people from all things – and ultimately he does. The Bible contains both examples of God saving his people and promises of him continuing to do so.

In reading this chapter about God’s saving his people, bear in mind that the Bible also speaks of God’s people experiencing sufferings common to all people (cf. 39. *Hard Times*, in Part H) and also persecution for their faith (cf. 40. *Persecution*, in Part H). God can and does save and preserve his people, but also does allow or even ordain difficult experiences for his people – often for reasons that may not be clear.

Promises given in the OT of God saving and preserving his people are still very much relevant under the new covenant – as is reflected in a number of NT passages. But they are more applicable in a spiritual sense – in keeping with the greater spiritual nature of the second covenant in contrast to the often more tangible aspects of the first covenant.

God’s Capacity to Save His People

God is able to save his people – no matter what the odds

[SHADRACH, MESHACH AND ABEDNEGO TO KING NEBUCHADNEZZAR:]
If you throw us into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from the furnace. He will save us from your power, O king.

DANIEL 3:17 NCV™

Nothing can prevent the LORD from delivering, whether by many or by a few. 1 SAMUEL 14:6B

God has mighty power to save his people

The LORD your God is with you; *the mighty One will save you.*

ZEPHANIAH 3:17A NCV™

Then *with his mighty power he led them out* [of captivity in Egypt], ...

ACTS 13:17B CEV

God does not need to use any other means but himself

[GOD:] But I will show pity to the people of Judah. *I will save them, but not by using bows or swords, horses or horsemen, or weapons of war. I, the LORD their God, will save them.* HOSEA 1:7 NCV™

Here God speaks of saving his people by no other power but himself.

God Saves His People – from All Things

God is the Savior of his people

[DAVID, TO GOD:] Guide me in your truth, and teach me, *my God, my Savior.* I trust you all day long. PSALMS 25:5 NCV™

God saves them out of all troubles

[DAVID:] I sought the LORD'S help and he answered me; *he delivered me from all my fears.* ⁵Those who look to him for help are happy; their faces are not ashamed. ⁶This oppressed man cried out and the LORD heard; *he saved him from all his troubles.* ... ¹⁷The godly cry out and the LORD hears; *he saves them from all their troubles.* ... ¹⁹*The godly face many dangers, but the LORD saves them from each one of them.* PSALMS 34:4–6, 17, 19

[PAUL:] However, the Lord stood by me and gave me strength so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the gentiles could hear it. *I was rescued out of a lion's mouth.* ¹⁸*The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will take me safely to his heavenly kingdom.* Glory belongs to him forever and ever! Amen.

2 TIMOTHY 4:17–18 ISV

Christ had rescued Paul from physical danger (v. 17) – in fact he had done so many times (cf. 3:11). However in light of vv. 6–8 which indicate that Paul's death was near, it appears that in v. 18 Paul is not this time referring to a physical rescue but a spiritual one – where the Lord would bring him “safely to his heavenly kingdom”.

God sets them free from things that imprison

[A PSALMIST, TO GOD:] LORD, I am your servant; I am your servant and the son of your female servant. *You have freed me from my chains.* PSALMS 116:16 NCV™

God’s saving of his people makes known that he is the only God

[MOSES, TO THE ISRAELITES:] *Or has any god ever tried to come and take one nation away from another for himself? The LORD your God used his mighty hand and powerful arm to do this for you in Egypt. He did this using plagues, miraculous signs, amazing things, and war. He did his great and awe-inspiring deeds in front of you.* ³⁵*You were shown these things so that you would know that the LORD is God. There is no other god.* DEUTERONOMY 4:34–35 GW

God Helps His People against Enemies

God consistently helps his people

God is our refuge and strength, *an ever-present help in times of trouble.* PSALMS 46:1 GW

[PAUL:] *I have experienced help from God to this day ...* ACTS 26:22A

God helps his people by delivering them from enemies . . .

The LORD helps them and rescues them; he rescues them from evil men and delivers them, for they seek his protection. PSALMS 37:40

[THE WRITER, TO BELIEVERS:] So we can say with confidence, *“The Lord is my helper, and I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?”*

HEBREWS 13:6

. . . For God fights for his people, giving victory over enemies

He [Jahaziel, a Levite] said: “Pay attention, all you people of Judah, residents of Jerusalem, and King Jehoshaphat! This is what the LORD says to you: ‘Don’t be afraid and don’t panic because of this huge army! *For the battle is not yours, but God’s.* ... ¹⁷*You will not fight in this battle. Take your positions, stand, and watch the LORD deliver you, O Judah and Jerusalem. Don’t be afraid and don’t panic! Tomorrow march out toward them; the LORD is with you!*” ... ²²When they began to shout and praise, *the LORD suddenly attacked the Ammonites, Moabites, and men from Mount Seir who were invading Judah, and they were defeated.* ... ²⁹All the kingdoms of the surrounding lands were afraid of God when they heard how *the LORD had fought against Israel’s enemies.* 2 CHRONICLES 20:15, 17, 22, 29

God enables his people to overcome all that is in the world . . .

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] What then shall we say about these things? *If God is for us, who can be against us? ...*³⁵ *Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will trouble, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? ...*³⁷ *No, in all these things we have complete victory through him who loved us!* ROMANS 8:31, 35, 37

Verse 31b implies that if God is for us then no one can effectively oppose us. In all adversity we have complete victory through Christ (v. 37).

. . . As such, God's people are enabled to overcome Satan

[JOHN, TO BELIEVERS:] I have written to you, young people, that you are strong, and *the word of God resides in you, and you have conquered the evil one.* 1 JOHN 2:14B

The reference to the word of God living in these believers suggests that it played a significant role in them overcoming Satan. As such this points to God enabling his people to overcome Satan.

How should believing that God is always able to save, affect the way we act and think?

What troubles with adversaries have you had in which God has helped you?

Is there anything that you need God to set you free from? What can you do to receive his help?

In what sense had John's readers "conquered the evil one" (1Jn 2:14b)?

Even with all the wonderful promises in the Bible, dreadful things still happen to some of God's people. Why do you think this is so?

II. God's Preservation of His People

As with verses which speak of God's saving of his people, verses which speak of God's preservation of his people are amongst the best-loved verses in the Bible. They contain some of the Bible's great promises, which reassure us when we wonder if God has "lost our address". As such they provide good reason for God's people to trust in him and be at peace.

God Meets His People's Needs

God cares for his people

The LORD is good; he protects his people in times of trouble; *he takes care of those who turn to him.* NAHUM 1:7 GNT

[PETER, TO BELIEVERS:] And God will exalt you in due time, if you humble yourselves under his mighty hand ⁷by casting all your cares on him because *he cares for you.* 1 PETER 5:6–7

Note that this subsection below points to the overall theme of this chapter. As such it is reflected in and pertinent to the whole chapter, not just this section.

God meets his people's physical needs even in harsh situations

[LEVITES, TO GOD:] *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.* NEHEMIAH 9:21

[DAVID, TO GOD:] *You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.* PSALMS 23:5 ESV

Even amidst adversaries, God provided for David – as implied by "prepare a table [feast] before me" and "my cup overflows".

God satisfies his people's spiritual hunger and thirst

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied. MATTHEW 5:6

Jesus said to them, "*I am the bread of life. The one who comes to me will never go hungry, and the one who believes in me will never be thirsty.*" JOHN 6:35

God provides for all their needs – they will not lack anything

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS WHO HAD SUPPORTED HIM:] *And my God will supply your every need according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.* PHILIPPIANS 4:19

Then Jesus said to them [his disciples], *“When I sent you out with no money bag, or traveler’s bag, or sandals, you didn’t lack anything, did you?”* They replied, *“Nothing.”* LUKE 22:35

God Strengthens His People

God strengthens his people when they are weak

Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; ³¹but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint. ISAIAH 40:30–31 ESV

God strengthens his people in the face of adversity

[DAVID, TO GOD:] *You give me strength for battle; you make my foes kneel before me.* PSALMS 18:39

[PAUL:] *At my first defense no one appeared in my support; instead they all deserted me – may they not be held accountable for it. ¹⁷But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me, so that through me the message would be fully proclaimed for all the Gentiles to hear. And so I was delivered from the lion’s mouth!* 2 TIMOTHY 4:16–17

Note that in Paul’s letters “Lord” is generally understood to be a reference to Jesus Christ.

God strengthens them spiritually, until Christ’s return

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *You are being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might, so that you might patiently endure everything with joy ...* COLOSSIANS 1:11 ISV

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.* 1 CORINTHIANS 1:8

God Protects His People

God protects his people

[JOSHUA, TO THE ISRAELITES:] *He continually protected us as we traveled and when we passed through nations.* JOSHUA 24:17B

God is a refuge for his people

He [David] said, *“The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, ³my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold and my refuge, my savior; you save me from violence.* 2 SAMUEL 22:2–3 ESV

God guards his people

Look! The one who is guarding Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps. ⁵The LORD is your guardian; the LORD is your shade at your right side. ⁶The sun will not ravage you by day, nor the moon by night. ⁷The LORD will guard you from all evil, preserving your life. ⁸The LORD will guard your goings and comings, from this time on and forever. PSALMS 121:4–8 ISV

God protects his people from all evil – including Satan

[DAVID, TO GOD:] *Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.* PSALMS 23:4 ESV

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen you and protect you from the evil one.* 2 THESSALONIANS 3:3

God will protect his people until the end

[PETER, TO BELIEVERS:] *God's power protects you through your faith until salvation is shown to you at the end of time.* 1 PETER 1:5 NCV™

God protects his faithful people from spiritual harm throughout their lives, bringing their salvation to fruition at the end of the age.

How does God provide for you? How do you or how should you respond to this?

In what ways does God strengthen his people? (Answer as if you were explaining this to a new Christian.)

How is God a “refuge” for his people? What did David mean in speaking of taking refuge in God (cf. 2Sam 22:2–3)?

What assurance do we have that God will keep us, protecting us from being snatched away from him - or falling away from him?

Choose a verse from this or the previous study to bear in mind during difficult times. Either rewrite it in your own words or say why you chose it.

20. God's Plans for His People

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I. General

God has wonderful plans and purposes for his people. Many of these concern the work he does through his people, with his incomparably great power. God promises to fulfill these plans and purposes, equipping and guiding his people accordingly.

God Has Plans for His People

Bear in mind that references to God's plans and purposes for his people include: general plans/purposes which apply to all Christians; and specific plans/purposes for each Christian. The various general ones – such as salvation and sanctification – are dealt with in other chapters in this book. This section looks at topics which show that God has specific plans and purposes for each of his people.

Thus the verses have largely been interpreted as such, i.e. as speaking of God having plans or purposes for specific people, or specific groups of his people. However, note that a number of the verses are also applicable to God's general plans and purposes, and arguably may even have these foremost in view.

God has plans and purposes for his people

[DAVID, TO GOD:] *You have made many wonderful plans for us. I could never speak of them all—their number is so great!* PSALMS 40:5B GNT

For David, after *he had served God's purpose in his own generation*, died and was laid to rest with his ancestors, and so he experienced decay. ACTS 13:36 ISV

These plans and purposes include work for God's people to do

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] God has made us what we are, and in our union with Christ Jesus *he has created us for a life of good deeds, which he has already prepared for us to do.* EPHESIANS 2:10 GNT

[PAUL, TO THE BELIEVERS AT CORINTH:] What is Apollos, really? Or what is Paul? Servants through whom you came to believe, and each of us in *the ministry the Lord gave us.* 1 CORINTHIANS 3:5

God's plans and purposes are not dependent upon his people's backgrounds

Amos replied to Amaziah, *"I was not a prophet by profession. No, I was a herdsman who also took care of sycamore fig trees. ¹⁵Then the LORD took me from tending flocks and gave me this commission, 'Go! Prophesy to my people Israel!'"* AMOS 7:14–15

God Fulfills His Plans for His People

In spite of his people's troubles, God will fulfill his plans and purposes for them

[DAVID, TO GOD:] *Though I walk straight into trouble, you preserve my life, stretching out your hand to fight the vehemence of my enemies, and your right hand delivers me. ⁸The LORD will complete what his purpose is for me.* PSALMS 138:7–8A ISV

For the LORD says, *'Only when the seventy years of Babylonian rule are over will I again take up consideration for you. Then I will fulfill my gracious promise to you and restore you to your homeland. ¹¹For I know what I have planned for you,' says the LORD. 'I have plans to prosper you, not to harm you. I have plans to give you a future filled with hope.* JEREMIAH 29:10–11

Despite his people's exile in Babylon and the apparent decimation of Israel as a nation, God would fulfill his promise and plans for them.

God may even initiate seemingly bad things to fulfill his purposes for his people

Joseph told them to come closer to him, and when they did, he said: *Yes, I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt. ⁵Don't worry or blame yourselves for what you did. God is the one who sent me ahead of you to save lives. ⁶There has already been a famine for two years, and for five more years no one will plow fields or harvest grain. ⁷But God sent me on ahead of you to keep your families alive and to save you in this wonderful way. ⁸After all, you weren't really the ones who sent me here—it was God. He made me the highest official in the king's court and placed me over all Egypt.*

GENESIS 45:4–8 CEV

God Works through His People

As mentioned earlier, God's plans and purposes for his people include tasks or work for his people to do for him. In fulfilling these plans and purposes, God works through his people.

God moves his people to do his work

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] Keep on working with fear and trembling to complete your salvation, ¹³because *God is always at work in you to make you willing and able to obey his own purpose.* PHILIPPIANS 2:12B–13 GNT

Then the leaders of Judah and Benjamin, along with the priests and the Levites – *all those whose mind God had stirred – got ready to go up in order to build the temple of the LORD in Jerusalem.* EZRA 1:5

God equips his people for the work

[THE WRITER, TO BELIEVERS:] Now may the God of peace who by the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead the great shepherd of the sheep, our Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹*equip you with every good thing to do his will,* working in us what is pleasing before him through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever. Amen. HEBREWS 13:20–21

God helps and empowers them to do his work even if they feel inadequate

[JEREMIAH:] I answered, “*Oh, Lord God, I really do not know how to speak well enough for that, for I am too young.*” ⁷The LORD said to me, “Do not say, ‘I am too young.’ But *go to whomever I send you and say whatever I tell you.*” ⁸*Do not be afraid of those to whom I send you, for I will be with you to protect you,*” says the LORD. ⁹*Then the LORD reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, “I will most assuredly give you the words you are to speak for me.*” ¹⁰*Know for certain that I hereby give you the authority to announce to nations and kingdoms that they will be uprooted and torn down, destroyed and demolished, rebuilt and firmly planted.”* JEREMIAH 1:6–10

To signify that he had given (or would give) Jeremiah his words to speak – and as part of his appointing and empowering of Jeremiah – God touched Jeremiah's mouth (v. 9). This may have occurred in a vision; some think it actually took place.

God's power for his people is great

With great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was on them all. ACTS 4:33

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *You will also know the unlimited greatness of his power as it works with might and strength for us, the believers.* EPHESIANS 1:19 GW

God Guides His People

God guides his people always . . .

The LORD will continually lead you; he will feed you even in parched regions. ISAIAH 58:11A

He will guide us forever. PSALMS 48:14B ESV

Note that the Bible speaks of God guiding his people in fulfilling his plans and purposes for them. More specifically, it tells of God guiding them in: living righteous lives; doing his work; and making choices in other matters.

. . . As such, God guides them in difficult circumstances

[MOSES, TO THE ISRAELITES:] *He led you through that vast and terrifying desert where there were poisonous snakes and scorpions.*

DEUTERONOMY 8:15A GNT

[DAVID:] *When I am ready to give up, he knows what I should do.*

PSALMS 142:3A GNT

The implication of the second clause is that God not only knows but also guides in what one should do.

God also guides them in doing his work

The Holy Tent where God spoke to our ancestors was with them in the desert. *God told Moses how to make this Tent, and he made it like the plan God showed him.* ACTS 7:44 NCV™

[CORNELIUS, TO PETER:] *So now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to say to us.*

ACTS 10:33B

How specific do you think God's plans are for each Christian?

What examples do you know of, where God has worked in bad things for his purposes?

Are you aware of a particular role or kind of work that God wants you to do? If not, what can you do to be open to God guiding you towards the work he wants you to do?

Pick a verse or concept that should make an impact on a Christian's approach to serving God. What impact should this have?

How does God guide us?

II. God's Plans for Israel

Large portions of the writings of the OT prophets speak of a wonderful, future renewal of Israel by God. There are differences of opinion as to what degree these are literal and physical, as opposed to figurative or spiritual. If they are literal, then they speak of Israel and Jerusalem (or Zion), most likely immediately preceding and during the thousand years or Millennium spoken of in Revelation 20:1–7. As such the time of a renewed Israel would largely correspond with that of a physical universal rule of Jesus Christ and would precede the final judgment. If instead the prophecies are basically figurative and spiritual, then they are more likely to be referring to all believers – the “new” Israel. As such they would be portraying God’s people and kingdom following Jesus Christ’s mission and/or quite possibly anticipating heaven or the new Jerusalem.

In reading the following sections, bear in mind that some prophecies are understood to be progressively fulfilled throughout history, culminating in a final fulfillment at the end of the age. For example a number of the passages refer initially to the Jew’s return after the Babylonian exile, but also appear to have a future era in view. Many probably also have an application to the experience of God’s people in all periods. As such they are a great source of encouragement to all believers.

Note that while the subheadings speak of Israel, many of the verses refer to Jerusalem in particular.

Return to the Land

God will return home the remnant of exiled Israel

[GOD:] *I’ll gather the remnant of my flock from all the countries where I’ve driven them, and bring them back to their pasture where they’ll be fruitful and increase in numbers.* JEREMIAH 23:3 ISV

Note that some commentators see a fulfillment of prophecies such as this one in the establishment of the modern state of Israel in 1948.

The people of Israel will possess the land forever

[GOD, TO JERUSALEM:] *All of your people will be godly; they will possess the land permanently.* ISAIAH 60:21A

Physical Renewal and Peace

Israel will be physically restored

They [people] will say, “This desolate land has become like the garden of Eden; the ruined, desolate, and destroyed cities are now fortified and inhabited.” ³⁶Then the nations which remain around you will know that *I, the LORD, have rebuilt the ruins and replanted what was desolate. I, the LORD, have spoken – and I will do it!*
EZEKIEL 36:35–36

Joy will accompany God’s renewal of Israel

Certainly the LORD will console Zion; he will console all her ruins. *He will make her wilderness like Eden, her desert like the Garden of the Lord. Happiness and joy will be restored to her, thanksgiving and the sound of music.* ISAIAH 51:3

The Messiah will rule Israel forever in righteousness and peace

Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this. ISAIAH 9:7 ESV

Israel will have lasting peace

[GOD:] *Fairness will produce peace and result in lasting security.*
¹⁸*My people will live in peaceful settlements, in secure homes, and in safe, quiet places.* ISAIAH 32:17–18

Spiritual Renewal

God will cleanse Israel of sin

[GOD, THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL:] This is what the sovereign LORD says: *In the day I cleanse you from all your sins ...* EZEKIEL 36:33A

The people of Israel will be given God’s Spirit

I will no longer hide my face from them, when I pour out my Spirit on the house of Israel, declares the sovereign LORD. EZEKIEL 39:29

A Renewed Relationship with God

God will be Israel's God and they will be his people

[GOD:] *I will be their God and they will be my people.* For they will wholeheartedly return to me. JEREMIAH 24:7B

This denotes the consummate fulfillment of a key aspect of the first covenant which God made with Israel – that he would be their God and they would be his people.

God will dwell in Jerusalem, living among his people forever

The LORD says, 'I have returned to Zion and will live within Jerusalem. ZECHARIAH 8:3A

The name of the city from that day forward will be: 'The LORD Is There.' EZEKIEL 48:35B

The nations will come to Jerusalem to worship God

And so his name will be proclaimed in Zion, and *he will be praised in Jerusalem*²²*when nations and kingdoms come together and worship the LORD.* PSALMS 102:21–22 GNT

Glorification

God will glorify Israel

Jerusalem, the nations will see your goodness, and all kings will see your glory. ISAIAH 62:2A NCV™

Israel's renewal will in fact display God's glory

*The desert and the dry land will be glad, and the wilderness will rejoice and blossom.*²*Like a lily the land will blossom. It will rejoice and sing with joy. It will have the glory of Lebanon, the majesty of Carmel and Sharon. Everyone will see the glory of the LORD, the majesty of our God.* ISAIAH 35:1–2 GW

God's glory and majesty will be evident in Israel's wonderful and glorious restoration.

How do you interpret or understand the Old Testament prophecies of Israel's future renewal?

How does Israel's promised spiritual renewal mirror the renewed relationship of God and his people that has followed what Jesus Christ accomplished?

What aspects of our life with God in the afterlife are reflected here?

What encouragement can believers today draw from these verses?

What is the position or relationship of modern-day Israel in relation to God's people in general?

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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.

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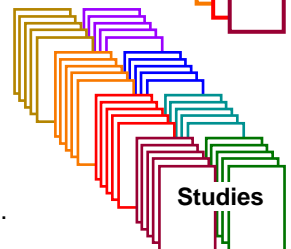
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Over 200 million Christians in at least 60 countries are denied basic human rights solely because of their faith. (Source: World Evangelical Alliance) Every year many Christians are killed because of their faith.

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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