

# Handout 1

## The Core Wisdom of the Bible

Reformation Fellowship  
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### Introduction—What Is Wisdom?

- A. What is “wisdom” ?
1. Correlated with knowledge and understanding.
  2. Related to skill and ability.
  3. Hence, wisdom is the knowledge and understanding that enables one to perform skillfully.
    - a. To do or to produce something skillfully.
  4. *DEFINITION: Wisdom is the skill or ability to perform excellently or to make something excellent because one has the knowledge and understanding that enables him to perform excellently or to produce something that is excellent.*
- B. Wisdom is what enables an individual to perform excellently (skillfully), rather than not, with regard to some particular task.
1. Hence, it is to perform in such a way that some particular thing that one does or makes is excellent.
  2. Or, it is to live in such a way that the life that one lives is lived excellently.
    - a. *James 1:5* > => “if any one lacks wisdom” = “if anyone lacks the ability to perform (i.e, to live) excellently”
- C. What is wisdom in human beings?
1. There are any number of different “performances” where performing excellently would be desirable (hence, there are many ways that human beings could be “wise”).
  2. But the “performance” that is of utmost interest to the authors of the Bible is this: to perform the task of being a human being. Hence, the wisdom they seek to promote is the wisdom that enables one to live excellently in the way one conducts himself as a human being. Hence, to be wise is to be able to *do* excellently and to *be* excellent.
    - a. Wisdom, then, is the ability to perform excellently in living out one’s existence as a human being; it is the ability to “succeed” at being a human being.
  3. However, by what standard is one’s being a human being measured? Who determines whether one has lived as a human being “excellently”? Who determines whether one has been a “successful” human being? What standard is used to decide that success?
    - a. Some faulty human standards:

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- (A) An excellent life is one wherein one achieves "happiness" (*eudaimonia*).
- (1) Wisdom is *eudaimonistic* wisdom.
- (B) An excellent life is one wherein the suffering and pain of human existence is significantly ameliorated. A successful life is a life that avoids a great deal of pain and sorrow.
- (1) Wisdom is *therapeutic* wisdom.
- (C) An excellent life is one wherein one comes to know and meet his moral obligations (duties).
- (1) Wisdom is moral or *deontological* wisdom.
- b. The true, relevant standard is the standard of God's will, God's purpose, God's design, and God's expectations.
- (A) God is the one who can judge whether one has lived "excellently" as a human being.
- (1) What God judges to be true is what is *objectively* true.
  - (2) Note that the faulty human standards emphasize what a human being would *want* from his existence. The true standard involves what God wants from a human existence.
4. It is difficult to articulate a definition of what it means for a human being to live one's life in an excellent manner. However, even if we can't articulate it, we can tacitly know what it means. For the most part, we have the ability to discern when a human life is an excellent one.
- a. An analysis or definition would include, at least, these two things:
    - (A) The person's navigating his existence and experience gracefully, impressively, and honorably.
    - (B) The person's living his life in a manner fitting for a human being [where what is "fitting" for a human being is defined by God's original conception of who a human being was created to be].
      - (1) For a human being *per se* to conduct himself excellently would require moral perfection. Only a perfectly good human being can be an excellent human being.
        - (a) However, since as sons of Adam we are all sinful and morally depraved, true human excellence is completely out of reach to us.
        - (b) Hence, the Bible speaks of a wisdom that leads to a lesser degree of excellence than moral perfection. While it is not true human excellence, it is a kind of "excellence" nonetheless.

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[A] In the context of human sinfulness, wisdom is made manifest when an individual lives his life in a manner "fitting" for a morally imperfect human being who (i) knows that he is inescapably sinful, and yet (ii) strives to know, love, honor, and obey his creator in the context of and against the backdrop of his sinfulness.

[1] The "wise" man lives his life as gracefully, impressively, and honorably as is possible for a sinful, morally imperfect human being to do.

5. In the light of all of the above, we could aptly define wisdom this way:

a. *Wisdom is the knowledge and understanding that equips a human individual to live in such a way that God is pleased with his or her life.*

(A) *James 1:5* > "if any one lacks wisdom" = "if anyone lacks the ability to live in a manner that is pleasing to God"

6. Should we care about being wise? Are we actually motivated to live excellently, and to be pleasing to God? What if I don't care whether God is pleased with me?

a. It is highly likely that God created us with a built-in interest in being an excellent human being, and hence in being pleasing to God.

(A) When we are not so interested, it simply shows that we are depraved and perverse. Our built-in, created inclinations have been suppressed, ignored, or twisted.

D. Two different senses in which the word "wisdom" can be used.

1. 'Wisdom' can be used to indicate an *attribute*.

a. The attribute of having the ability to perform excellently, or having the ability to produce something excellent.

(A) *Exodus 31:1-11* > God granted to Bezalel and Oholiab the *wisdom* (=the ability, the skill) to make all of the various elements needed to construct the tabernacle to God's specifications.

(B) *James 1:5* > "if any one lacks wisdom" = "if anyone lacks the ability to live in a manner that is pleasing to God."

2. Or, through a kind of metonymy, 'wisdom' can be used to indicate a particular performance or product that is excellent as a result of the "wisdom" (skill or ability) of the one who did or made it. In other words, "wisdom" = a particular "wise" something = a particular excellent something.

a. It is a kind of metonymy of cause for result.

(A) Metonymy of cause for result is where one uses a word that literally denotes the cause of some result as a way of denoting the result itself. In other words, the cause that gave rise to some result is used to stand in for the result itself.

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- (1) "The cleverness of the criminal made several people go bankrupt."
- (a) Where "cleverness of the criminal" does not denote the literal cleverness of the man, it denotes the clever scam or clever fraud that was concocted by the criminal.
- (2) "His compassion cost him his life; he drowned trying to save the stranger."
- (a) Where "his compassion" does not denote the compassion of the man, literally; it denotes the act that was motivated by the man's compassion, namely, his act of risking his own life to save a stranger from drowning.
- (3) *Romans* 1:18, "The wrath of God will be brought forth from heaven against all the disregard of God and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in their unrighteousness."
- (a) Where "the wrath of God" does not denote his wrath, literally; it denotes the adverse and harmful effects that, God in his wrath, will cause to occur in the lives of unrepentant sinners.
- (b) See also *Revelation* 15:1, 15:7, and 16:1.
- (4) *Romans* 3:7, "But if by my lie the truth of God is magnified to his glory, then why am I nevertheless condemned as a sinner?"
- (a) Where "my lie" does not denote my lie, literally; it denotes the ultimate consequences of my lie (that is, of the falsity of my response and reaction to God's truth). That is, my false and unrighteous response (unbelief), leads to God's responding in mercy and forgiveness as a consequence. It is God's mercy, forgiveness, and faithfulness to his promises that magnifies God's glory. Hence, it is not literally "my lie" that magnifies God's glory. Rather, it is God's mercy, forgiveness, and faithfulness to his promises that results as a consequence of my lie that magnifies God's glory. Hence, "my lie" is being used to stand in for the response of God comes about as a consequence of my lie.
- (5) "The wisdom of Bezalel and Oholiab will be destroyed if the tabernacle is destroyed."
- (a) Where "the wisdom of Bezalel and Oholiab" does not denote the wisdom (skill) of these men, literally; it denotes the various elements of the tabernacle that they so skillfully (wisely) produced.
- (6) *I Corinthians* 1:20, "where is the wise man? [= where is the man who has wisdom?]" "Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? [= Has not God shown that the lives and performances of individuals in this world which are purported to reflect their wisdom (that is, the knowledge and understanding that leads to their ability to choose and act well) actually, in fact, reflect

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their foolishness (that is, the ignorance that results in their choosing and acting badly)].”

(a) In this case, more specifically, we have a metonymy of the enabling attribute for the result of that enabling attribute.

[A] The attribute (wise / wisdom) is being used in place of that which presumably comes about as a consequence of that attribute (wise actions, choices, and/or words).

E. What is wisdom as related to God? That is, what is the “wisdom of God”?

1. Two different senses in which it is used:

a. “Wisdom of God” = an attribute of God.

(A) Wisdom of God = God’s **ability** to perform excellently or to produce something excellent.

(1) God, because of his wisdom (ability), can be an excellent creator, protector, judge, provider, etc.

(2) *Romans 11:33*

(a) “the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God” = the ability of God to perform excellently or to produce excellent things is deep in its abundance; that is, God’s skill to perform excellently or to produce excellent things exists to a profound degree.

[A] The excellent things of God’s “wisdom” (skill or ability) that are in view here are his profoundly wise judgments and purposes.

b. “Wisdom of God” = some particular thing that God has done or created.

(A) Wisdom of God, through metonymy = **some particular excellent thing** that God has done or made.

(1) Metonymy of cause for result (effect).

(a) In this case, more specifically, we have a metonymy of enabling attribute for a result of that enabling attribute.

[A] Where the phrase (the **wisdom** of God) that literally denotes an enabling attribute of God (his wisdom) is used to stand for an effect of that enabling attribute.

[1] God’s attribute is being used in place of that which presumably comes about as a consequence of that attribute (wise actions, wise choices, wise plans, and/or wise words).

(2) Examples.

(a) “Satan could not stop or thwart the wisdom of God.”

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[A] This assertion is not intended to say that Satan could not stop or thwart an attribute of God.

[B] This assertion is intended to say that Satan could not stop or thwart some particular *wise plan* of God.

(3) *1 Corinthians 1:21* [wisdom = God's wise plan or purpose], *1:24* [Christ, the wisdom of God = Christ, the center of God's wise plan or purpose for saving certain individuals from destruction], *2:7* [the wisdom of God = the wise plan of God for saving certain individuals from destruction]

## Part One: God, Created Reality, and the Nature of Their Relationship

### A. *PROVERBS 8:22-36*

1. Two elements within *Proverbs 8:1-36*:
  - a. Extended exhortations to receive instruction from WISDOM. [8:1-21, 32-36]
    - (A) Wisdom instructs in accord with truth and righteousness.
      - (1) Wisdom leads to nobility, truth, righteousness, knowledge, discretion, and justice.
      - (B) Wisdom is more valuable than gold, silver, or jewels.
      - (C) All who heed wisdom are blessed; they will find Life and the favor of Yahweh.
        - (1) All who reject wisdom harm themselves and are destined for death.
    - b. Declaration that WISDOM co-existed with God, prior to the beginning of created reality. [8:22-36]
      - (A) It makes no sense to read this as a random, unconnected thought inserted into the middle of the chapter. We must understand it as making an essential contribution to the point of the chapter.
  2. What is this "wisdom"?
    - a. Given that (i) WISDOM pre-existed with God himself and that (ii) God "possessed" it at the beginning of created reality [8:22], there are two viable options for what WISDOM means:
      - (A) An understanding that enables God to function skillfully and with excellent results (i.e., a wisdom) that was possessed by God at the very beginning of created reality.
      - (B) Or, as an instance of metonymy, a wise plan for created reality devised by God before he brought created reality into existence.
    - b. Given that (i) it is reasonable to assume that WISDOM means the same thing throughout the entire chapter of *Proverbs 8*, and that (ii) the primary point of *Proverbs 8* is to exhort his readers to receive instruction from this WISDOM, it seems

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unlikely that WISDOM is an understanding that enables God to function skillfully and with excellent results. Here is why that seems unlikely:

(A) In the case of human beings, wisdom (skill to perform excellently) results from an understanding of the reality human beings inhabit. What would wisdom be in the case of God? What pre-existent reality could God have understood such that he was enabled to be skillful in his creation of reality? Whatever it could have been, is it plausible to think that we could come to share God's understanding of THAT reality? It seems unlikely. We can never understand the depths of reality the way God understands them, such that we could perform as God does.

(1) On the other hand, if God's wisdom is not some sort of understanding but is something else entirely, then it is difficult to know how we could receive instruction from it. We know what it means to be instructed in some "understanding" of something. What would it mean to be instructed in something that does not involve and "understanding" of something?

(B) Therefore, it is not very likely that the wisdom Solomon has in view is that which enables him to perform skillfully and with excellent results—whether that be some understanding which he had before the world was created, or anything else.

c. But it does make sense to understand WISDOM to be the "wise plan" for created reality that God devised before he brought created reality into existence.

(A) It makes sense for Solomon to be asserting that God brought created reality into being in keeping with a wise plan for created reality that he had previously devised.

(B) It makes sense that we human beings could receive instruction from (and about) this wise plan for created reality that God had devised. In other words, by learning about and acquiring an understanding of God's wise plan for created reality, a human being gains an understanding of created reality that would enable him to perform skillfully at living in that created reality.

(C) Hence, such an understanding of "wisdom" (i.e., as God's wise plan) can make sense out of Solomon's contention that being instructed by this "wisdom" (i.e., by his wise plan) would lead to truth, righteousness, blessing, and Life.

3. Translation of *Proverbs* 8:30-31 >

a. "Then I was beside him as a trusted confidant; and I was his delight day after day, at all times causing joy before him, causing joy by the inhabited realm of his world, even by the delight I brought with the sons of men."

(A) Or, however, the word meanings and syntax of the text are to be analyzed, the basic sense is this: The Wisdom of God was there with God at the beginning and was trusted by God to direct him in his creation of created reality. God took delight in the Wisdom of God (that is, in the plan that he had devised). It caused

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God considerable pleasure, joy, and delight. In particular, the world of human beings brought him great pleasure, joy, and delight.

(1) Interpretation and translation of the biblical text needs to happen from the outside in (not from the inside out), from the top down (not from the bottom up). Hence, while it is clearly a dialectical process, we do not ultimately determine what a text means on the basis of how we have decided the vocabulary and syntax need to be analyzed, rather we determine how the vocabulary and syntax need to be analyzed on the basis of how we have decided we have to understand the meaning of the text.

(B) Solomon’s point that God particularly took delight in the sons of men is noteworthy for this reason: God would be more impressed with the vast expanses of the cosmos if the Wisdom of God were the blueprints for the material structure of reality. But if the part of the Wisdom of God that gives God particular delight is “the sons of men,” then it would seem that the most important part of the Wisdom of God is the storyline of the history of mankind. For the most striking aspect of a human existence is the story that unfolds in and through that existence.

4. Summary of the point of *Proverbs* 8 and the relationship between the two different elements of this chapter:

a. To know God’s plan for created reality is to understand the plan and purpose behind my own existence and the plan and purpose for reality itself. When one understands the plan and purpose for reality itself—and for his own existence—then he will be equipped to function in that reality in such a way that the life he lives is excellent.

(A) Human beings should seek to be instructed by God’s wise plan (God’s WISDOM)—the plan in keeping with which all of created reality is created by God. If a man is instructed by God’s wise plan and comes to understand it, then he will be guided into truth and righteousness. To be so instructed by God’s wise plan is more precious than gold, silver, or precious jewels, for the one who is instructed by God’s wise plan will find the favor of God and Life.

b. Solomon’s point is that human wisdom comes from possessing and being instructed by the “wisdom” that existed before the world even began, that is, from possessing and being instructed by *the wise plan* of God that he had devised before he even began to bring anything into being.

(A) To live as a wise human being involves living one’s life skillfully in keeping with the nature of what created reality actually is. And what is created reality? It is exactly what God planned created reality to be before it even began. Hence, for a human being to live wisely entails his knowing and understanding the basic nature of the preconceived plan of God for created reality and living one’s life in the light of his understanding of that divine plan.



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(1) The foolish man is the man who does not have a clue about what created reality is, while the wise man understands the true nature of the created reality within which he lives.

(a) The foolish man does not have a clue about what created reality is because he knows nothing of what God conceived reality to be before he brought it into existence. The wise man understands the true nature of the created reality within which he lives because he knows and understands what God conceived reality to be before he brought it into existence.

[A] In other words, the foolish man is foolish because he knows nothing of God's WISDOM (=wise plan for created reality). The wise man is wise because he knows and understands something of God's WISDOM (=wise plan for created reality).

5. What is the nature of God's WISE PLAN (wisdom) in this passage?

a. If created reality is a mechanism that God built (a kind of "Robo-world"), then God's WISE PLAN (wisdom) would be his plan for the mechanical structure of created reality. That is, his wisdom would be his ingenious blueprints for the Robo-world.

(A) Difference between two paradigms (thought experiment):

(1) Robo-world (the paradigm I grew up with).

(a) The creations in Robo-world are semi-autonomous.

(b) "History" is not created by the inventor; it is created by programmed actions of robots.

(2) The primary alternative: an author imagining a story into existence.

(a) Everything that is in the story comes out of the mind and imagination of the author.

(b) No creature is in the least bit autonomous.

(c) History is created by the author, not the characters.

(B) If created reality is a sort of Robo-world reality, then human wisdom amounts to living in keeping with the mechanisms ("laws") of created reality.

(1) This would be just like the wisdom of the ancient Stoics.

(C) Given that we have inculcated the Enlightenment paradigm from our culture and education, this is the most "natural" way to understand what God's wise plan must be.

b. However, if created reality is a story that God is authoring, then God's WISE PLAN (wisdom) would be his plan for the narrative plot structure of created reality. That is, his wisdom would be his wise and wonderful idea for a set of inter-locking stories to author.

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- (A) Then human wisdom amounts to knowing, understanding, and appreciating the meaning, significance, and purpose of the stories that God is authoring, and hence, it amounts to having a successful and excellent existence because one's choices and actions are informed by an understanding of what God is doing.
- (B) Since we are products of Enlightenment thought and assumptions, this is not the most "natural" way for us to understand God's wise plan. Nevertheless, ultimately, *it is the best possible explanation for all the data* that we get from common-sense experience, philosophy, and the Bible.
- (1) Best explanation of all the data: God as author and created reality as story; created reality as an "idea" in the mind of God.
- (a) The compatibility of divine sovereignty and human freedom > *requires* > a particular conception of divine causation > *requires* > a particular conception of God as transcendent > *requires* > a conception of God wherein his relationship to reality is analogous to the relationship between an author and his story > *requires* > a conception of created reality as story-like, rather than machine-like.
- (b) Two other specific examples of data that are best explained by the "story paradigm":
- [A] Our ordinary experience and common sense suggests to us that our existence seems to have meaning and significance. It makes no sense to us that our existence is without meaning and absurd.
- [1] A reality that has nothing more than a mechanical structure to it has no intrinsic meaning and significance.
- [a] God could build a big machine that pumps out widgets. But why? Why make a machine that pumps out widgets?
- [b] God could create a physical, material reality that operates lawfully in accord with the scientific laws. But why? What is the point?
- [2] By its very nature, a narrative does (or, at least, may) have an intrinsic meaning and significance.
- [a] Hence, reality as a narrative more closely matches our expectations for reality.
- [B] Personal identity is not a problem if human existence has a narrative structure. Personal identity is a difficult (perhaps even unsolvable) problem if human existence merely has a mechanical nature.
- c. As tempting as it is to us to see the "wise plan" of God to which Solomon is referring as blueprints that God designed for a mechanistic structure and reality, that conclusion should be resisted. Abductive reasoning (inference to the best possible explanation)

- tion) would lead us to conclude that God's "wise plan" is his wise and wonderful idea for a set of interlocking stories.
6. Therefore, abductive reasoning would lead us to see the biblical worldview as a form of idealism, not a form of materialism. Stories are, by their very nature, a set of ideas; not a conglomeration of material stuff.
    - a. The crucial difference between materialism and idealism is not how "thin" is the stuff out of which created things are made. The crucial difference is *the degree of autonomy* created reality has from the author or creator of reality.
      - (A) Idealism sees created reality as *NOT in the slightest degree* autonomous from the creator.
      - (B) Materialism sees created reality as *semi-autonomous* from the creator.
    - b. Hence, in *Proverbs 8*, the "wise plan" of God (that existed with God when God brought created reality into existence) is his conception of what **story** to tell (an **IDEA**), not his blueprint for what mechanical structures to make.
  7. From *Proverbs 8*, we are left with the following question:
    - a. How *detailed* was God's pre-existent plan? Did God pre-determine every detail of created reality? Or only the general outline of it?
      - (A) In other words, did God pre-determine every detail of each interlocking story? Or did he determine only the broad outlines of each story? Or, only the broad outlines of the meta-narrative that subsumes all the individual stories?

**B. Acts 17:22–31**

1. Points Paul makes:
  - a. The God whom the Athenians honor as "the Unknown God" is the creator of all of created reality. Unlike the dumb idols that the Athenians worship, he needs no temple he has no need for any human being to serve him or give him anything.
  - b. The Unknown God is the one who creates each and every human being and the whole of history.
  - c. The purpose that this Unknown God has for mankind is that each and every human individual should come to know this God who creates history.
  - d. This Unknown God that we should come to know is eminently knowable for two basic reasons:
    - (A) He is "not far off," he is "near to us," for "in Him we live and move and have our being."
    - (B) We are his children (made in his image); hence, just as we can come to know one another, in a somewhat analogous way, we can come to know the Unknown God.

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He is not so very mysteriously different that knowledge of him is out of reach. He is like us in very important ways.

- (1) Our creating dumb idols to represent God to ourselves as we do shows how ignorant we are of this Unknown God.
- e. Therefore, we should all repent of our ignorance of this God.
  - (A) A day is soon coming when a man appointed by God will come to rule over the world. It is the man Jesus. He was demonstrated to be this man by his resurrection from the dead. In order for one to have a place in the kingdom that he will establish, one must repent of his ignorance of God.
2. To make the point that this God that we should get to know is "not far off." Paul says that "in him, we live and move and exist (have our being)."
  - a. Paul cannot here be conceiving of created reality as a mechanistic and materialist reality.
    - (A) To assert that we live, move, and have our being "in him" would be a strange thing to say if we are semi-autonomous, mechanical entities.
      - (1) We would not say of the engineer who designed Robo-world that the robots within it "live, move, and have their being" in the engineer.
      - (2) Even "by him" would be a strange thing to say: "by him we live, and move, and have our being." If we are semi-autonomous, then we "live, move, and have our being" within ourselves; for that is what we were created to be—self-functioning and self-sustaining.
    - b. On the other hand, if we were characters in a story of which God is the author, then to assert that we "live, move, and have our being in him" would be a completely appropriate way to describe us.
      - (A) The entire being of a character within a story lies *within* the mind of the author.
  3. *Acts 17* confirms what we see in *Proverbs 8:22-31*. The pre-existent plan of God (the Wisdom of God) was a *pre-conceived script of the narrative that God was going to bring into being*; it was not a plan for a mechanistic structure that he was going to build.
  4. *Acts 17* hints at an answer to our unanswered question (How detailed is the pre-existing script according to which God creates reality?). It suggests that *everything* that occurs is part of that script.
    - a. For "in him we live, and move, and have our being."
    - b. However, this evidence is not completely definitive. Paul could be speaking in very broad and general terms, not meaning it as an absolute statement.

### C. *JOHN 1:1-5*

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1. John uses “*logos*” to describe exactly the same thing that Solomon calls the “wisdom of God.”
    - a. John says the *logos* was in the beginning with God. Solomon says the wisdom of God was in the beginning with God.
      - (A) These are identical statements. *Logos* and *wisdom* are synonymous. Roughly speaking, both denote the “wise plan” of God.
  2. John says NOT ONE THING that has come into being has come into being “apart from” the *logos*. That is, NOT ONE THING that has come into being has come into being apart from the “script” or wise plan that existed with God from the very beginning.
    - a. *John* 1 answers the question that remained after interpreting *Proverbs* 8. Namely, did God pre-determine every detail of each interlocking story? Or, did he determine only the broad outlines of each story, or the broad outlines of the overall meta-narrative? John makes clear that *God pre-determined every detail of each and every individual, interlocking story.*
  3. What John says about “life” being in the *logos* (in the context of his gospel) suggests that John is *not* conceiving of the *logos* as the plan of a mechanistic structure. He is conceiving of it as the plan for the unfolding story that he has decided to bring into being—a story that involves salvation from destruction into life.
    - a. Life is not some sort of mechanical entity that could exist in the mechanical structure of created reality. Rather, it is an abstract entity; not a tangible, concrete entity. It can exist as part of a particular narrative. But it could never exist as a specific concrete material entity in a material and mechanical reality.
    - b. Therefore, John confirms here what we saw in *Proverbs* 8: the pre-existent plan was a pre-conceived script of the narrative that God was going to bring into being. And it was not a plan for some mechanistic structure that he was going to build.
      - (A) Going further, John makes clear that every second of our lives pre-exists as part of the pre-existent plan of God.

D. **GENESIS 1:1-2:4a**

1. How have we typically understood *Genesis* 1?
  - a. As a description of God’s fashioning all the semi-autonomous entities that make up the natural world: the sun, moon, stars, birds, fish, animals, plants, and human beings.
    - (A) Except for those who interpret it as a myth, we typically interpret it as a basically literal description of how and when God created material, physical reality.
2. Why have we always interpreted it as we have?
  - a. Because, from the period of the Enlightenment, we have thoroughly absorbed a materialistic, mechanistic paradigm. We read *Genesis* 1 through the lenses of that paradigm.

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- (A) While God is an invisible, intangible being, created reality consists of material, tangible "stuff." The creation account is an account of how all the material, tangible "stuff" that is other than God came into being.
- (1) The typical reading of *Genesis 1* assumes a false picture of reality: the physical world is what God created; God himself (and other spiritual beings) are uncreated. (Typically, this picture of reality would not be explicitly articulated and acknowledged in these terms, but it is the tacit understanding that underlies the typical reading of the *Genesis* creation account.)
- (a) Implication: primary reality is the reality in which God dwells (along with Satan, angels, etc.); physical reality (the reality we humans inhabit) is of secondary importance to that primary reality. (From the Bible's perspective, human history is of much greater import to God's purposes than, for example, the angelic realm. This variance shows the tacit underlying assumption to be false.)
3. How should we interpret *Genesis 1*?
- a. Illustration of the sort of genre that *Genesis 1* is:
- (A) See accompanying paper entitled "*Model Creation Stories to Aid In Our Understanding of Genesis 1*".
- (B) All of the following statements can be made about all of the model creation stories outlined in the paper mentioned above:
- (1) The order in which things come into existence is arbitrary. The order is not intended to be chronologically accurate. In fact, it is not even intended to be rationally coherent.
- (2) The groupings of things that are said to come into being alongside other things is arbitrary. It is not intended to reflect any literal ordering of creation.
- (3) The created entities that are mentioned in the account are not intended to be exhaustive. The account is not meant to be an absolutely exhaustive account of all that God created. Rather, it is only intended to communicate the breadth of God's creative act as a way of suggesting the larger truth that God is the creator of absolutely everything that is.
- (4) The assignment of each particular created thing, or of each sort of created thing, to a particular direction, box, or month within these accounts is totally artificial. (It is dictated by a subsidiary purpose of the account, not by the primary purpose of the account.) This assignment is not intended to reflect any truth whatsoever about the nature of created reality nor about the nature of God's creative act. For, as already suggested, the groupings created by such assignments are completely arbitrary.

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- (5) The creation of each and every account has a subsidiary purpose. Not only is the purpose of each account to take a philosophical position on the nature of God and his relationship to reality (it is exactly the same philosophical position in all three creation stories mentioned in the paper), but each story has its own unique subsidiary purpose: namely, to justify some hypothetical religious practice or perspective (bowing to the east, the attribution of meaning to the rainbow, the celebration of the Son of God in December).
- (6) None of these stories is intended to describe *how* or *when* created reality came into being. Their sole purpose is to maintain that every aspect of everything that is and of everything that occurs is the result of God willing it into existence. Everything that is comes about simply because God has conceived of it and willed it to be.
- (7) All of these stories have *a certain fanciful "feel" about them*, because they all express a philosophical truth through the medium of a fictional, unrealistic, and somewhat fanciful story. It would be a huge mistake to allow the fanciful "feel" of the account to distract me from the earnestly serious philosophical statement that is being expressed.
- (C) If the model creation stories in the paper mentioned above successfully imitate the nature and character of the creation account in *Genesis 1* (and I maintain that they do), then all of the above statements apply to the creation account in *Genesis 1* just as surely as they apply to the model creation stories in the above paper.
- b. Primarily, *Genesis 1* should be interpreted as a philosophical statement about the nature of created reality in relation to God its creator:
- (A) It is not directly a polemic against the gods of polytheism. (It does indirectly function as such a polemic, of course, because it promotes a radically different worldview from polytheism. But that is not its primary purpose. Its primary purpose is to make a positive statement about the nature of created reality in relation to God.)
- (B) What it states:
- (1) God brings all of reality into being simply by willing reality to be what he wants it to be.
- (a) This account does not describe God as fashioning reality out of pre-existing materials.
- [A] God is not a craftsman who exerted himself to fashion or craft the world.
- (b) Nor does it describe God as having magical speech that allows him to conjure up created reality out of nothing, where there was no pre-existing thing.

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[A] “And God said ‘Let there be X,’ and there was X” is not a magical incantation. While it is logically possible that it be a magical incantation, that is not the best way to understand it.

[1] God is not a wizard who conjured up the world.

(c) Rather, God’s speech (“Let there be X”) is an expression of his will and desire.

[A] “Let there be X and there was X” is meant to suggest that all of created reality—out of blank, sterile nothingness—came into being simply because God willed it to be.

[1] Hence, it describes God as merely WILLING created reality into existence.

[a] Note the similarity to an author. An author “wills” his created reality to be whatever he wants it to be. He need not exert himself in any way. By contrast, a craftsman or engineer must exert himself to *craft* or to *engineer* created reality to be what he wants it to be.

[2] God is an author who imagines the world into being.

[a] Created reality is utterly dependent upon God’s will to have existence. If God wills for X to exist, X will exist. If God does not will for X to exist, X will not exist.

[b] *Genesis 1* confirms what we saw in *Proverbs 8*, *Acts 17*, and *John 1*—namely, the created reality that God creates is not best understood as a sort of mechanistic structure. Rather, it is best understood as a kind of narrative, as something that can simply be willed into being.

[c] Hence, created reality is utterly and completely dependent upon the will of God; it is NOT semi-autonomous.

(2) ***Everything that exists*** exists by the will of God.

(3) It is not nature that God was primarily interested in bringing into existence. History is what God was primarily interested in creating; nature was simply the context (the stage) for history.

(a) The initial creation account is mistakenly taken to be THE CREATION ACCOUNT. That is not so. *Genesis 1* is the account of *the creation of the heavens and the earth*, the stage upon which God’s continuing creation is to take place. It is not the account of *creation itself*. The account of the creation of the most important aspect of God’s creation does not begin until the account beginning in *Genesis 2:4*.



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c. Secondly, as an explanation of the meaning and purpose of Sabbath-keeping.

(A) This is why the author of this account *contrives* an account where nature is created in “six days” and the seventh day that follows is when God ceased from his task of bringing nature into existence. After his work of creating nature has been completed, we are to understand that only then did God begin to create what he was really interested in creating (human history, the story).

E. **Hebrews 1:2**

1. All of the “ages” were created specifically with Jesus—the *Messiah*—in view. Hence, God’s authoring of all of history was to the end that Jesus, the *Messiah*, might be highlighted, exalted, and glorified in and by that history.
  - a. The very point being made here presupposes this very important point: *it is God who authors history*. Certainly history is created, authored, and determined as the net effect of choices made by the various human actors. But, ultimately, history is created, authored, and determined by God. This can only be true if God is the author of all the human choices made by human beings.

F. **Ephesians 3:7-11**

1. *“Of this gospel I became a servant in accord with the gift of God’s grace that was given to me, consistent with the working of his power. To me, the very least of all the sanctified ones, this grace was given: (a) to convey to the Gentiles the good news about the incalculable treasure of the Messiah, and (b) to bring to light what is his plan for distributing his blessing to all (since from long ages past the secret had been hidden in God, in the one who creates all things). My bringing this to light was so that the multifarious wisdom of God pertaining to his ekklesia (which is in accord with the purpose that he formed for the ages, to the benefit of Messiah Jesus, our lord) might now be made known to the leaders and authorities in divine matters.”*
  - a. Paul is using wisdom here in much the same way that “wisdom” is being used in *Proverbs 8:12–9:6*. In this passage, the “multifarious wisdom” of God (literally, the “multi-colored wisdom” of God) consists, specifically, of the many different “stories” that God has created wherein select individual human beings come to be joined to the eternal people of God in and through their life journeys.

G. **Hebrews 10:5–10**

1. *Therefore, when it comes to the ritualistic system of sacrifices, it says, “You do not want a sacrifice and offering, rather, you have arranged a body for me. In whole burnt offerings and offerings for sin, you find no pleasure. Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come (in the scroll of the book it is written concerning me) to do your will, O God.’” After saying above, “sacrifice and offering” and “whole burnt offerings and offerings for sin” you “do not want” nor do you “find any pleasure in them”—things that are offered in accord with the Covenant—then it says, “Behold, I have come to do your will.” He takes away*

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*the first with the result that he establishes the second. By this “will” we are sanctified in view of the one time offering of the body of Jesus, the Messiah.*

- a. The parenthetical comment contained in the quotation from *Psalms 40:6-8a* would appear to be an off-handed comment to the effect that who he (the Psalmist) is and how he behaves has already been scripted in advance. His response to God is contained in the “scroll of the book.” That is, how he will respond to God had already been determined and scripted before he ever had a chance to respond.
2. **Notable implication:** In various different ways, this (and the other passages we have considered) suggest that created reality was created by God in accord with some pre-existing plan that God possessed. This pre-existent plan (this “wisdom of God”) is a complete and comprehensive script for how all of created reality is going to go. (How reality will unfold is recorded in the “scroll of the book.”) Knowing that such a “wisdom” exists and understanding, in general terms, what purpose is being served by that pre-existing plan (“wisdom”) is what is required in order for me to be rightly oriented toward my existence.
  - a. The purpose of my existence is to be a story. On the one hand, the nature and outcome of that story is determined by me. It depends on what choices I make. On the other hand, the nature and outcome of my story was pre-conceived by God before the foundation of the world.
    - (A) Knowing that my life is a story being created to serve God’s purposes puts me in a position to know who I am and to know the meaning, purpose, and significance of my existence. Much folly results in a person’s life when he fails to grasp this fact about himself—that is, when he fails to grasp that the meaning and purpose of his existence centers in God. *If I think that I exist for me*, I will make many very foolish choices.

#### H. *1 Corinthians 8:6*

1. In the context of explaining what Jesus-believers believe—in contradistinction to what idol-worshippers believe—Paul maintains two things: (i) The Jesus-believer knows that all of humanity was brought into being for the purpose of benefitting God [*eis* God], the creator. Hence, as Jesus-believers, we exist for the purpose of bringing honor, glory, and praise to God [*eis* God]. (ii) Furthermore, the Jesus-believer knows that all of humanity was brought into being with a view to Jesus, the Messiah [*dia* Jesus]. That is, with a view to bringing honor to Jesus, the Messiah. Hence, as Jesus-believers, we exist for the purpose of benefitting Jesus—that is, for the purpose of bringing honor, glory, praise, and exaltation to Jesus [*dia* Jesus].
- I. *Miscellaneous passages which significantly confirm, illustrate, or fill out the theology we have derived from the above passages:*
  1. *Exodus 6:2-8*

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- a. God instructs Moses in a new way of conceiving of him. No longer should Moses think of God as *El Shaddai* {God Most High}, the controlling god within a pantheon of gods. Moses should rather think of God as *Yahweh* {the One Who Is}, a being who transcends existence altogether.
- (A) *Yahweh* is not a being who exists within and who shapes and determines our reality, and whose existence is as contingent, as dependent, and as vulnerable to non-existence as our reality itself is. *Yahweh* is a being whose existence simply *is*—whose existence is necessary and not contingent, whose existence is not dependent upon anyone or anything, and is not vulnerable to becoming non-existence.
- b. Note how, in this passage, God connects the sort of being he is (as indicated by his name *Yahweh*) to the fact that he will most certainly be able to free the people of Israel from their bondage to the Egyptians and to fulfill his promises to grant them the land he promised Abraham.
- c. Notable implications:
- (A) The nature of *Yahweh*'s existence—that fact that he has “necessary” existence rather than contingent existence—entails that he is the author of created (contingent) existence and that his being exists outside of and beyond created reality. In other words, the necessity of *Yahweh*'s being entails that he transcends our reality and does not exist within its bounds.
- (B) *Yahweh* is the **transcendent** cause of every aspect of created reality. As the transcendent cause, *Yahweh* can cause and determine reality in a manner that is consistent with free human choice. Only a proper understanding of *Yahweh*'s transcendence allows for a rational and consistent understanding of how to reconcile divine sovereignty with human freedom and responsibility.
- (C) Given the nature of who God is and his relationship to reality, there is nothing that God cannot bring to pass in reality. If God wills it to be, it will be.

## 2. *Isaiah 45:7*

- a. According to Isaiah, God explicitly states that he is the creator of evil, darkness, adversity, and bad things, just as surely as he is the creator of good things. Hence, God creates and causes ALL things in reality, not just the good things.

## 3. *Genesis 22:1–19*

- a. Abraham's “faith” was being tested by God in this event. Abraham believed that—one way or another (even if it meant raising Isaac from the dead [see *Hebrews 11:19*])—he could count on God to fulfill the exact promises that he had made to Abraham, even though there was seemingly no possible way that those exact promises could be fulfilled if Isaac were to die prematurely. The only way that Abraham could find the “freedom” to obey the command of God to kill Isaac is on the assumption that God would and could do the impossible and fulfill his promises to Abraham even while Abraham's obedience would render God's fulfilling his promises impossi-

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ble. Hence, *the God in whom Abraham believed is not limited to what is possible in the cause and effect world of our experience*. God exists outside of and God authors the cause and effect world that we all live in. Hence, he is fully capable of bringing into being whatever he has said will come into being. No existing created reality can stand in the way of his doing so. This is the understanding of God (the “faith”) that Abraham showed that he had.

- b. In another context, Abraham’s action would have been the crazy, insane murder of his own son. Abraham’s act finds its true meaning and significance in the context of the coherent, ongoing story of his life—specifically, in the context of the coherent, ongoing story of his interaction with *Yahweh*.
- c. Notable implications
  - (A) The course of my life is not determined by various forces and realities within this existence (that is, by the various “causes” within ordinary created reality). The course of my life is determined by the will of *Yahweh*. Therefore, *I must not trust in the various cause and effect relationships that can be learned through life experience. I must trust only in God himself*. God, and he alone, determines the outcomes of my choices and actions. Principles of cause and effect may *generally* predict the outcome of my actions, but they can never *necessitate* any outcome. Only God’s will necessitates the outcome of my choices and actions. As a result, *God’s will will always be done, no matter how impossible it might appear*.
    - (1) We are foolish to put our trust in anyone or anything other than the author of all of reality. We must not even trust in the cause and effect relations that we learn through experience. As rational beings, it is right and proper that we make choices based on expectations that arise from those cause and effect relationships. But we must not TRUST them. That is, we must know that our expectations will only be met if *Yahweh* so wills it.
    - (2) If God intends good for me, then there is absolutely nothing that can prevent him from bringing that good to me—not even me, in my own freedom. Hence, he who began a good work in me will absolutely complete that good work. There is a great comfort and security in this.
  - (B) As is the case here in *Genesis 22*, no action by a human being has meaning and significance in and of itself. Its meaning and significance can only be found in the context of the coherent, ongoing story of one’s life. When God creates a free-will choice by a human being, he is contributing to the story that he is creating that is centered in that individual. Every choice that a human being makes (the self-same choice that God creates) contributes to a coherent story that has that human being as its protagonist.

4. ***2 Chronicles 18:1-34 [1 Kings 22:1-40]***

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- a. If (as is clear in the *2 Chronicles* account) God causes and controls the very whim of a soldier to shoot an arrow into the air at random and with no apparent purpose (or for some purpose totally unrelated to its consequence), what does God *not* control?

5. ***Proverbs 21:1***

- a. Here, the very decisions that a king makes are said to be completely under the control of God. But the proverb is not envisioning mindless decisions caused by God. It does not envision actions that do NOT stem from the free will and deliberation of the king. Rather, it is describing the ability of God to cause and create free-will choices in a human being (namely, the king).

6. ***Romans 9:21 (see also Isaiah 45:9, Isaiah 64:8, Jeremiah 18:4, and Jeremiah 18:6)***

- a. We are like pots molded by a potter in the sense that the potter makes whatever pot he wants to make, to be used for whatever purpose he wants to use it. In other words, we are creatures created by God. God creates us to be whatever he wants us to be and to serve whatever purposes he wants us to serve. How is a human being created? A human being is created in and through the choices he makes. Hence, God creates me what he wants me to be by causing the free-will choices that I make.

- b. **Notable implication:** God is the creator and author of free-will choices by human beings. God does not coerce actions by human beings against their will. Rather, he creates the free-will choices of human beings and the actions that flow from those choices. Human beings are responsible for their choices and actions because their choices and actions are “free” from, and not necessitated by, any ordinary created causes. So, while we create the beings that we will be in and through the free-will choices that we make, nevertheless, at the same time, the author of our free-will choices is thereby creating the beings that we will be. We are pots, God is the potter. He makes us to be whatever he wants us to be.

7. ***Matthew 26:33-35, Mark 14:29-31, Luke 22:31-34, and John 13:37-38 in the light of Matthew 26:69-75, Mark 14:66-72, Luke 22:54-62, and John 18:25-27***

- a. The detail and specificity of Jesus’s prediction of Peter’s denials requires a detailed knowledge, by God, of every detail of the relevant events. To understand the details of all of the relevant events would require a detailed knowledge of the free choices of a large number of different individuals. How could God have such knowledge unless he is the author of those very choices?

8. ***Numbers 23:19; Jeremiah 1:12; Ezekiel 17:24***

- a. These passages are not about God’s integrity—that is, they are not about his good *intention* to keep his word. Rather, these passages are about the necessity and inevitability of God’s predictions coming to pass. God’s prediction of an event absolutely necessitates that the event he has predicted will come to pass. Why? Because God is not one who simply *knows* the future; he is the one who *creates and authors*

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the future. Hence, when God says X is going to occur, X is going to occur. For he is going to bring it about.

9. *Acts 2:22–24*

a. Luke clearly states that Jesus’s crucifixion was in keeping with some pre-existing script for Jesus’s life. But this script for Jesus’s life was not just a script for Jesus’ life alone, it also entailed a script for Judas’s life and for a number of other people as well. Ultimately, it makes sense that, in the biblical worldview, *each and every human being* has a particular story to play out—a story scripted by God before the foundation of the world.

(A) Jesus was “delivered over,” he was “nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men,” he was “put to death,” and he was “raised up again, putting an end to the agony of death”—all by the “*predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God.*”

(B) But, by the same token, particular godless men nailed Jesus to the cross, and a particular man delivered Jesus over to the authorities (betrayed Jesus)—all by the “*predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God.*”

b. Note that—as we see articulated in *Acts 2:22–24*—Judas’s free-will choice to betray Jesus was part of a larger event that God had pre-ordained. Therefore, Judas clearly had to betray Jesus. Otherwise, God’s purposes would not have transpired as God had planned them. Hence, *God caused Judas to betray Jesus*. However, note that Judas is held fully accountable and responsible for the evil choice to betray Jesus. Nowhere is the fact that Judas was simply doing what God had preordained him to do taken to mean that Judas was not responsible for and accountable for his action. In the minds of all the biblical authors, *divine control over every desire, choice, and action is fully compatible with human freedom and responsibility*.

(A) It does no good to suggest that God’s purposes only require that *someone* betray Jesus, not that *Judas* betray Jesus. But if it is a problem to suggest that God caused Judas to betray Jesus, then it should equally be a problem for God to cause *anyone else* to betray Jesus. But, if it is a problem for God to cause *anyone whatsoever* to betray Jesus, then God would not be able to know, predict, and ensure that his purposes be fulfilled. For God’s purposes would then be contingent upon autonomous human beings, who may or may not choose to do what God intends for them to do.

10. *Amos 3:6–8*

a. This is one of the only places where God describes *how* he knows the future such that he is able to inform the people of Israel through his prophets concerning what they should expect. Nowhere does he say anything along the lines of “he looks down the tunnel of time and sees what is occurring in the future.” Rather, as he says here in *Amos*, God knows the future because he knows what he intends to create (*i.e.*, to author) in the future. At any point, he can inform us through his prophets what the future has in store because, since he is the author of the script, he knows what his script con-

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tains. *Amos 3:7* explicitly states that the future is something that God *does*, not something that he passively *knows*.

11. ***Exodus 20:1–7***

- a. In the context of ancient polytheism, God is commanding Israel not to be polytheistic in their mindset and actions. They are not to believe that there are many different reality-shaping forces {gods} who direct and govern the course of their lives. There is one and only one reality-shaping force whose will directs and governs everything that occurs—the will of the transcendent creator, *Yahweh*. All of their worship and religious practice should acknowledge this truth. To worship many gods (as polytheists do) is to deny the truth that *Yahweh*, and he alone, governs the whole of reality.

12. ***1 Kings 18:20–40***

- a. In this passage, Elijah has set up a test. Whose “god” governs reality? In this test, nothing the priests of *Baal* did could bring it about that *Baal*, whom king Ahab worships, could bring about the specified result (lighting the offering on fire). And nothing that the priests of *Baal* did to stop it could prevent *Yahweh* from bringing about the specified result (lighting the offering on fire). Hence, this test set up by Elijah demonstrates that *Yahweh*, and he alone, controls and directs everything in reality.  
  
(A) Elijah’s contest proved that *Yahweh* was the true God by demonstrating that God can do anything he wants to do and no one and no thing can stop him. Furthermore, nothing can be made to occur that God does not will to occur. Of no other god can this be said.

13. ***Matthew 16:21–25***

- a. Note how keenly aware Jesus is of exactly what awaits him. He seems to be keenly aware of some script that he knows has been created for him.
- b. Jesus issues an exhortation to his disciples. They too will be called upon to undergo a searching, troublesome ordeal by the author of their script. And, if they want to follow him (to be his disciples), then they must willingly and obediently endure the ordeal scripted for them, just as Jesus is about to willingly and obediently endure the ordeal scripted for him.  
  
(A) Jesus—wise and righteous though he is—feels sorely tempted to substitute his own will for the will of his Father. He rebukes Peter for serving as a conduit for such a temptation.  
  
(B) Only the individual who is willing to set aside his own ambitions, desires, hopes, and dreams (that is, his own “life”) will be granted eternal life. The one who insists on the right to define his own life and existence—the one who insists on playing God over his own life—will be condemned. The one who submits to the reality that God is the rightful author of his being and existence, he is the one who will be granted mercy and eternal life.

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c. Notable implication:

(A) The story of each individual person will include an ordeal (or series of ordeals) that that person will be asked to endure by his creator. It is his own personal “cross” to bear. The ultimate destiny of that individual (whether it be condemnation or mercy) will hinge on whether he obediently “takes up his cross”—that is, whether he submits to and obediently endures the ordeal that God has asked him to endure.

J. **Brief statements that articulate the worldview that underlies the above passages:**

1. *STATEMENT #1: God is not a being who exists in some higher domain of the same reality in which we exist; rather, he exists outside of our reality altogether. In other words, God does not exist, he super-exists. God is not real (in the same sense that we are real), he is more real than we are. If reality were a house, it is not as if God lives upstairs while we live downstairs. God does not live in the house at all. Rather, God is like the builder of the house who has his own existence outside of it.*
2. *STATEMENT #2: God’s purpose in creating the reality in which we exist was to create something that reflected something of who he is. In other words, God’s creation of reality is an act of self-expression.*
3. *STATEMENT #3: God’s aim in his creation of reality is to create a story. God has created, and is creating, a nexus of interlocking stories that are all united under, and that all contribute to, one grand overarching story.*
4. *STATEMENT #4: Created reality exists to reflect the glory of God in and through the individual stories that he authors—stories that are centered in the life of each and every individual human being. Created reality was not made for me, in order that I might find happiness. Created reality was created for God, that his glory might be embodied in and reflected by the stories that he authors.*
5. *STATEMENT #5: All of reality (every second of it and every inch of it) is determined by God. God, and he alone, causes reality to be exactly what he wants it to be. God, and he alone, determines the story of each individual’s life.*
6. *STATEMENT #6: Every thought, desire, and choice of each and every human being is authored by God. Therefore, every human choice is caused and determined by God.*
7. *STATEMENT #7: God is the only god who matters. We should seek to know, honor, serve, and obey no other god but him.*



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## Part Two: The Nature, Role, and Plight of Human Beings

### A. *Genesis 1:1-2:4a*

1. The initial creation account is *anthropocentric*. Quite clearly, it intends to present humankind as the apex of God’s creation.
  - a. Everything that God creates is ultimately defined or explained in terms of its relation to human beings.
  - b. Human beings are to “rule over” most of the other creatures God created.
2. The second account (the one that immediately follows this account) is the account of the beginning chapters of the story of mankind.
  - a. The second account represents what God is ultimately interested in creating—the stories that are centered in human beings.
3. Notable implications:
  - a. Human beings constitute the main characters in the drama of the story of created reality that God is creating.

(A) Human history is the main storyline of the narrative that constitutes God’s primary work of creation.
  - b. As creatures created by God, human beings are magnificent creatures. We are wondrous and marvelous in terms of the created beings that we are.

(A) Self-negation—out of a hatred for who I am as a created being—is an act of evil rebellion against my creator. I am *not* an insignificant nothing. I am a significant creation of God.

    - (1) Each human being is of great ontological worth.
    - (2) There is an important distinction to be made between ontological worth and moral blame. To be “blameworthy” does not entail being “worthless.”

### B. *Genesis 1:26–27* (*Genesis 3:22, 5:1, 9:6; James 3:9*)

1. Human beings are created “in the image of God.” In the creation account, this is placed in direct opposition to all the other creatures that God created—notably, the animals.
  - a. God is a person (a personal being rather than an impersonal being). To be made in God’s image is to likewise exist as a personal being, rather than as an impersonal being.

(A) A person (in the sense that I mean it here) is not a body, nor does it presuppose a body. (God is a person, yet God is not an embodied being.) A person is a being with particular characteristics that are dependent upon reason, that entail a mind.
  - b. The defining characteristics of a “person”:

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- (A) A personal being is a being of higher-order rationality.
- (B) A personal being is a being capable of higher-order intentionality and, therefore, language.
- (1) "Intentionality" is a technical term in philosophy. Intentionality is not about a person's "intentions" in the ordinary sense of that word. Intentionality is the power of the human mind and mental states to be about, to represent, or to stand for, things, properties and states of affairs.
- (a) Intentionality (from Latin *tendere*) entails the ability of the human mind to create mental states that point beyond themselves to something else. It is the ability of the human mind to create mental objects that represent something other than themselves. It entails the ability of the human mind to employ language.
- (C) A personal being is a being capable of higher-order imagination and creativity.
- (D) Most important of all, a personal being is a *moral being*.
- (1) This is the one absolutely unique characteristic of a person. Impersonal beings are *not* moral beings.
2. On the one hand, human beings are made "from the dust of the ground" just like the animals are [*Genesis 2:7, 19*]. On the other hand, unlike the animals, human beings are created in the image of God. So, human beings are a unique hybrid creature. On the one hand, we are like the animals in significant respects. But, on the other hand, we are also like God in a significant respect. (Like God, we are persons.)
3. *Genesis 9:6* > After the world-destroying flood in the time of Noah, human beings are to take animals for food [*Genesis 9:2-3*]. But they are not to kill human beings for food. Indeed, they are not to kill human beings at all. Why? Because they are *not just another species of animal*. They are *persons*, made in the image of God.
- a. To be marked with the "image of God" in my being is a sort of mark of God's right of ownership over me. God and God alone has the right to determine if I will live or if I will die at any given time. As a human being, I have no such right over another human being. That other human being, made in the image of God, is marked with his stamp of ownership, not mine.
- (A) As personal beings—who reflect something of the nature of who God is—we have a sort of dignity, distinctiveness, and significance that makes it wholly inappropriate for other human beings to treat me as disposable. Animals lack that dignity, distinctiveness, and significance. It is right and appropriate to view animals as disposable in a way that would be inappropriate for other human beings.

C. *Deuteronomy 30:19* (See also *Joshua 24:15*.)

1. The reality is that human free-will choice determines and defines who each individual human being is.

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- a. The Bible assumes this existential reality. There is no one passage that explicitly states it and expounds upon it. It is rather *an unstated assumption that underlies everything the Bible states*. It underlies everything the Bible teaches.
  2. This assumption is a fundamental and indisputable part of commonsense itself.
    - a. The reality that free-will choice is the reality that defines and determines who any particular individual human being is is an integral part of what it means to be a person.
      - (A) It underlies what it means for a human being to be a moral being.
    - b. It is a part of what it means that humans are made in the image of God.
    - c. It is an important distinctive of human beings. It distinguishes human beings from animals.

**D. *1 Corinthians 11:7***

1. The background to Paul’s argument here is this: The Jesus-believing women in the culture of Corinth at the time when Paul writes this letter are faced with a dilemma. Praying to God with one’s head covered expresses disrespect for God. Yet, at the same time, to be seen in public with her head uncovered would signal a woman’s disrespect for her husband. So, now that, in Jesus-believing communities, a woman has been extended the newfound freedom of entering into public worship with her husband—what is a Jesus-believing woman to do? When she prays or prophesies during public worship, should she uncover her head in order not to show disrespect toward God, with the effect that she will risk showing disrespect for her husband? Or, should she keep her head covered in order not to disrespect her husband, with the effect that she will risk expressing disrespect toward God? Paul answers this by making a judgment call about which “message” will likely be heard by others in the culture of that time and place. He judges that a believing woman who removes her head-covering in public will not be viewed as respecting God. Rather, she will be viewed as disrespecting her husband. Therefore, in order not to send the message that Jesus-believing wives do not respect their husbands, Paul advises that they should keep head-coverings on during public worship.
2. The verse (*1 Corinthians 11:7*) reads, “For a man ought not to have his head covered, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man.” Paul is not saying, “a husband is the image and glory of God, but his wife is *not* the image and glory of God. Paul is not saying that a man’s wife is “the glory of man instead of being the image and glory of God.” Rather, Paul is saying this: “A man, along with every other human being (including his wife), is the image and glory of God. Hence—because of that fact—he is under obligation to honor God and not to disrespect him. (An obligation shared by every other human being, including his wife.) But that man’s wife has another, potentially competing, obligation. His wife is an individual who, through her behavior, will either express praise, honor, and respect for her husband, or she will express dishonor and disre-

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spect for her husband. Her obligation, by virtue of the nature of the marriage relationship, is to do the former, and to avoid the latter.”

- a. Paul’s argument in this chapter is this: Just as every human being—and most notably a woman’s husband—has a moral obligation to honor God and live a life that praises him, analogously a wife has a moral obligation to honor her husband and live a life that praises and respects him. The issue is a person’s behavior. How ought every human being act in relation to God? And how ought every wife act in relation to her husband? Every human being ought to act in such a way that his behavior respects and honors his creator. Analogously, every wife ought to act in such a way that her behavior respects and honors her husband. Why? Because the intended nature and purpose of the marriage relationship requires this.
- b. Paul sees a connection between a human being’s existing in “the image of God” and a human being’s being “the glory of God.” Paul seems to be saying that, because he is created in the image of God, a human being’s purpose is to bring glory to God. Paul’s reasoning seems to be this: God created the human being in his image. Arguably, he did so because he wanted his creature to reflect something unique about him, the creator, thereby bringing “glory” to himself. Hence, we can infer from that fact the following: the very purpose of human existence is to bring “glory” to God.

(A) Paul’s further inference is this: If the purpose of human existence is for a human being to bring “glory” to God, then it follows that to dishonor and disrespect his creator would be incompatible with the very purpose of his existence.

3. Notable implication:

- a. The very purpose of any human individual’s existence is to the end that God might be “glorified” by his existence. This means that the purpose of a particular human being’s existence is not defined by the outcome or result of his existence for that particular human being. Rather, it is defined by the meaning and significance of his existence for the creator. In other words, I am not here so that my existence might reward me in some way. I am here so that God’s glory might be put on display.

(A) By bringing me into existence, God is not obligated to make my existence one that rewards me. He does not “owe me.” For I was not brought into existence for me. I was brought into existence in order to serve the purposes of God. And God’s purposes ultimately involve God, the creator, being “glorified” in and through my existence in some way.

(1) God can be “glorified” in his capacity as my righteous and holy judge.

(2) Or, God can be “glorified” by manifesting his profound and beautiful mercy toward me.

(B) Whatever God’s purposes for me might be, my obligation is to honor and respect the right and authority that God has over me. I owe him honor. To disrespect God would be utterly evil.

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E. **Romans 1:16–2:2**

1. Paul’s argument here is this: *Every human being stands condemned and subject to the coming wrath of God*, because every human being, universally, is innately opposed to God and the things of God. Every human being, without exception, has a propensity to embrace foolish beliefs about God and his reality, has a propensity to refuse to embrace the truth about God and reality, and has a propensity to fail to live in the light of those truths. The behavior of human beings, universally, gives evidence that their moral judgment has been perverted by their opposition to God and truth.
  - a. The point Paul is articulating here: every human being stands condemned to wrath and complete destruction for his innate hostility toward God and the things of God.

F. **Genesis 3:1-24**

1. This account is not an account of the “fall” of mankind (if by “fall” we mean a fall from moral perfection to sinfulness, from being good to being evil). It could be argued that it is an account of a “fall” from blamelessness in relation to a Law to culpability in relation to that Law. But the perspective that views Adam and Eve as having been created morally perfect only to have then made a choice that corrupted them and rendered them sinful is not what this account is describing.
2. This account is not the account of a “fall,” it is the account of a test. The commandment not to eat from the tree is an artificially constructed test that was intended by God to reveal the moral state of the human creature. What was the result? They failed the test. They demonstrated that—as the creatures that God created them to be—they were sinful rebels against God who were deserving of condemnation to death and destruction rather than eternal life.
3. Notable implications:
  - a. Human beings are not beings who make themselves worthy of condemnation if and when they choose to disobey God’s command. Rather, human beings are worthy of condemnation simply by virtue of being who they are, simply by virtue of being fundamentally damnable in the very nature of who they are. Indeed, they are worthy of condemnation by virtue of who and what God created them to be. Human beings were created by God to be evil beings.
  - b. Eternal life will not and cannot be granted to human beings because they deserve to be rewarded with eternal life. If eternal life is granted, it is granted as an act of mercy, not as an act of justice.

G. **Psalms 51:1–19, esp. 51:5**

1. Here David reflects on the sins he committed in and around his adultery with Bathsheba and his murder of her husband. In this *Psalms*, David acknowledges that he was actually “born in sin” and that his only hope rests in the mercy of God to forgive him.

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2. We could paraphrase what David is saying here by stating that all of us (like him) are born with a "sin nature." However, we must take care that we not be misled by such an expression. My "sin nature" (while it is a useful philosophical fiction) is not the actual *cause* of my sinful choices. (My sin nature does not cause me to be sinful right now any more than a cold climate causes today's weather to be cold right now.) Rather, it is a way of describing *the pattern* of my choices. As it happens, the moral choices that I make trend in the direction of sin and evil. That is what I mean when I say that I have a "sin nature." Being described as having a "sin nature" leaves open the true and actual *cause* of my choices.
- a. The actual cause of my sinful choice can validly be described in two different ways, depending upon which perspective I take:
- (A) On the one hand, each and every sinful choice is the resolution of my own free will.
- (1) I am not caused by anything in created reality to make the choice that I make. I make my choice freely. Hence, the *cause* of my choice is this spontaneous resolution of my own will.
- (B) On the other hand, each and every sinful choice is the creation of the author of my being.
- (1) Since the spontaneous resolution of my own will is an *ex nihilo* creation of God (the author of my being), it follows that the ultimate cause of every one of my sinful choices is God.
- b. In actuality, therefore, to be "born with a sin nature" is to be born in accord with divine purposes that involve God's creating me to be an evil sinner. I cannot escape moral failure, for that is what God—in accord with his own purposes—is creating me to be.
- (A) Hence, God is creating me to be a being who—in the light of my moral performance—is utterly dependent upon the mercy of God. I am a being who deserves condemnation. I can only be rescued from that condemnation by God's mercy toward me.
3. To be "born in sin" is not describing the fact that literally everything I do is sinful. Rather, it is describing my readiness and propensity to sin. A human being who was truly morally good would never sin at all. The fact that I ever sin is a moral defect. The fact that I sin often, easily, and at the drop of a hat describes my true state. That is what it means to be "born in sin."
4. Notable implications:
- a. We are born evil sinners. We are not sinners because at some point we chose to become sinners. Rather, because we are sinners intrinsically, through the moral choices that we make we give evidence of the fact that we are sinners.

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- b. God creates us to be evil sinners in order that we might play the role that he wants us to play in the story that he is authoring.

#### H. *Romans 2:3-10*

- 1. Paul’s argument here hinges on his belief that a day of judgment awaits every human being (because every human being is damnably sinful). On the day of judgment that is coming, those who are stubbornly unrepentant will meet with wrath and fury from God as the just punishment for their evil. Those who “do good”—that is, who repent of their opposition to God—will be granted glory, honor, and immortality.
  - a. We should not misunderstand Paul’s point. Paul is not suggesting that there are those who behave well and those who behave evilly and that the former will be rewarded with glory, honor, and immortality and the latter will be met with “tribulation and distress.” Rather, Paul’s point is this: There is one and only one kind of human being—an evil human being. There are no good human beings. There are only evil human beings. But, there are *two kinds of evil human beings*. There are evil human beings who have adopted an attitude of repentance from their opposition to God. And there are human beings who have *not* adopted such an attitude of repentance. These latter individuals remain stubbornly unrepentant in the face of their evil. The former (the repentant evil individuals) will be given mercy and will be granted glory, honor, and immortality as their ultimate destiny. The latter (the stubbornly unrepentant evil individuals) will not be granted mercy. They will meet with God’s wrath and condemnation.

#### I. *Romans 5:12-21*

- 1. Paul’s contention here is that what my future holds in store for me hinges on how I am related to two particular individuals—Adam and Jesus. Through my connection with Adam, my future promises condemnation due to the sinfulness that I share with him. Through my connection with Jesus (assuming I do, in fact, belong to him), my future promises eternal life because of the gift of mercy and forgiveness that God will grant to those who belong to Jesus.
  - a. Contrary to the perspective held by Paul’s contemporaries within Judaism, it is not one’s obedience to the Torah that frees one from condemnation and secures the blessing of eternal life. Rather, it is one’s connection to the man Jesus.
- 2. Other notable points Paul makes here:
  - a. Human beings are not condemned because they sin (i.e., disobey the Law). Rather, human beings are condemned because of who they are—namely, inherently evil beings.
    - (A) “but death nevertheless reigned from Adam to the time of Moses, even upon those who had not sinned in the likeness of Adam's transgression... .”

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- b. Every human being is evil because he is the same sort of creature as Adam, because Adam is the prototype of all of humanity descending from him.
    - (A) "... even upon those who had not sinned in the likeness of Adam's transgression—he who is the prototype of what was going to come."
  - c. The penalty that God will exact on sinful humanity is just, fair, proportional, disciplined, and restrained. (The human sinner deserves the wrath that he will receive for any *one* of the acts of unrighteousness that he has performed.) The mercy that God will grant to those who belong to Jesus is abundant, unbounded, unlimited, unqualified, and unrestrained. (God forgives *each and every single* act of unrighteousness that the human sinner has performed.)
    - (A) "...the gift is not like that which arises through the one who sinned; for—on the one hand—judgment leading to condemnation results from one transgression,...."
    - (B) "...but—on the other hand—the gift of grace is in response to many transgressions which would lead to a just penalty."

J. **Deuteronomy 27:26**

- 1. Two possible ways to view this:
  - a. By not obeying the commandments of God, one makes oneself worthy [deserving] of condemnation. (And, correspondingly, if one *does* obey the commandment of God, one makes himself worthy [deserving] of the blessing of Life.)
  - b. By *not* obeying the commandments of God, one makes oneself disqualified from receiving mercy from God so that he can escape the condemnation that is already his due. (And, correspondingly, if one *does* obey the commandment of God, he makes himself qualified to be a recipient of mercy. He does *not* make himself worthy [deserving] of the blessing of Life. He makes himself qualified to be a recipient of mercy, but he does not make himself worthy [deserving] of Life as a reward.)
- 2. This passage itself says nothing that explicitly supports one of these interpretations over the other. That is, with respect to whether Law-obedience brings about mercy or deserved reward, one would have to import a view on this question into his reading of this account. The account itself does not explicitly answer this question. In view of the larger context of the Old Testament scriptures, the second of the alternatives about (Law-obedience giving rise to mercy) is most likely the right way to view this passage, not the first alternative (Law-obedience giving rise to a reward for one's intrinsic goodness).
  - a. The message of the whole first portion of Old Testament scriptures (the book of *Genesis* from *Genesis* 3 onward) is that mankind is incurably wicked and is inherently worthy of being condemned to destruction. In other words, its message is that each and every human being stands condemned to death and destruction, but that it is nevertheless possible for certain damnably evil human beings to have repentant hearts that qualify to receive God's mercy rather than his condemnation.



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3. Analogies to understand the two possible readings:

- a. Insulin is given to a diabetic in order prevent the adverse effects of his disease. His diabetes would ultimately kill him if he failed to take injections of insulin. So, if I could meaningfully say to a diabetic, "You are going to die if you do not take your insulin."  
(A) In this case, the "condition" for not dying is that one accept the remedy for a reality that already exists. The diabetic is already going to die, because of his disease. Insulin is the preventative. So the nature of the condition is as follows: "if you do not take the preventative remedy, you are going to die." This conditional statement is a statement of warning about what will happen if one does not avail himself of the remedy that has been offered.
- b. Owen (the owner of a piece of property P) might say to Nick (his neighbor), "I will kill your cattle if you do not keep them off my land."  
(A) In this case, the "condition" given to Nick for not having his cattle killed is that he not do a particular thing that displeases Owen (the owner of property P). Namely, that Nick not fail to keep his cattle off of property P. This is a case of *quid pro quo*. If Nick fails to do *that* [*quo*], then Owen will do *this* [*quid*].
- c. Is the statement in *Deuteronomy 27:26* ["Cursed is he who does not confirm the words of this Law by doing them."] the statement of a *quid pro quo* by God? Or, is the statement in *Deuteronomy 27:26* a statement of warning with regard to the consequence of not accepting the proffered remedy.  
(A) It is, as a matter of fact, the latter, not the former. It is not a *quid pro quo*. It is a warning about the consequence of not receiving the remedy that God has provided.

K. *Genesis 12:1-3*

1. The blessing of Abraham is the promise of mercy instead of condemnation. The promise that God is going to "bless" Abraham must be understood against the backdrop of everything that has come before in the book of *Genesis*. The theme of the first 11 chapters of *Genesis* is that mankind has a serious problem: he is under the **curse** of destruction due to his nature as an evil being. Therefore, to promise a "**blessing**" to Abraham is to promise him that he will not be made subject to the curse of destruction that is the common fate of humanity.

L. *Galatians 3:6-14*

1. Rightly understood, and rightly translated, this passage would read something like this:
  - a. Just as Abraham "believed God and it was credited to him, resulting in dikaiousune," [Gen. 15:6] so then, you should understand that those who look to find acceptance by reason of their belief, these are the sons of Abraham. Now the Scripture, foreseeing that God would decree the Gentiles *dikaioi* by reason of their belief, announced the good news to Abraham in advance, saying, "In you all the peoples will be blessed"[Gen. 12:3]—the

upshot being that those who look to find acceptance by reason of their belief are blessed with the believing Abraham. ¶ Now however many there are who look to find acceptance by reason of their doing what the Covenant requires are under a curse. Indeed, it is written, “*Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all the things written in the book of the Covenant to do them.*” [Deut. 27:26] Now, that no one is decreed *dikaiois* in the presence of God on the basis of the Covenant is evident, because “*The one who is dikaiois by reason of his belief shall attain Life.*” [Hab. 2:4] (Yet, the Covenant is not excluded by belief; rather, “*The man who does these things shall attain Life by them*” [Leviticus 18:5 (loosely). See also Ezekiel 18:1–32 and Ezekiel 33:10–20].) When he became the curse on our behalf, the *messiah* bought us our freedom from the curse presupposed by the Covenant. (Indeed, it is written, “*Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.*” [Deuteronomy 21:23]) As a result, the blessing of Abraham comes to Gentiles *who are in Messiah Jesus*. As a result, we receive the Spirit’s promise *through our belief*.

2. Paul’s argument here is that, whereas human beings are—each and every one of them—under the curse of death and destruction due to their sinfulness, God has promised that some will receive mercy, rather than death and destruction. God articulated that promise long ago to Abraham. He not only promised Abraham that he would be granted a “blessing” (that is to say, that he would not be made subject to the curse of mankind), but he also promised him that individuals from every people group on earth would likewise be granted that same “blessing” (namely, being freed from the curse to which mankind was subject.) Such individuals would be, as it were, the “children” of Abraham.
  - a. While the Law of Moses was given to the people of Israel as an *avenue* for their receiving mercy from God, it was not *the basis* for the mercy that God was promising Abraham when he promised him a blessing. Rather, the ultimate *basis* for the mercy that God had in view from the very beginning (when he promised Abraham and his children a “blessing”) was Jesus and the death that Jesus willingly and obediently underwent in order that his appeal for mercy on behalf of those who believe in him might be heard.
3. In the way that he appeals to it in his argument here in *Galatians*, Paul confirms the reading of *Deuteronomy* that I described above. The point required by Paul’s argument—the point that he intends to support by citing *Deuteronomy 27:26*—is that when God, under Moses, made a covenant with the people of Israel, he was offering mercy to people who already stood condemned (cursed). The people of Israel were condemned, from the outset, because they were essentially and inherently evil creatures. In other words, he is describing the plight of the people of Israel and, by extension, all of mankind. All of mankind stands under a curse and, hence, stands in need of the mercy of God. The Law of Moses was presented as a promise of divine mercy to the people of Israel if they would but keep God’s covenant. However, keeping the Covenant was never the *basis* for that divine mercy. *Habakkuk* clearly states that one will receive mercy and life *if he believes* (with no mention of Law-keeping being a requirement). Hence, *Habakkuk* clearly suggests that one can receive mercy apart from Law-keeping. So, if one is able to receive mercy apart from it, then Law-keeping cannot be the *basis* of divine mercy. However, it

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is not the case that mercy and Life will *not* be extended to the Law-keeper. It will! At least, to the extent that one's Law-keeping reflects a heart of belief and is an expression of that belief, the Law-keeper clearly will receive mercy and Life through his Law-keeping. Yet the *basis* for divine mercy is not his Law-keeping. Neither is his belief the *basis* for divine mercy. Rather, the *basis* for divine mercy is a person's connection to the Messiah—the one who died in order that we might be given freedom from the curse. It is on the *basis* of Jesus's death and his effective intercession that the Jesus-believer will be granted the blessing of Abraham—eternal life.

M. *Hebrews 9:16-23*

1. Rightly understood, and rightly translated, this passage would read something like this:
  - a. *Now where there is a covenant, the death of the one subject to it is a necessary, pre-existing reality. Indeed, any binding covenant is over "dead" men, because at no time is one in force when the one who is subject to it stands to receive Life. Accordingly, the first covenant was not inaugurated apart from blood. For when every commandment in accord with the divine Torah had been spoken by Moses to all the people, taking the blood of calves and goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, he sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, saying, "This is the blood of the Covenant which God has commanded you." And even the tabernacle and all the implements of the ritualistic service he likewise sprinkled with the blood. Indeed, nearly everything was cleansed with the blood in accord with the divine instruction. Indeed, apart from the shedding of blood, release from the divine wrath would not occur. So then, it is necessary for the copies of the things in the heavens to be cleansed with these offerings. But the heavenly realities themselves are cleansed with better offerings than these.*
2. The central gist of Paul's point here is that, before the Mosaic covenant was put into effect at all, the people of Israel (just as the rest of mankind) stood under the condemnation of death due to their sinfulness. ***Sinfulness is not a function of the Law.*** That is, it is not defined by nor caused by the Law. One is not a sinner because he transgresses the Law. Rather, one transgresses the Law because he is a sinner. His sinfulness is prior to his transgression; not the consequence of it. Sinfulness is a function of human beings being the sort of creatures they are. It is endemic to the very nature of their being, not a consequence of their failed performance.
  - a. This explains why, at the very inauguration of the covenant, the people of Israel and all the implements of worship had to be cleansed by the sprinkling of blood. All human beings and everything human beings have produced are tainted with the stain of sin. That needs to be acknowledged from the very outset by the people of God, as they enter into their covenant relationship with God. Therefore, Covenant-keeping can never be a way to demonstrate that one is good. (For no son of Adam is good; and one cannot demonstrate that he is good when, as a matter of fact, he is not good.) Hence, God never intended for Covenant-keeping to serve as a way that an individual could prove himself to be good. Covenant-keeping is a way to demonstrate that one

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has a heart to want to know and serve God. Hence, it was offered as a way to demonstrate that one is a fitting recipient of God's mercy. That is what God intended from the very beginning.

N. **Romans 9:22–29**

1. The key contribution of this passage is this: God, the author of reality, creates some people to be evil rebels against their creator who will, in the end, experience the wrath of God. And he creates other people to be repentant sinners who will receive mercy from God. Both are a part of the creator's purpose for created reality.
  - a. The context here concerns the purposes of God and what, through his prophets, God had promised. God had promised a number of blessings to his people Israel. The question is whether Paul's teaching (his gospel) would not imply that the fulfillment of those promises to God's people the Jews are precluded. If, as Paul suggests, all of the blessings promised by God will be realized in connection with Jesus, the Messiah, and if the people of Israel have not responded in belief to Jesus, then does that not suggest that God will not fulfill the promises he made to Israel (if Paul's gospel is right)? For, according to Paul's teaching, Israel's unbelief would preclude them from receiving the promised blessings (for Paul teaches that those promised blessings only come through belief in Jesus). But if Israel is precluded from receiving the blessings, then God's assurances to Israel that he would bless them were a lie, weren't they?
    - (A) Paul argues that God's promised blessing was never promised to an individual Jew as an individual. God's promised blessing was to the people of Israel as a people group. God's promise to the people group will most certainly be kept. But whether any given individual Jew will receive the promised blessing is utterly dependent upon a choice that that individual Jew makes. Only those who are open and receptive to the truth (most notably the truth about Jesus being the Messiah) will be granted the promised blessing. Hence, some individuals will prove to be "vessels of wrath, created for destruction." Other individuals will prove to be "vessels of mercy, created for glory." And Israel as a people group? They are destined, at the end of history, to be an entirely holy people who are given hegemony over the entire world.

O. **John 3:16**

1. John's point in this statement is **not** to contend the following: **Because** God loved the world as much as he did, he desired to save it. And he saved it by sending his Son into history to die for the world so that the world might be saved on the basis of his death.
  - a. Rather, John's point is this: **When** God sent his Son into history and appointed him as the basis upon which individual human beings could be saved (through their believing in that Son), **that very act** was an act of love that God was directing toward the world.
    - (A) He did not send his Son to save the world **because** he loved the world. Rather, his sending his Son to save the world **just was his act** of loving the world.

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- b. The love of God being described here was not Jesus's being sent to die for the sins of the world. Rather, God's love is being described as his making provision for some individuals among mankind to receive mercy and not be condemned. God's provision was to send his Messiah into history and, in accord with his purposes, to extend mercy to anyone who embraced the truth about God's Messiah. God's act of love was his making this provision for mankind so that some might receive mercy.

(A) We know from elsewhere that Jesus's death played an important role. But Jesus's death is not in view here in John's description of God's love. God's love is seen in the fact that God mercifully provided a way for an individual to be rescued from his wrath—namely, the way of his Son—irrespective of how the Son constituted such an escape for God's wrath.

P. *Hebrews 1:8-9; 4:14-16; 5:8-10; 7:26-28; 9:13-15*

1. In the book of *Hebrews*, Paul asserts, almost off-handedly at times, that Jesus is unique among human beings. While mankind is sinful, Jesus is not. He surpasses the rest of mankind in the quality of his righteousness. His unique righteousness (consisting of his moral perfection) was necessary for two reasons:

- a. It was necessary in order that he might qualify to serve as the truly righteous king who would reign in righteousness over God's people Israel in the righteous kingdom that was promised to come.
- b. It was necessary in order that he, as the individual whom God appointed to serve as the true high priest who would intercede for sinful mankind, would be able to offer himself as an acceptable ("unblemished") offering in his act of making propitiation for mankind's sins.

(A) Describing Jesus as "unblemished" is Paul's way of suggesting that Jesus was absolutely sinless. God's purposes involved the Messiah—an utterly sinless human being—allowing God to depict, in and through his own tortured death, the divine wrath toward human sin. Because Jesus (the Messiah) was sinless, it is crystal clear and totally unambiguous that the acts of divine wrath directed toward Jesus were not the result of divine wrath toward Jesus. God had no reason to be wrathful toward Jesus, for Jesus was perfectly sinless. Hence, Jesus's righteousness makes it clear that the acts of divine wrath directed toward Jesus at his crucifixion are to be seen as a depiction of God's wrath toward *our sins*, the sins of every other human being. It is just as Jesus explained to his disciples: "I am dying for the sins of the world."

Q. *2 Corinthians 5:21*

1. In *2 Corinthians* Paul asserts that the one who "knew no sin" was "made sin" on our behalf. What does he mean by that? The individual who was himself not sinful to any degree was the individual against whom God chose to depict what his wrath against human sin would look like. In other words, the suffering and death that Jesus was asked by his Father to undergo was *not* as a consequence of God being wrathful toward Jesus. Jesus

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was sinless; there was no reason for God to be wrathful toward him. Therefore, the suffering and death that Jesus was asked by his Father to undergo was clearly meant to be a dramatic display of what other human sinners deserve. For Jesus did not himself deserve what happened to him. Jesus's death was meant to make a forceful statement with regard to God's attitude toward human sin. It was not meant to punish Jesus. For he knew no sin and did not deserve punishment.

**R. Passages regarding the destiny of the unrighteous:**

1. ON THE ONE HAND, GOD'S WRATH WILL BRING THE DEATH, DESTRUCTION, AND ANNIHILATION OF THOSE INDIVIDUALS WHO DO NOT RECEIVE MERCY FROM GOD.

- a. **Luke 13:3,5; 2Peter 3:7.**

- b. The concept of being thrown into the "outer darkness" is often misconstrued as punishment (as Hell), when it is actually destruction. It is a metaphor for being cast into oblivion—that is, for having one's existence absolutely annulled and brought to nothing.

(A) Note that, before created reality had its beginning, there was "darkness" (Gen. 1:2). The "darkness" describes the blank sterile nothingness that was there before God created something to exist there. **Gen. 1:2** is saying, where there now exists a vast ocean, there was once nothing but blank sterile nothingness.

(B) **Jude 13**: "the gloom of darkness" > hence, the darkness to which the unrighteous will be assigned in the time of judgement in the coming age is the darkness of "blank, sterile nothingness."

(1) **Matthew 8:12, 22:13, 25:30; 2 Peter 2:17**

(C) Note **Isaiah 26:14** > indeed, God will wipe out all "remembrance" (mindfulness) of them

(1) What Isaiah means is like this, I think: I don't today remember the graduate students with whom I had a weekly bible study when I was an undergrad. That is, I don't remember the names of most of them. I remember that they existed. I remember that I interacted with them. But I don't remember much else about them. The fact of their existence back then does not currently—in the present— have any significant relevance, effect, or impact on me.

(2) Such, I believe, is the destiny of the unrighteous individual: he will be obliterated and have all memory of him erased in the sense described above. It is not that the simple fact that he existed is lost from all memory. But the fact of his existence will have ceased to have any significant relevance, effect, or impact on those who live on in the everlasting Kingdom of God. In other words, the fact that the unrighteous individual ever existed will not really matter. In terms of its relevance to anything significant, they might as well have not existed.

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- c. The concept of being subjected to "fire" is often misconstrued as punishment (as Hell), when it is actually destruction.
- (A) **Jude 5–7** > I want to remind you ... And angels, who did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode, He has kept in darkness with unbreakable (eternal) bonds for the judgment of the great day, how Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them—since these cities indulged in gross immorality in the same way as these, even going after strange flesh—by undergoing punishment, are laid out as an example of the *aionic* fire.
- (1) Peter's point is that Sodom and Gomorrah were subjected to punishment by fire, and that that punishment is analogous to the *aionic* fire to which all ungodly individuals will be made subject at the judgment. Note that Sodom and Gomorrah were not tormented and afflicted with pain by the fire that God sent upon them. Rather, they were destroyed, incinerated, wiped out, wasted, and annihilated by that fire. In other words, the wrath of God against Sodom and Gomorrah expressed itself in their destruction, not in their torment.
- (B) **Matthew 18:8**
- (1) The phrase *aionic* fire should **not** be translated "eternal fire." It should be translated "the fire that pertains to the Age."
- (2) *Matthew* 18:9 is, literally, the "Gehenna of fire," not "fiery Hell" as NASV translates it.
- (C) **Matthew 25:41**
- (1) Again, here, the phrase *aionic* fire should **not** be translated "eternal fire." It should be translated "the fire that pertains to the Age."
- (D) Hence, the "lake of fire" in the book of *Revelation* (and perhaps elsewhere) is an incinerator that turns to ash (that is, it destroys the existence and reality of something). It is not a place of torture and unending agony.
- (1) **Revelation 19:20, 20:10, 20:14, 20:15**
- (a) In 20:14, the "lake of fire" and the "second death" are identified as the same thing.
- d. The concept of *Gehenna* [Hebrew] is often misconstrued as a reference to Hell. Actually, it is a concept of ultimate and final annihilation. *Gehenna*, like the "lake of fire," is a garbage dump where fires are used to destroy, incinerate, and turn to ash. It is not a place of torture.
- (A) **Mark 9:42-48**
- (1) Should read "Gehenna," not "hell." And Gehenna is identified as the "unquenchable fire."
- (B) **Matthew 18:9**

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- (1) Should read "Gehenna of fire," not "fiery hell."
2. ON THE OTHER HAND, GOD'S WRATH WILL RESULT IN BEING PUNISHED WITH SOME SORT OF AFFLICTION.
- a. **Matthew 25:46; Romans 2:9; 2 Peter 2:9**
- (A) In these passages, the fate of the unrighteous is identified as "punishment," or as "tribulation and distress," and not as "death" or "destruction."
- b. There are a number of statements in the Bible that suggest *varying degrees* of punishment.
- (A) **Hebrews 10:29**
- (1) The one who rejects the Son deserves a greater punishment.
- (B) **James 3:1**
- (1) Teachers will receive a greater judgment.
- (C) **Matthew 18:6, Mark 9:42, Luke 17:2**
- (1) The person who misleads a "little one" would have a better fate if he were to be thrown into the sea and drowned.
- (D) **Matthew 10:15, 11:22, 24**
- (1) Judgment will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah than for the city that rejects Jesus's gospel, and more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon than for Chorazin and Bethsaida.
- (E) **Revelation 18:7**
- (1) Voice asks that Babylon be given "torment and mourning" in proportion to how much she has "glorified herself" and "lived sensuously."
3. As we can see from the above notes, the emphasis of the biblical statements falls on **destruction** more than it does on **punishment**. Both are acknowledged, but destruction (the ultimate and final destiny of the unrighteous) is what is emphasized.
- a. It stands to reason that the biblical authors would focus primarily on the ultimate and final outcome of the life of the ungodly. They are not likely to focus on the prior, intervening punishment that the ungodly will endure and neglect the ultimate fate of the ungodly.
- (A) Note that ungodly people were also judged with the destruction of their lives within history (Sodom and Gomorrah). But, while that is also mentioned, the real significance of the temporal destruction of the ungodly is what it entails with respect to their ultimate destruction. Both the godly and the ungodly die. But the godly will be raised from the dead to eternal life. The ungodly will not be granted eternal life. Hence, their temporal destruction (when it is the result of judgment) is



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a sign of the wrath of God upon them. But as a sign of the wrath of God upon them, it marks them off as being individuals who are cut off from eternal life.

(1) Similarly, the just punishment of the ungodly at the final stage of created reality—as *significant* as it is—is all the more significant for what it entails about the ultimate outcome of their existence. The one who will be punished for his deeds will ultimately be cut off from eternal life as well. He will go to his destruction. That is the final, ultimate, and primary fate of the ungodly.

#### 4. Other issues pertaining to one’s eternal destiny:

a. The adjective “*aionios*” qualifying various nouns that describe God’s wrath does not mean that the experience of God’s wrath is “eternal.”

(A) Biblical claims:

(1) *aionic* destruction / **2 Thess. 1:9**

(2) *aionic* condemnation / **Heb. 6:2**

(3) *aionic* punishment / **Matthew. 25:46**

(4) *aionic* fire / **Jude 7, Matthew 18:8, Matthew 25:41**

(B) Meaning of *aionic*: the word *aionic* is used to indicate that something (destruction, judgment, punishment, fire) is connected with the *aion*, that is, with that particular coming *age* which God has designated as the time when that particular thing is going to occur.

(1) It does not indicate the *duration* of the event (that is, *aionic* punishment is not *eternal* punishment). Rather, *aionic* indicates the time in which that event is going to occur. In other words, *aionic* punishment is the *punishment that will occur in a certain Age [aion] to come*.

(a) *aionic* means “of or pertaining to the Age.”

b. The concept of *Tartarus* [Greek]—appearing only once in the N.T. (**2 Peter 2:4**)—is often misconstrued as a reference to Hell.

(A) Whatever *Tartarus* is, it is *not* the traditional concept of Hell.

(1) Note that it may very well be a unique fate for “angels” and have nothing to do with the fate of ungodly human beings.

(a) It appears to parallel another mysterious concept found in the Bible—the concept of the Abyss—the “pit” into which the demons did not want to be consigned by Jesus.

[A] Being kept (imprisoned) in *Tartarus* until the day of judgment could very well be something that “fallen angels” experience while no human beings ever do experience it.

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- c. The concepts of *Sheol* [Hebrew] and *Hades* [Greek] are often misconstrued as names for Hell. Actually, they are names used for denoting death and the grave. They represent a departure from the land of the living into a kind of darkness (non-existence) where their existence ceases to have any meaning or significance.

(A) The all-important question the gets addressed by the Bible is this: Will an individual be given Life again after the grave (after *Sheol*, after *Hades*)? Or, does the non-existence into which one enters in the grave (*Sheol*, *Hades*) represent what will be the final and ultimate outcome of his existence.

5. For an extended discussion of the destiny of the unrighteous person, listen to the audio files on the doctrine of hell under “Dr. JAC’s Philosophy Shop, Question #10-part 1, and Question #10-part 2 on the Sound Interpretation Project website (soundinterp.site).

S. **Brief statements that articulate the worldview that underlies the above passages:**

1. **STATEMENT #8:** *The human being is a magnificent creation of God. He is the apex of God’s creation.*
2. **STATEMENT #9:** *A human being (whether male or female) is created in the image of God. Since God is a person (and not an impersonal being), the human being is like God insofar as the human being is a person, and not an organic robot like the animals.*
3. **STATEMENT #10:** *Because he is a person, a human being can be either good or bad, morally speaking. Each individual human being, by the choices he makes, determines which he will be—either morally good or morally bad.*
4. **STATEMENT #11:** *As a matter of fact—with the notable exception of Jesus—every human being who has ever come into existence has shown himself to be morally bad—from the moment of his inception. He was created by God to be a sinful rebel against his creator.*
5. **STATEMENT #12:** *Insofar as he is morally bad, every human being justly deserves to experience the wrath of God against himself when final judgment is rendered.*
6. **STATEMENT #13:** *At the final judgment of mankind, the wrath of God against each evil human being will include just punishment for the specific evils that he has committed (that is, just recompense for his sins), followed by his complete destruction.*
7. **STATEMENT #14:** *Because every human being is morally bad, every human being will, in fact, experience the wrath of God at the final judgment—except for those particular individuals from whom God, **out of his profound mercy**, chooses to withhold his wrath.*

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### Part Three: The Nature and Import of Jesus

#### A. *Hebrews 1:8-9; 4:14-16; 5:8-10; 7:26-28; 9:13-15; 2 Corinthians 5:21*

1. For reasons described in Part Two, note P and note Q above, God created Jesus to be a morally perfect, sinless, human being. Jesus was an absolutely unique human being in this respect. No other human being in the entire history of mankind has been perfectly righteous in the way that Jesus was, and is.

#### B. *John 10:22–38 and Psalm 82*

1. In the time of Jesus, there apparently was a school of thought that held that the Messiah (the Son of God) who was to come would not be an ordinary human being. Apparently, they believed that he would be some sort of divine manifestation who appeared in the appearance of a human being; but he would not actually be a human being *per se*. (Note that this view is what underlies one of the objections to which Paul is responding in the book of *Hebrews*. In *Hebrews* Paul is arguing that Jesus’s ordinary humanity is not a valid reason to object the claim that he is the Messiah.) Individuals holding such a view are objecting to Jesus’s claim to be the Messiah on just such grounds. Namely, “Jesus, you can’t be the Messiah, for you are just an ordinary human being.” Paul responds to these objectors by pointing out an explicit truth from the Scriptures (*Psalm 82*). Namely, in *Psalm 82*, God explicitly states that he granted to ordinary—and, indeed, even unrighteous—human beings the title “Son of God.” If God granted the title “Son of God” to ordinary and unrighteous human beings, then clearly, even though he is an ordinary human being, it cannot be a problem for the true Messiah sent from God to claim the title “Son of God” for himself.
  - a. Jesus’s argument does not imply that he is no different from all the wicked kings of Israel throughout their history. Each and every king of Israel could, in principle, have been the unique “Son of God.” That is the title that was granted to them by God. The only thing that prevented them from being, in truth, the very “Son of God” himself was their lack of the right moral qualifications. They were not righteous; they were evil. But had they proven to be perfectly righteous (as Jesus was), then the fact that they were an ordinary human being would not have been disqualifying.
  - b. If we understand the exact nature and the significance of Jesus’s response to his objectors here, we see that Jesus’s view of himself lies in direct contradiction to the views of classical Christian orthodoxy. Classical Christian orthodoxy is emphatic that Jesus is identical with God in a way, and in a sense, that makes it impossible for him to be an *ordinary* human being. A similar view underlies the nature of the objection being raised by Jesus’s detractors in this passage here in *John 10*. The objection raised by Jesus’s detractors in *John 10* is that he cannot be the Unique One—the one who uniquely reflects God himself (that is, the Messiah, the Son of God)—because he is an ordinary human being.

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(A) What is Jesus's response to them? Just this: being an *ordinary* human being is not incompatible with being the Son of God. It is not incompatible with being the unique human being who is identical to God himself. Jesus would respond in exactly the same way today to classical Christian orthodoxy. *One need not reject the notion that Jesus is an ordinary human being in order to insist that he is God.*

(B) The only way to make sense of Jesus's view, of course, is to understand that Jesus does not view himself to be identical to God *ontologically*. He does not believe himself to be God because he believes himself to be made of God-stuff. Jesus clearly believes that he is an ordinary human being in that he is made of ordinary human-stuff. In what sense is he God, then? He is God insofar as he shares a personal identity with God. He is not God because he shares the same BEING with God. He has a separate and distinct being. God has transcendent uncreated being. Jesus has non-transcendent, created being. Their being is different. But their identity is one and the same.

(1) To state this another way:

(a) Jesus is not qualitatively identical to God.

[A] A box of Kellogg's cornflakes is qualitatively identical to the box of Kellogg's cornflakes right next to it on the grocer's shelf.

(b) Jesus is not numerically identical to God.

[A] The husband of Jody (my wife) is numerically identical to the father of Jody's children.

[1] Something cannot be numerically identical to something else unless they are qualitatively identical to one another in absolutely every respect. Since Jesus is not qualitatively identical to God in every respect, it follows that he cannot be numerically identical to God.

(c) To coin a term, Jesus is *representationally identical* to (or *representationally the same as*) God.

[A] The avatar you create within a video game is representationally identical to you.

[B] The shadow of a particular person cast on a wall by a bright light is representationally identical to the particular person who is casting the shadow. The shadow is a shadow of *that particular person*. It is not a shadow of anything or anyone else.

[1] If I point to a shadow on the wall and say this is me, Jack Crabtree, I do not mean that the shadow is the very person of me, Jack Crabtree. I mean that it is caused by and therefore represents me, Jack Crabtree rather than any other person or any other thing.

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C. **John 1:14–18**

1. John 1:18 > “No one has seen God at any time. The unique Son who is at the bosom of the Father, that one translates (interprets) Him.”
2. Jesus is the person that God is, translated into the medium of a human person.
  - a. In one sense, a translation (or interpretation) is different from the original that it translates (interprets). But on the other hand, it is also the same as the original. If it were not the same as the original, then it would not be a translation (interpretation) of it.
    - (A) If I write a book and someone else translates it into French, the French translation of my book is, in one sense, identical with the book that I originally wrote in English. (It is *representationally* identical.) However, it is very different in another sense. It is French, while my original book was English.
      - (1) In one sense Jesus is identical with God in just this same way. (He is *representationally* identical with God.) But he is very different from God in another sense. God is the transcendent author of all reality, while Jesus is an individual human being.
      - (B) Two musicians could perform a musical score and each give a different “interpretation” of it. However, each interpretation is the piece of music composed by its composer.
        - (1) A musical performance is ontologically different from the ink-stained paper in musical notation that we call a musical score. However, the musical performance—insofar as it is a performance of one particular musical score rather than another—is the same as that musical score. (The performance is *representationally* identical to that musical score.)
        - (2) Jesus (a finite human being) is ontologically different from God (the one and only transcendent author of all created being). However, Jesus—insofar as he is the translation of God’s individual person into the medium of a human life—is the same as God. Jesus is the translation of God’s individual person; he is not the translation of anyone or anything else. (Jesus is *representationally* identical to God.)
    - b. The mistake that Christian orthodoxy has made is quite simple. It has confused *qualitative* identity (and/or *numerical* identity) with *representational* identity. The Bible teaches that Jesus is identical to God in the sense of *representational* identity. Christian orthodoxy has misconstrued that Biblical teaching to insist that Jesus is identical to God in the sense of *qualitative* (and/or *numerical*) identity.
      - (A) To say this another way, the Bible teaches that Jesus is God in the sense that Jesus is a translation of God. Christian orthodoxy has misconstrued that Biblical teaching to insist that Jesus is God in the sense that Jesus is God directly and originally (somehow), and not a translation of him.

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D. *Hebrews 1:1–4*

1. *Hebrews 1:1-3a* > “God, having spoken in past times in many portions and in many ways to the fathers through the prophets, has in the last of these days spoken to us through the Son—the one whom he appointed heir of all things, the one with a view to whom he did, in fact, make the ages, the one who, being a shining forth of the Glory, is indeed the stamp of his particular personal identity—even supporting everything that the Son said by the divinely powerful utterance spoken by him.”
2. Jesus is the “shining forth of the Glory” precisely because he is the “*charakter* of his *hypostasis*” = the “stamp of his particular personal identity”
  - a. Just as God visited and became present with the people of Israel in the wilderness in the form of a brightness (“the Glory”) that appeared above the tent of meeting and led them through the wilderness, so God has again visited and become present with the people of Israel in the time of Jesus. In both cases, the “shining forth of the Glory” is the act of becoming tangibly and physical present to the people of Israel.
  - b. Jesus is God making himself tangibly and physical present to the people of Israel, because Jesus is the *charakter* of God’s *hypostasis*.
    - (A) A *charakter* is a stamp, like an ink-stamp. It is like the ink stain left behind on a piece of paper when a stamp is wet with ink and then used to stamp the paper.
      - (1) So, Jesus is the stamp of God’s *hypostasis*. He is not numerically identical with God’s *hypostasis*. He is the stamp of that *hypostasis*. That is, he is the “image” or representation of that *hypostasis* when that *hypostasis* has been depicted in a different form—when that *hypostasis* has been stamped onto the form of a human life.
    - (B) By God’s *hypostasis* I believe Paul means God’s particular individual identity as a person.
      - (1) Jesus does not share anything ontologically with God. He is not one and the same with God in terms of his being. But Jesus does share an identity (a *hypostasis*) with God. (He shares an identity with God in the same way that a shadow shares an identity with the object that casts it.)
        - (a) Again, Jesus is *representationally* identical with God. He is not qualitatively or numerically identical with God.

[A] If Paul believed that Jesus were qualitatively or numerically identical with God, then he would not have described him as being the “stamp” [*charakter*] of God’s *hypostasis*. The image left behind by a stamp is neither numerically identical to, nor qualitatively identical to, the stamp that created it.

E. *Colossians 1:15–20*

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1. *Colossians* 1:15 describes Jesus (the Messiah) as the "**image** of the invisible God." Paul does not say that Jesus **is** the invisible God. He says that he is the "**image**" of the invisible God.
    - a. The image of a thing is ontologically distinct from that which it images. It is not qualitatively, nor numerically the same as what it images. It is, rather, *representationally* identical.
      - (A) Accordingly, since he is the "image" of God, Jesus is not ontologically the same as God. Neither is he qualitatively the same as God, nor numerically the same as God.
        - (1) Rather, Jesus is *representationally* the same as God.
        - (2) If Paul believed that Jesus was ontologically the same, numerically the same, and/or qualitatively the same as God, he would not have called him the "**image**" of the invisible God. For, in those cases, he would just **be** God, not the "**image**" of God.

F. **1 Corinthians 8:6**

1. Jesus is described as the one *dia* whom all things (or all people) are. Hence, we exist *dia* Jesus, Paul concludes. What does it mean to exist *dia* Jesus? The typical English translation has decided that we exist "through" Jesus, thinking that Paul is suggesting that Jesus is some sort of "agent" behind our creation and our coming into existence. I do not believe that this is correct. Rather, I think Paul is saying that to exist *dia* Jesus is, roughly, to exist "for" Jesus. More precisely, Paul is saying that the purpose, meaning, and significance of my existence is found in Jesus. It is in view of Jesus and God's purposes for Jesus that I find the explanation for my own existence. The purpose of my existence is to serve to fulfill, in part, the purposes of Jesus's existence. That is what Paul means by "we exist *dia* Jesus."
2. Paul's statement here, as well as his statement in *Hebrews* 1:2 (where Paul states that Jesus is the one individual with respect to whom all of history is created), makes it clear that, in Paul's view, Jesus is the most important created being in all of God's creation. Jesus is the centerpiece of cosmic history. He is the point around which all of created reality turns.
  - a. It certainly stands to reason that the one created being around which all of created reality turns would turn out to be, at one and the same time, the one who represents God himself within created reality. That is, it stands to reason that the created being who is *representationally* identical to God himself, who is *representationally* identical to the transcendent author of created reality, would be the most important, most significant, and most exalted created being within created reality.

G. **Brief statements that articulate the worldview that underlies the above passages:**

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1. *STATEMENT #15: With regard to the nature of his being, Jesus is an ordinary human being just like every other human being who has ever existed. With regard to the kind of being that he possessed (and possesses), there is nothing extraordinary about Jesus.*
  2. *STATEMENT #16: Jesus is absolutely unique among human beings in two crucial respects: (1) from the very beginning of his existence, he was and continues to be inherently and unfailingly good rather than inherently evil, and (2) God created Jesus to be the translation of his very own personal identity into the form of a human being.*
  3. *STATEMENT #17: Jesus is God in the sense that God created Jesus to be the exact representation of who he himself is within created reality.*
  4. *STATEMENT #18: Jesus is the most important created being within all of created reality. All of created reality was created for the benefit of Jesus and with Jesus in view. In other words, Jesus is the centerpiece of everything else that God has created or will create. Jesus is the main protagonist in the overarching storyline of created reality.*

### Part Four: The Gospel for Mankind

- A. A number of passage in the New Testament make mention of “*the gospel of Christ.*” In all likelihood, this phrase is typically meant to describe the “gospel” that was proclaimed and taught to us by the Christ.
1. As such, it does not specify the *content* of the gospel he proclaimed. Rather, it describes the fact that Jesus was the one who taught it and proclaimed it.
    - a. To learn the content of the “gospel of Christ,” we would have to simply explore Jesus’s teaching and determine exactly what “good news” he was proclaiming to his audience at the time that he taught.

(A) In my judgment, the “gospel of Christ”—the “good news” proclaimed by the Christ—was primarily what I will call (later in these notes) the “Gospel for Israel.” Namely, in brief, “Good news, the Kingdom of God is at hand.” But, as we shall see, incorporated into the gospel for Israel is the “Gospel for Mankind.” Furthermore, Jesus also, at times, explicitly teaches what I am calling the “Gospel for Mankind” (as I shall go on to define it here). Namely, in brief, “Good news, God will grant mercy and withhold his wrath from everyone who belongs to Jesus and he will grant them the blessing of Life.”
- B. *Ephesians 1:13*
1. Here, the gospel is referred to as the “*gospel of our salvation.*” This refers to our “salvation” (that is, our “rescue”) from the complete destruction that is our destiny if God does not have mercy upon us. Because each and every one of us is an evil being, we justly deserve to be appropriately punished and then destroyed. That is the default fate of every son of Adam. The “good news” (gospel) is that God is willing to show mercy toward a discrete set of individual sons of Adam. If one belongs to that set of individuals, then he stands to be an individual who will be rescued (saved) from the punishment and death



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that is his due. Hence, if one belongs to that set of individuals, then news of the existence of that group of individuals is “good news.” It is the “gospel of his salvation.”

**C. Romans 1:16**

1. “For I am not embarrassed by this message of good news; it amounts to the power of God that results in deliverance for everyone who believes—to the Jew, first and foremost, but also to the Greek.”
  - a. The gospel Paul refers to in this verse parallels very closely the “gospel of our salvation” that he mentions in *Ephesians* 1:13. Here, in *Romans* 1:16, Paul speaks of not being ashamed of (or embarrassed by) the “gospel,” because it is the “power of God that results in salvation for everyone who believes.”
    - (A) Why does Paul describe it as the “*power*” of God resulting in salvation? Because, giving life to a person who has gone to the grave—thereby overcoming the seemingly unconquerable nature of death—gives dramatic display to the *power* that God has to accomplish anything he wills to accomplish. As the transcendent author of all of reality, created reality places no limit on what he can do within that reality. If God wants to bring an individual back from the dead—accomplishing what no other person and no other thing can accomplish—then he can easily and effortlessly do so. Such is the power of God! So, the “gospel” proclaimed by Paul is the good news that—at least for those who belong to Jesus, God’s Messiah—God intends to put his indefeasible power on display by resurrecting mortal, damnable sinners to immortal existence.
      - (1) Granting immortal existence to damnable sinners amounts to rescuing (or saving) such individuals from the wrath of God (from the death and destruction) that they deserve. For that reason, Paul describes it as “the power of God that results in *salvation*.”

**D. Colossians 1:5, 23**

1. Paul speaks here of the *hope of the gospel*. When Paul calls it the hope “of the gospel,” he is suggesting that there is a “hope” that is announced in and by the gospel that he proclaims.
  - a. A “hope” of something is an eager, confident expectation of that thing. Hence, the hope of the gospel is the eager, confident expectation of something that is announced in and by the gospel. That is, it is the eager, confident expectation of something that is heralded as “good news.”
    - (A) What is the something of which the “good news” claims we can have an eager and confident expectation? Essentially, it is salvation from the wrath of God. Hence, the hope of the gospel is the eager and confident expectation that we will be granted mercy and forgiveness from God rather than wrath and that, accordingly, we will be granted eternal Life rather than punishment and destruction.

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- b. Throughout the New Testament, this hope of the gospel is variously referred to as
- (A) the hope of *aionic* [eternal] life
  - (B) the hope of salvation
  - (C) the hope of glory
  - (D) the hope of the glory of God
  - (E) the hope of his calling
  - (F) the hope of *dikaiosune*

E. *Romans 5:2, 8:20–21, 28–30; 2 Thessalonians 2:14; 1 Peter 1:17–21*

1. A major aspect of the “hope” of the gospel is the eager, confident expectation that we will be granted a **glorious** existence beyond the grave. That is, our expectation is not merely that we will go on existing—rather than being destroyed. It is that we will continue on forever in a **glorious** existence. The apostles take care to emphasize *the wonderful nature* of the existence to which we are destined if we belong to Jesus. The phrase that they frequently use in order to highlight the wonderful nature of the believer’s destiny is the “**hope of glory**.” The believer in Jesus can have an eager and confident expectation that his ultimate destiny will not be destruction; it will rather be an utterly **glorious**, everlasting existence.
2. In *Romans 5:2*, Paul says that the believer “boasts in hope of the glory of God.”
  - a. There are at least three options for what this could mean:
    - (A) The believer can “boast” that he has an eager and confident expectation of receiving praise from God.
    - (B) The believer can “boast” that he has an eager and confident expectation of being recreated to be a glorious being with a glory that will come from God himself—with a glory that God himself has created and devised for the believer.
    - (C) The believer can “boast” that he has an eager and confident expectation of being recreated to be a glorious being with a glory that reflects the very glory of God himself. (In order to reflect the “glory” of God himself, Paul would have to be speaking of the glory of one’s moral nature. It would be the “glory” of moral perfection. Arguably, no other aspect of God’s glory could be reflected by a finite creature.)
  - b. In the light of *Romans 8:20–21*, we can rule out the first option above.
  - c. It is very difficult to determine which of the remaining two options Paul intends. In all probability, it is the second option that best captures the syntax of the phrase “the glory of God.” So, our hope (the hope proclaimed by the gospel) is the eager, confident expectation that one day God will grant us a glorious, everlasting existence that he has purposed for those who belong to him.

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(A) There are different facets to the "glory" of the existence that God has in store for the believer.

- (1) One facet of the "glory" of that existence is the fact that it is an existence that is "free" from death, decay, and corruption. (Note *Romans* 8:20-21.) As an **immortal, incorruptible** existence, it will be vastly more glorious than our present mortal existence, in bondage to death and decay.
- (2) Another facet of the "glory" of that existence is the fact that it is an existence that is significantly more **awesome** than is this existence. (Note *I Corinthians* 15:35-57). The body of our ultimate existence in "glory" is more honorable than the body we have now, is more powerful than the body we have now, and it is a direct *ex nihilo* creation of God (a spiritual body) rather than a product of biology (a natural body).
- (3) Perhaps the most important facet of the "glory" of that existence is the fact that it is an existence in which we have left evil and unrighteousness behind and have become perfectly righteous. Hence, we will be glorious with the glory of moral perfection.

(a) Note: *1 John* 3:1-3 > "Look at what sort of love the Father has given us that we should be called the offspring of God. Indeed we are. For this reason the world does not know us, for it did not know him. Beloved, even now we are offspring of God; but what we shall become has not yet been made manifest. We do know that, if Jesus becomes manifest, we will be like him; we know that we shall, in him, see just what it is that we will one day be. Everyone who has his hope fixed on this purifies himself just as the man, Jesus, is pure."

[A] We believers are children (offspring) of God. John says that is why the world does not "know" us. The world does not know God. Therefore, the world does not know us either. Why? Because, as children of God we are like God and resemble him in some important sense. So, what the world does not like about God, it also does not like about us.

[B] While we are, even now, children of God, it is not yet known what that means about who and what we will ultimately become. What we do know is this: we will ultimately become what Jesus has already become. [Note: *Romans* 8:28-30] So, when Jesus returns, the sort of being Jesus is at that point is the sort of being that all of us who are children of God will become. In fact, the sort of "glory" that Jesus was granted after his resurrection, that is the sort of glory that will be given to us.

[C] The individual who has as his hope that, one day, he will be just like Jesus is an individual who seeks to emulate the righteousness and goodness of Jesus even now. (That is, he seeks to "purify himself.")

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Why is that? Because whatever else Jesus is, he is a sinless and morally blameless individual. That is what we will one day be as well—morally perfect. That is an essential part of the “glory” that will one day be ours. [Note: *1 Peter* 1:17-21; *2 Thessalonians* 2:14; and *Romans* 8:28–30, “those whom he justifies he also “glorifies”] That serves as our motivation to strive toward righteousness even now.

F. ***Colossians 1:24–27***

1. *Colossians 1:24-27* > “Now I rejoice in my my sufferings on your behalf. Indeed, in my life here I complete the things left incomplete in the tribulations of the Christ for the sake of his body, which is the ekklesia. Of this ekklesia, I became a servant in accord with the charge given me by God for your benefit, that I might fully explore and articulate the plan of God, the secret hidden from the ages and generations. It is now made known to his hagioi. It is to these ones whom God willed to make known what is the wealth of the glory of this secret to the benefit of the Gentiles. The secret is the Messiah for you, the hope of glory. He is the one whom we are proclaiming, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, to the end that we might present every man teleios in the Messiah.”
2. Two things of note here:
  - a. Paul here reiterates what we have seen him say elsewhere, the significance of the gospel message is that it speaks to the “hope of glory.” It is likely that the “hope of glory” that Paul mentions here is exactly the same concept as the “hope of glory” elsewhere in his writings. It is the eager, confident expectation of the wonderfully glorious existence that God has promised to those who belong to him. It involves an existence where one is immortal, awesome, honorable, morally perfect, and a new creation of God.

(A) From whence does this “hope of glory” arise? What is the basis for such a hope? Paul’s tells us explicitly. The basis for this hope is the Messiah. It is the Messiah who came to benefit us by saving us from wrath if we simply believe in him. It is the Messiah who is “*en us*.” [Messiah *en us* = Messiah *to the benefit of us*.] It is the Messiah whom God sent into the world that the world might be saved through him. Contrary to the expectations of Paul’s contemporaries in Judaism, God did not send the Torah [Law] into the world that the world might be saved through Torah. God sent his Son into the world that the world might be save through his Son. The phrase, “Messiah *en us*” is Paul’s shorthand way of describing the Messiah as the one who, as a benefit to the world, was God’s provision for rescuing the world from his wrath. [Note: *John* 3:16]
  - b. In this context, Paul is describing how he was charged by God with proclaiming the secret that was hidden from past ages and generations—namely, that the hope of glory belongs to those who are “in Christ,” to those who belong to Christ, not to those who are Law-keepers. In other words, the “secret” that came into the world with Jesus is

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that it is Jesus, the Messiah, who determines who will be granted Life, not the Law. The Messiah plays a more significant role in God’s purposes than the Law does.

G. *Titus 2:11–13*

1. While Paul’s language in 2:12 is somewhat ambiguous, I think the context here and Paul’s general teaching make clear what he means. Paul begins by making the following point: when God brought Jesus into the world, God was making salvation possible for mankind and was thereby showing forth his grace. In the subsequent clause, Paul spells out the practical implications of the gospel of salvation in Jesus: namely, because we will be saved from the wrath of God through Jesus, we should live here and now (i) by forsaking ungodliness and worldly desires, (ii) by striving to be sensible, righteous, and godly in all that we do, and (iii) by living in eager anticipation of the hope of eternal life that has been promised to us in Jesus [the “blessed hope”]—a hope that will finally be realized when Jesus enters back into history once again. When Jesus does enter back into history again, he will appear in all his glory and will make himself known as our “our great God and *soter*, Messiah Jesus.”
  - a. Notice that Paul has no problem granting the title of “God” to Jesus when Jesus appears to us in all his glory at the second coming. It is implicit in the very concept of the Messiah that the Messiah is the man who represents God to his people (and to all creation). As his unique representative, Jesus just is God in that sense. Hence, Paul willingly grants Jesus the title “God.”
2. If one is eagerly awaiting the realization of his hope of *aionic* life, then he is at one and the same time awaiting the return of Jesus. Why? Because it is at the return of Messiah Jesus that those who belong to him will be granted their inheritance of everlasting life in the coming *aion*.

H. *Galatians 5:5*

1. One is sorely tempted to translate this verse “are eagerly awaiting the hope of righteousness” and to construe Paul to be describing the content of our hope. That is, to construe Paul to be describing our eagerly awaiting the realization of God’s promise that one day we will be made righteous (morally perfect). However, in this context, that does not seem to be what Paul is saying. Here *dikaiosune* does not denote righteousness (a moral attribute). Here (as it does almost everywhere in the books of *Romans* and *Galatians*), it denotes the state of having been forgiven, of having been pardoned for my evil, of having been accepted—in an act of divine mercy—to receive the blessing of Life that I do not deserve rather than being given the destruction that I do deserve. *Dikaiosune* is the state of having been decreed *dikaios* by God.
2. Hence, the “hope of *dikaiosune*” is the hope for which the state of being *dikaios* qualifies me. Because I have been decreed *dikaios* (that is, because I stand in a state of *dikaiosune*), I can now have hope (a confident and eager expectation) of something. What is the something that I can now eagerly and confidently expect? It is the same something that we have been discussing all along. It is salvation from the wrath of God. It is life af-

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ter death. It is *aionic* life. It is “glory,” that is, a glorious everlasting existence after death. In other words, the “hope of *dikaiosune*” is no different from the hope of the gospel itself. It is one and the same thing.

I. *Ephesians 1:17–19a*

1. My translation: My prayer for you is that the God of our Lord, Jesus the Messiah—his glorious Father—may give you a spirit produced by wisdom and by an unveiling of an understanding of him as the eyes of your heart are enlightened. And this is to the end that you will know what is **the hope of his calling**, what is the wealth of his glorious inheritance to the benefit of his holy ones, and what is the surpassing greatness of his power toward us who believe.
  - a. The concept of “calling” is genuinely ambiguous. On the one hand, the Greek word can describe a summons or an invitation. But, on the other hand, it can denote an appointment or assignment to some particular role or status. God clearly does both in the lives of those who belong to him. On the one hand, God has appointed the believer to be his child, destined to inherit *aionic* Life. He did so before the world even came into being. Hence, he “called” his children to that status in the sense that he appointed them to that status. Yet, on the other hand, how does it become evident that one has been appointed by God to be his child? God invites or summons an individual in the midst of his existence to embrace Jesus as his teacher and master and he responds positively to just that invitation. Hence, God “calls” his children to that status in the sense that he invites them to enter into a relationship with him through his Son. So, it is true that God appoints (calls) those individuals who will be saved from the divine wrath and granted *aionic* Life. But it is equally true that God invites (calls) those individuals who will be saved from wrath and granted *aionic* Life. Therefore, when Paul uses the term “calling” in a context like this one, it is a moot point whether Paul’s intention is to emphasize the choosing and appointing of an individual, or the inviting of that individual. In either event, the “hope of one’s calling” is exactly the same thing. It is the hope of salvation that an individual has because—by God’s election and by the irresistible invitation of God—that individual has come to believe in Jesus and thereby come to show himself to belong to God as one of his children.

J. *Ephesians 4:1–6*

1. My translation: Therefore, I urge you—I, the prisoner because of the lord—to walk in a manner suited to the **calling** to which you have been **called**. With all lowliness of mind and lack of presumption, with long-suffering, putting up with one another out of love, strive earnestly to preserve the oneness which is from the Spirit, based on the mutual bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, inasmuch as indeed you were called to **one hope of your calling**. There is one Lord, one belief, one baptism. There is one God and Father of all—he who is over all and to all and for all.
  - a. Paul is using “one hope of your calling” here in the same sense that he uses “the hope of his calling” in *Ephesians 1:17-19a* above. It is the hope of salvation, that is, the ea-

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ger, confident expectation that one will be rescued for the wrath of God and given everlasting life in the eternal Kingdom of God.

**K. 1 John 2:23-25, John 3:16**

1. Each and every human being must make a personal, existential (existence-defining) choice with regard to what they are going to do with Jesus. To deny the truth regarding Jesus is to show that one does not know God, the Father. To embrace the truth about Jesus shows that one is one with Jesus and God. That person will be granted *aionic* Life.

**L. Genesis 12:1-3**

1. This passage, which we have already discussed, represents the earliest explicit articulation of the gospel for mankind. (The gospel for mankind is implicitly contained in *Genesis* 3:15 [if we take seriously how Adam seems to interpret it in 3:20]. But it is only implicit there. *Genesis* 12:1-3 is the first *explicit* articulation of it.) This blessing that God promises Abraham is the promise of life, in place of death. God is promising Abraham that he will mercifully forgive him, and not have him endure the divine wrath that is his due. He will grant him everlasting life instead. Therein lies the gospel!
  - a. Abraham was not told what the basis for God’s mercy to him will be. The New Testament writers know that Jesus is the basis for God’s mercy to Abraham. Abraham does not know that.
    - (A) Abraham does not have to know the basis for divine mercy in order to receive it. So long as Jesus knows Abraham, Abraham does not need to know Jesus in order to be granted life beyond the grave.

**M. Galatians 3:6-9** (earlier, we looked at this passage to explore a different point)

1. In this passage, Paul interprets God’s promise to Abraham in *Genesis* 12:1-3 in the light of other truths that surface during the account of Abraham’s life and in the light of further revelation that has come to mankind in and through Jesus.
  - a. Paul simply assumes here in *Galatians* that the “blessing” promised to Abraham in *Genesis* 12:1-3 is the blessing of everlasting Life. He further assumes that everlasting Life cannot be granted to Abraham (or any human being) unless it is granted as an act of mercy, overlooking the condemnation that he deserves. (If we rightly understand Paul’s brief and cryptic argument, then we will see that he makes this assumption explicit in *Galatians* 3:10.) Hence, God’s promised blessing necessarily includes forgiveness for his sinfulness. (Paul describes the forgiveness for one’s sinfulness here in *Galatians* as having “*dikaiosune*” [traditionally rendered “justification”]).
  - b. Citing *Genesis* 15:6, Paul understands that there was a qualifying condition for Abraham’s being granted *dikaiosune*—namely, an openness and receptiveness to God’s promises to him such that he might believe God. Because Abraham believed God, it was “counted” as meeting a necessary condition placed on God’s mercy such that he would now be qualified to be granted *dikaiosune* and, therefore, everlasting Life.

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- c. In the light of what was further revealed through Jesus, Paul understands that qualifying for the mercy of *dikaioisune* through his belief was not unique to Abraham. The promise made in *Genesis* 12:1-3 was not a promise made only to Abraham, it was made to a multitude of select individuals from every people group throughout all time. It was made to Abraham and all who were "in him." (And Paul clearly takes being "in him" to mean being in a line of descent from him, that is, as having him for an ancestor, a father.) So, the promise was made to Abraham and his "children." [Note *Galatians* 3:16a, "to Abraham and to his seed"]
- (A) Clearly these "children" who will receive the same blessing as Abraham are only "children" in a metaphorical sense since these "children" come from "all the families of the earth."
- d. Paul draws a rational inference from the above by way of the following implicit argument:
- (A) All of these are true:
- (1) God promised the blessing of everlasting Life to Abraham and to his metaphorical sons.
  - (2) There was a necessary condition Abraham was required to meet in order to inherit the promised blessing of everlasting Life.
  - (3) The same necessary condition for inheriting the promised blessing of everlasting Life that was required of Abraham is also required of his metaphorical sons.
- (B) It follows, therefore, that one is a metaphorical son of Abraham if he meets the same condition for inheriting the promised blessing as Abraham did—namely, if he believes God's promise to him.
- (1) Hence, in *Galatians* 3:7, Paul states this inferred conclusion this way: *it is those who are "of faith" who are sons of Abraham.*
    - (a) Paul's point here is that the ones who are sons of Abraham are those who—since they are looking to find acceptance in the eyes of God by meeting the same condition as their father Abraham—believe God's promise to them.
- [A] That is, they are those who manifest the same *openness* to God as their "father" Abraham did.
- e. In light of the gospel proclaimed by Jesus, Paul recognizes that the gospel was proclaimed before Jesus, back in the time of Abraham. The gospel proclaimed to Abraham was the good news that God would mercifully grant Abraham everlasting Life, if he would but believe the set of promises that God was announcing to him. When Abraham believed God's specific promise that he would give Abraham a biological offspring (Isaac) through whom God's various promises to him would come about,



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Abraham manifested his openness and receptivity to believing God. His openness and receptivity was noted and regarded by God, with the result that God granted Abraham *dikaiosune*. In the gospel proclaimed by Jesus, Jesus taught that those who “come to him (Jesus)” will be granted the blessing of everlasting Life. This is the same blessing promised to Abraham himself. So, in the light of the gospel proclaimed by Jesus, Paul recognizes that the “sons of Abraham” are those who will manifest their openness to believing God by believing the promise that he will grant everlasting life to those who come to his Son.

- (A) Note that Abraham’s sons do not believe the same particular promise that Abraham believed in *Genesis* 15. They believe a different particular promise. In other words, Abraham’s sons do not believe exactly the same thing that Abraham believed. What they share in common with Abraham is an inner orientation of their heart that makes them open and receptive to God and his promises.
- f. In *Genesis* 12:1-3 God makes clear that there will be metaphorical sons of Abraham (individuals “in” Abraham) who will come from “all the families of the earth.” Paul sees in this statement a prediction that **Gentiles** will be granted the blessing of everlasting Life through their belief in the gospel of Jesus.
- (A) One who makes a choice to “come to Jesus”—that is, to affiliate with him—thereby demonstrates that he believes the promise of the gospel that Jesus proclaimed. Jesus proclaimed a gospel that anyone who comes to him will be granted Life. In the typical circumstance, one who comes to Jesus believes that he will be granted everlasting Life as a consequence. It is this “belief” that saves him.
- g. Those individuals who believe God’s promise that everlasting Life will be granted to any who belong to Jesus—these individuals will be blessed with the same blessing that will be given to the believer Abraham—the one who is to be blessed because of his belief in God’s promise to him.
- (A) In *this* context, it seems likely that Paul understands the content of the belief that saves the sons of Abraham to be a *promise* (just as it was for Abraham), rather than a *fact*. One could reasonably think that the content of the “belief” that saves a person could be the truth that Jesus is God’s Messiah. In other words, one could reasonably think that it is the one who believes the truth that Jesus is the Messiah who will be saved. (In some contexts, I think that this is exactly what the biblical authors have in mind.) But here, in this context, Paul seems to construe the content of saving belief as belief in the promise of God—specifically, in the promise that anyone who comes to his Son will be granted *aionic* Life.
- (1) Note that the choice to “come to Jesus,” then, is the “work” apart from which the “belief” in God’s promise would be empty. It is not mere intellectual assent to the gospel of Jesus that saves a person. What actually saves a person is the “work” of actually choosing to affiliate with Jesus (that is, to “come” to Jesus) and to view him as one’s teacher and master. But such a “work” naturally follows from a serious belief in, and personal commitment to, the

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promise that is contained in the gospel that Jesus proclaimed. [Note *James* 2:14-26] In other words the person who makes a choice to affiliate with Jesus as his teacher and master is typically one who believes that, by doing so, he will be granted *aionic* Life.

N. **Romans 2:3-16, 2:28-29**

1. Here—in a book whose argument centers around the fact that it is those who believe in Jesus (rather than those who keep the Law) who will receive mercy from God—Paul describes the qualifying condition for mercy, *not as belief in Jesus*, but as “repentance,” and as “seeking glory, honor, and immortality by persevering in doing good.” Why does he do that? Paul understands that “repentance” and “seeking to do good” is an even more basic, more fundamental, qualifying condition for mercy than is belief in Jesus. Ultimately, one is not granted everlasting Life because of an act that one performs (believing in Jesus). Rather, one is granted everlasting Life because of a deeply inward condition of one’s spirit—because of a condition in one’s spirit which gives rise to his deepest desires and his most foundational existential commitments.
  - a. When, in other contexts, the qualifying condition for receiving mercy from God is described as believing in Jesus, these descriptions do not contradict what Paul is saying in *Romans* 2:3–29. Why? Because Paul never means to suggest that it is the *act* of believing in Jesus that meets with God’s approval. What meets with God’s approval is the orientation of the individual’s innermost being that gives rise to his belief in Jesus.

(A) Paul’s understanding is that those whom God has chosen for the destiny of everlasting Life are marked as such by God. He marks them here and now, in this present existence, as belonging to him. With what sort of mark does he mark them? He marks them *in their inner being*. God—the only one who has access to the innermost recesses of a person—transforms the deepest, innermost longings of the individual who belongs to him. It is that transformation (what the biblical authors call “sanctification”) that marks him as a recipient of God’s mercy and as a recipient of the eternal Life that God promises to those whom he has chosen. This transformed inwardness, therefore, is the most basic, foundational qualifying condition placed on eternal Life. But how can one know if he has undergone such a transformation in the invisible depths of his inner being such that he will qualify for eternal Life? There are many different tangible, discernible manifestations of such a transformation (that is, of “sanctification”). But the one that is typically affirmed to be a generally reliable indicator of this transformation is belief in Jesus. The N.T. takes it to be generally true that if one believes in Jesus, it means he will be granted everlasting Life. Likewise, if one does not believe in Jesus, he will not be granted eternal Life. But given the understanding of God’s working that underlies this assumption, it follows that the qualifying condition being met by the individual who believes in Jesus is not the act of believing *per se*, it is the state of having been transformed by God in his inner man. Not just any “belief in Jesus” will save a person. One is saved only by a “belief in Jesus” that arises out of (and

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that reflects) a transformed (sanctified) inner being. Arguably, one could believe in Jesus as a result of other realities, realities that do not mark one as an heir of eternal Life.

(B) The same could be said about Law-keeping. God never intended to grant Life to an individual merely because he outwardly obeyed the Law. The kind of Law-obedience that would meet with God's favor and mercy was a Law-obedience that arose out of and was reflective of a transformed (sanctified) spirit. [See *Romans* 2:28-29]

O. *Acts 17: 30–31*

1. In this passage that we have already discussed, take note of this: Paul does not proclaim to these pagans that Jesus is the Jewish Messiah and call upon them to embrace the truth that Jesus is the Messiah. That is, he does not call on them to believe in Jesus. Why? Because these Athenians would not even understand what that means. So, Paul's sermon here makes clear something very important: there is something even more foundational than belief in Jesus. One can qualify for mercy and forgiveness from God by way of a more fundamental reality than belief in Jesus—namely, *repentance*. If one turns from his ungrateful, arrogant, opposition to God and comes to want to know, serve, honor, and love him, then God will grant him mercy and forgiveness. And such forgiveness and mercy will come to him even without his having come to know and explicitly acknowledge Jesus.
  - a. In his sermon here in *Acts 17*, Paul does explicitly mention the man Jesus, whom God raised from the dead, as an individual who will one day rule the world. But Paul does not call the Athenians to believe in Jesus. He calls on them to repent of their idolatry and turn to serve and honor the one true God over all of reality. Otherwise, they will miss out on the rule of the unique man whom God has appointed to rule the world.

P. *Acts 20:17–35*

1. Things of note:
  - a. *Acts 20:21* > Paul says he preaches “repentance toward God and belief in our lord Jesus Christ.” The gospel that Paul proclaims does not call a person to believe in Jesus *instead of* repenting. For Paul, these are two sides of the same coin. If one repents *vis à vis* God, he will believe in Jesus. And if one believes in Jesus, it is because he is repentant *vis à vis* God.

(A) Note in *Acts 17* (discussed just above): when preaching to pagans, Paul merely called these pagans to repentance *vis à vis* God. They did not have enough knowledge and background to be able to respond to the claim that Jesus was the Messiah. They wouldn't even know what that meant.
  - b. *Acts 20:24* > Here Paul calls the gospel the “gospel of the grace of God.”
  - c. *Acts 20:25* > Having just described his ministry as “testifying solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God,” he then says that what he preached among them was “the king-

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dom of God.” For Paul, proclaiming the coming of the kingdom and teaching the gospel of the grace of God are not two different things. Somehow, in some sense, they amount to the same thing. We don’t understand either of these things unless and until we understand how they amount to the same thing.

(A) How is proclaiming the “gospel of the grace of God” the same thing as proclaiming the “coming of the kingdom”? The grace (gift) of God is God’s mercifully overlooking a person’s evil and granting him *aionic* Life rather than making him subject to the condemnation he deserves. The “kingdom of God” is an alternative way of describing *aionic* Life. In the plot line of the story of created reality that God is authoring, the next age (*aion*) beyond the present evil age will be the establishment of the reign of Jesus the Messiah over Israel and the whole world within the last age of history on this present “earth.” *Aionic* Life is, first and foremost, life in that coming age (*aion*) at the end of history—the age of the Kingdom of God. However, *aionic* life does not end there. *Aionic* existence will pass into everlasting existence in the *eternal* Kingdom of God when the present heavens and earth pass away and God creates a new heavens and a new earth that will endure forever. But, because *aionic* life is the same as life in the kingdom of God (and both entail everlasting life), to proclaim the gospel of God’s grace is the same as proclaiming the possibility of life in the coming kingdom.

- d. *Acts* 20:27 > Paul here describes his preaching of the kingdom of God and his testifying of the gospel of the grace of God as tantamount to “declaring to you the whole purpose of God.” This is noteworthy. As Paul sees it, the central purpose of God for all of created reality is to be found in the very gospel that Paul was charged with teaching and articulating.
- e. *Acts* 20:32 > It is by understanding and embracing the word of God’s grace that enables a person to have an “inheritance among all those who are being sanctified.” Those who are being “sanctified” are those who are being selected out by God to be granted an “inheritance” of life rather than condemnation. How is it that those who are being selected out for such an inheritance become evident as having been selected? By virtue of the fact that they believe the message of the gospel of God’s grace and do not reject it.

**Q. *John* 6:29, 37, 44**

- 1. Everlasting life after the grave comes to those who come to Jesus and believe in him.
  - a. This (belief in Jesus) is the condition that is articulated as the *typical* condition that must be met in order for one to be saved from death.

(A) Contrary to what is often thought, belief in Jesus is not an *absolute* condition for *aionic* life. Some individuals will be granted everlasting life who never did believe in Jesus. However, in the typical case, one who believes in Jesus will be saved and receive life, and one who does not believe in Jesus will not be saved and will not receive life.

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- b. However, the *penultimate* condition that must be met is that one belong to the set of people whom Jesus claims as his own. (That is, he must be a person for whom Jesus will intercede.)
- (A) Jesus is the true high priest who intercedes for those who “belong to” him, appealing to God to grant them mercy. No one will receive mercy and eternal Life unless Jesus—the true high priest whose appeal God will hear and grant—intercedes on his behalf.
- c. And the *ultimate* condition that must be met is that one belong to the set of people whom God, the author of all reality, has created for the very purpose of inheriting everlasting Life. In other words, the ultimate condition is that one belong to the set of people whom God has chosen for that destiny, that one belong to the set of people whom God chose, before created reality even began, to be recipients of his mercy .
2. The one who comes to Jesus and believes in him is one who has been “given” to Jesus by the Father.
- a. Hence, the *ultimate* condition that must be met is that one belong to that set of people whom God created to “give” to Jesus to belong to him. (That is, he must be a person whom God created to be a recipient of mercy and life.)
3. No one will come to Jesus and believe in him unless he is “drawn” by God.
- a. A heart to believe the truth about Jesus does not originate in and of myself. God creates that heart within me and I discover that I am drawn to Jesus, his Son.
4. The good news for mankind is not “good news” for every human being. It is good news only for some. It is good news only for those who come to Jesus because God—who chose them—draws them to Jesus.

R. **John 1:12, Romans 8:16–25**

1. My translation (*Romans 8:16–25*) > The Spirit himself bears witness along with our spirit that we are children of God—and **if children, then also heirs** (not only heirs of God, but also fellow-heirs with the *messiah*)—if we experience with him the longing to be glorified with him. ¶ Now I count it that the experiences of longing in this current time are not fit to be compared to the glory that is about to be realized in us. The anxious yearning of the creation eagerly awaits the unveiling of the sons of God. For the creation was made subject to futility—not voluntarily, but because of Him who put it in subjection on the basis of his confident expectation that the creation itself would in fact be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the entire created order groans with them and is in labor with them till now. Not only this, but also we ourselves—because we have the first fruits of the Spirit—even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly awaiting our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body; for it is in confident anticipation that we are saved. Now an anticipation that is being seen is not an “anticipation”—for why would one “anticipate” what he sees? But if we anticipate what we are not seeing, then with perseverance we eagerly wait for it.

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2. As we see in these passages, the human beings for whom the gospel is "good news" are a certain class of individuals who are called, among other things, "children of God," or "sons of God."
    - a. The fundamental significance of being a "child of God" in these passages (and others) is that one stands to "inherit" the promised blessing of life beyond the grave. Hence, a "child" is an heir (note *Romans* 8:17).
      - (A) In other contexts, the concept of being a "child of God" has a different metaphorical significance. For example, in some contexts, it is made clear that a "child of God" is one who shares certain attributes with God, his father. Specifically, the child of God will have an aversion to sin and unrighteousness because God, his father, has an aversion to sin and unrighteousness.

### S. *Ephesians*

1. Paul's letter to the Ephesians is not a letter to a particular believing community. It is most likely a letter that he intended to be circulated among all the believing communities in Asia. Since it had such a widespread audience, we can reasonably assume that it emphasizes general truths. Paul begins his primary argument in *Ephesians* by reminding his readers that those who believe the truth about Jesus have been appointed to a very specific role within God's purposes. And, as such, they have been appointed to a very specific inheritance, a very specific reward. Then, on the basis of that fact, Paul exhorts his readers to pursue a life of holiness: "Since you have such a role and destiny, live your lives in a way that is fitting for the role and destiny to which you have been appointed." (Note *Ephesians* 4:1) What is the role and destiny to which the believer has been "called" or appointed? He has been appointed to be a member of God's *pleroma*, his *ekklesia*.
2. In the course of spelling out the "calling" to which the Jesus-believer has been appointed, Paul provides a number of clues about God's fundamental purpose for created reality. Accordingly, *Ephesians* is an important source for coming to understand why God created reality, why we exist, and why we who believe in Jesus do so.
  - a. Granted, Paul does not spell it all out in exactly these terms. He does not tell us he is answering these questions. And he does not explicitly assert that forming his *pleroma* is his fundamental purpose for all reality. However, all of the various assertions that Paul makes in *Ephesians* are best understood and best explained in the light of just this inference: namely, God's primary purpose for reality is to "grow" his *pleroma*.
3. From this inference, what picture emerges of God's primary purpose for reality? God's central purpose is to create a plethora of different and diverse stories of how different human individuals came to be incorporated into the *pleroma* (the *ekklesia*, the "All"). Each member of the *pleroma* shares a destiny wherein he will live forevermore with Jesus, his king, in the eternal Kingdom of God. Each member of this group is a recipient of God's profound mercy, for each of them is deserving of condemnation and destruction. Therefore, the *pleroma* will stand for all time as a monument to the glory and awesome-

ness of God’s mercy (note *Ephesians* 4:16). That is God’s primary purpose for this created reality in which we find ourselves.

- a. Note *Ephesians* 1:3-12, 3:10–11. The best way to understand the gospel of salvation is not to view it as something that God devised in order to fix a problem that emerged subsequent to the beginning of created reality. Rather, the gospel of salvation simply is the essential core of the story that God intended to create from the very beginning. In other words, the gospel of salvation was *God’s purpose before the foundation of the world*. It was not something that became necessary in order to fix something that had gone wrong.

T. ***Romans 8:28-30***

1. It is clear from this passage that an individual’s salvation is something that is included in God’s plans for created reality. An individual is saved because God has purposed that he be saved. And everything that God does and creates is calculated to lead to that individual’s being saved, if he is one whom God created for that purpose.
2. God saves ALL of those whom he has chosen. If a person’s salvation is part of the eternal purposes of God, then nothing will prevent that person from being saved.

U. ***Hebrews 4:12 (the division of soul and spirit)***

1. Here Paul makes a clear distinction between religious actions, expressions, or commitments that are reflective of the deepest, most inward state of a person and those actions, expressions, or commitments that do not reflect a person’s most inward state—that are simply pasted on to the outside of a person. The latter do not reflect the actual inner state of the person. They are intended to create a persona for others (and for oneself) to observe and admire. But they do not genuinely and authentically arise out of the true state of one’s inner person.
  - a. Note the “whitewashed tombs, which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness” of which Jesus spoke. (*Matthew* 23:27)
  - b. Note Luke 11:39 > “Now you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and of the platter; but inside of you, you are full of robbery and wickedness.”
  - c. Note the concept of ***hypocrisy*** to which Jesus frequently refers. Hypocrisy is not insincerity. Hypocrisy is play-acting. The hypocrite acts out the part of someone he is not. With respect to the hypocrite, who he is in his true inner person is different from the part he is playing.
2. The choice to believe in Jesus—and, inversely, the choice not to believe in Jesus—reveals something eternally significant about an individual human being. (*Heb.* 4:12-13)
  - a. The one who, out of a hardened heart, rejects the truth about Jesus is one who is destined for condemnation (he is one who will be denied the Sabbath Rest promised by God).

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- b. The one who, out of a responsive heart (or spirit), embraces the truth about Jesus is one who is destined for mercy and eternal life (he is one who will be granted the Sabbath Rest promised by God).
  3. The "belief" that characterizes and marks the individual for whom Jesus will intercede and obtain divine mercy is not a merely "outward" reality (it is not merely a matter of what one outwardly says or does, it is not merely a matter of his "soul" or persona), it is a deeply inward reality—a reality that is rooted in and reflective of the genuine orientation, values, and desires of his inner being, of his "spirit."

#### V. *Romans 8:9b-11*

1. My translation > Now if one does not have the spirit of the *messiah*, this one is not of him. But if the spirit of the *messiah* is in you, while your bodily existence is condemned to die because of sin, yet your spirit results in Life on account of *dikaiosune*. Indeed, if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells within you, the one who raised the *messiah* from the dead will also give Life to your mortal bodies in view of the indwelling of his Spirit within you.
2. Paul's point in this paragraph is that the one who belongs to the Messiah and is destined to be granted Life is one who evidences a particular "spirit" within himself. Specifically, it is one who evidences the "spirit of the *messiah*" within himself. By "spirit" Paul means to denote a complex of deeply inward realities. So, by the "spirit of the *messiah*" Paul means to denote a deeply inward orientation of one's being toward knowing, loving, fearing, serving, and obeying God. Because that was the orientation of the *messiah*'s inner being, Paul describes such an orientation as the "spirit of the *messiah*."
3. What Paul makes clear and explicit in this paragraph is that the ultimate indicator that a person is destined for *aionic* Life is the state or condition of his **inwardness**. A person cannot be known to be a child of God—to be one who is destined to be saved—merely from outward behavior. Only to the extent that one's outward behavior reflects an inwardness that is rightly oriented toward God and the things of God—only then is one's outward behavior any sort of evidence of one's eternal destiny. Ultimately, we are saved because of a rightly oriented **inwardness**, and not by any external reality.

#### W. *Revelation 3:14-22*

1. In this passage: it clear is clear that Jesus confronts us with a choice. We can choose to associate with him ("open the door" to him), or we can choose not to associate with him (not "open the door" to him). If we open the door to him, he will dine with us. If we do not open the door to him (by implication), he will not dine with us. Jesus's "dining" with us seems to be a metaphor for his accepting us as his friend, with all that that entails. Namely, if Jesus accepts us as his friend, then he will advocate for us and obtain mercy and the blessing of *aionic* Life for us.
  - a. This is a passage that makes clear that we are confronted by an existential choice. The existence-defining choice that we must make is what we are going to do with Jesus.



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Will we choose to define our existence by an association with him? Or will we choose not to define our existence by an association with him?

- (A) Our salvation is dependent upon which of these we choose. The one who will be saved is the one who makes an existential choice to associate with Jesus. It is only by choosing to "open the door" to Jesus that we will "dine" with him. To "dine with him" is ultimately a metaphor for enjoying everlasting existence with him.
2. Note that what God (and Jesus) want and expect from us is more than a casual acceptance of Jesus. What they want and expect is a *passionate* commitment to knowing and associating with Jesus. Indifference—or any sort of casual commitment to Jesus—gains us no standing with God (or Jesus). Jesus challenges us to be "hot," and not merely "lukewarm." This is the significance of the instruction to "be zealous" in *Rev. 3:19*.
    - a. The philosopher Soren Kierkegaard defines the faith that saves as an "infinite passion for the infinite." He is attempting to capture a very important concept in the teaching of the New Testament. The individual that God wants and expects is an individual who is like a pearl merchant who, upon finding a valuable pearl, sells *everything he owns* in order to purchase it. The infinite passion that God will reward with *aionic* Life is a longing to know God (the "infinite"), and a longing to have a place in his Kingdom, that is so strong that the person will give up everything else he possesses in order to obtain it. This infinite passion is a longing for *aionic* Life in the Kingdom of God that is so great, and so focused, that there is nothing he will not give up, or forfeit (hence it is "infinite," unbounded), in order to lay hold of that Life in the Kingdom.

X. **John 6:35-40**

1. Whether one is granted *aionic* Life is contingent upon whether the person "comes to" Jesus.
2. If an individual was created by God for the purpose of being saved, then that individual will "come to" Jesus.
3. While God has delegated authority to Jesus to determine who will get *aionic* Life and who will not get it, yet Jesus will not withhold *aionic* Life from any individual to whom God, in his eternal purposes, has wanted to give it.
4. To "come to" Jesus entails "believing in" him, which is to say, it entails embracing the truth about Jesus.

Y. **Luke 16:10-13**

1. In this passage, it becomes clear that the decisive choice an individual must make is a choice with respect to whom he will serve as his master. In this context, the choice is framed as a choice between God and material resources (mammon). In different contexts, the choice might helpfully be framed differently. But—however it is framed—the N.T. teaches that whether or not we inherit *aionic* Life depends upon **a personal, existence-**

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**defining choice** that an individual must make. Will we or will we not choose to serve God and him alone.

- a. The parable that Jesus taught immediately preceding this teaching ends with an exhortation *to act wisely*—that is, *to choose* to become rightly related to God by choosing to relate to his material possessions in the right sort of way.

Z. **Matthew 16:24-27** (earlier, we looked at this passage to explore a different point)

1. To “deny oneself” and to “lose one’s life for Jesus’s sake” (which are, essentially, different descriptions of the same thing) describe **an existential decision** that a human being must make. It is the decision to allow the nature and course of one’s existence to be defined by God (and by one’s relationship to Jesus), rather than having the nature and course of one’s existence be defined by one’s own desires and wishes.
  - a. Typically, this is an agonizingly difficult choice to make. However, one is not a disciple of Jesus if he does not make such a choice. And making such a choice is determinative of whether one will be granted life or condemnation.

(A) We see Jesus wrestling with exactly this choice in the Garden of Gethsemane.

AA. **John 6:44–45, 65**

1. No one can or will “come to” Jesus and believe in him unless God “draws” him. That is, God must create within an individual the choice to come to and believe in Jesus. If God does not do so, then no human being will come to Jesus and believe in him. It is not possible for a human being to come to Jesus and believe in him apart from the work of God in his inner being making it come to pass.

AB. **Brief statements that articulate the worldview that underlies the above passages:**

1. **STATEMENT #19:** *The “gospel” (good news) for all of mankind is that God intends to extend mercy to certain select individuals with the result that they will receive the blessing of eternal life rather than the wrath that they justly deserve. Hence, the “gospel” (good news) amounts to this: God has made it possible for me—a justly damnable person—to receive mercy from God and thereby escape the wrath of God’s condemnation at the final judgment.*
2. **STATEMENT #20:** *The gospel for mankind reflects the divine purpose at the core of the central theme within the primary storyline that God is authoring. The primary storyline of the grand overarching story of reality is the story of God’s selecting for himself a set of specific individuals to whom he will grant mercy. It is the story of how God rescues a set of individuals from the wrath that they deserve and blesses them instead with everlasting life in the eternal kingdom of God. In other words, the primary storyline of created reality is the story of how a select group of individuals become beneficiaries of the “gospel” (good news) revealed to mankind.*
3. **STATEMENT #21:** *A CHILD OF GOD—in contradistinction to a CHILD OF THE DEVIL—is the person who has made a life-defining choice to direct his deepest-most desires toward knowing, serving, honoring, believing, and obeying God. Only a CHILD OF GOD defined in this way will receive mercy from God and escape the final wrath of God.*

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4. *STATEMENT #22: It takes a special, extraordinary act of God for any inherently evil human being—hostile toward God as he is—to choose to direct his innermost desires toward knowing, serving, honoring, believing, and obeying God. No human being would ever do such a thing apart from God working a miracle in his innermost being.*
  5. *STATEMENT #23: The “gospel” is good news only for the CHILD OF GOD. It is not good news for any other human being (for a CHILD OF THE DEVIL).*

## Part Five: The Gospel for Israel

- A. There are fundamentally two distinctive perspectives on the prophetic predictions in the Old Testament:
1. One perspective understands the prophetic predictions to predict a significant role for ethnic Israel at the end of history.
  2. The other perspective understands the prophetic predictions in such a way that it understands God's dealings with Israel as a special, chosen people to have come to an end since the coming of Jesus. Currently, and for the rest of time, the only special, chosen people of God are that set of individuals who believe in Jesus.
- B. Each of the above two perspectives will tend to interpret any given Old Testament prophecy in a way that supports and confirms its perspective.
- C. The typical debate between these two perspectives runs like this:
1. Perspective 1 (a future role for ethnic Israel exists): "I take passage P to mean X."
  2. Rebuttal to perspective 1 by proponent of perspective 2 (no future role for ethnic Israel exists): "But passage P could mean Y instead."
    - a. Note that such a rebuttal offers no compelling reason to reject meaning X; and neither does it offer a compelling reason to embrace meaning Y.

(A) Of course passage P could mean Y. But the issue is never what a passage *could* mean. The issue is what the relevant author intended the passage to mean. I have not finished the task of biblical interpretation until I have offered a convincing, compelling case for why the meaning I advance for passage P is most likely the particular meaning that its author intended.
- D. **Genesis 12:1–9; 13:8–18**
1. Note: the narrative here informs us that the promise to make Abraham a "great nation" is inextricably bound together with the promise to give Abraham and his "seed" the *land* of Canaan. As later passages go on to make clear, God's promise is to establish the seed of Abraham, giving it secure possession of that land, and to make it a "great nation" that is located in that land (the land of Canaan).
  2. We have already looked at this passage (*Genesis* 12:1–9). We noted that there are two distinct promises that God makes to Abraham in this passage. If we conflate these different promises into one promise, we badly miss what God's purposes are. The two different promises are these: (1) God promises Abraham the blessing of everlasting life, and (2) God promises that he will give him a multitude of descendants who, one day, will become a great geo-political force (that is, that he will make him a "great nation" one day).
    - a. Notice how these two promises are of a radically different character. The first promise pertains to the ultimate destiny of an individual human being. The second promise pertains to how a particular ethnic group will fare within the overall trajectory of

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human history. The first promises everlasting life. The second promises victory, prosperity, and hegemony to a particular, identifiable political entity (that is, to what later comes to be called "the kingdom of Israel").

(A) The second of these promises to Abraham is problematic to many Christian Bible interpreters. Except within certain distinctive streams of Christian understanding, typical Christian understanding finds no place for the substance of this second promise. Consequently, the typical Christian bible student has no framework for making any sense of this second promise. So, they either ignore it or they seek to re-interpret it in a way that "fits" their Christian worldview and narrative.

(1) For the first portion of my ministry as a Bible teacher, I could make no sense of the second promise to Abraham. Therefore, I tended mostly to ignore it (while I focused on understanding the New Testament). I suspected that the right way to interpret the Old Testament Scriptures would involve interpreting them in such a way that the second promise to Abraham was not taken literally.

(2) In this latter part of my ministry as a Bible teacher, that has changed. Why? Because—

(a) I have a greater familiarity with the content of the Old Testament than I did during the first portion of my ministry as a Bible teacher. In my earlier ministry, my focus was almost exclusively on understanding the New Testament and I remained largely ignorant of most of the Old Testament.

(b) I have a much more accurate understanding of the New Testament now, as compared to my understanding during the first portion of my ministry. Typical Christian perspectives characterized the first portion of my ministry. Now, my perspectives are more attune to the intended meaning of the Bible, and less informed by Christian culture and tradition. The Christian culture and traditions that influenced my early perspective are decidedly church-centered, and not particularly Israel-centered. As a consequence, the second promise to Abraham seemed odd and out of place and did not readily fit into my Christian framework.

[A] My more accurate understanding of the Bible has involved a shift to an entirely new paradigm with regard to what the Bible is doing. The Bible does not describe a problem (sin) and offer a solution to that problem (Jesus, et. al.) {That was the old paradigm.} Rather, the Bible tells a story of what God is doing within created reality and invites me to participate, through my choices, in defining what my place will be in that story. {This is the new paradigm.}

[1] Under the old paradigm, the second promise to Abraham does not fit. It seems oddly out of place and irrelevant. Under the new para-

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digm, the second promise to Abraham is perfectly fitting and understandable.

[a] Old paradigm: message of Bible is this—believe in Jesus [and/or Jesus’s church] and you will be saved.

[b] New paradigm: message of Bible is this—God is the one who reveals himself in and through all of the various stories he has created throughout the history of mankind.

3. There are various attempts to interpret the promises to Abraham in such a way that it construes them as essentially one promise—and that one promise is a promise that “fits” into the typical Christian worldview and narrative:
  - a. The “blessing” is that Abram will be the “father” of a vast world religion (“great nation”)—namely, Christianity. The blessing is that his name will be made great by reason of his being the head of a great religion.
    - (A) This is not a straightforward way to construe the word “nation.”
    - (B) How then do the apostles see in the promise of this blessing the promise of eternal life? (As for example, how Paul interprets it in the book of *Galatians*.)
    - (C) This does not explain particularly well why those who bless Abraham will be blessed, and those who curse him will be cursed.
      - (1) Those who “bless” Abraham are presumably going to be blessed with the same blessing with which Abraham is going to be blessed. Are those others also going to be the head of a great religion?
  - b. The “blessing” is that he will be the “father” of God’s Messiah.
    - (A) Contrary to how many interpreters read it, Paul’s argument in *Galatians* does not identify the “seed” of Abraham as the Messiah. Rather, it identifies the “seed” of Abraham as that set of people who will be blessed with the same blessing with which Abraham is blessed. Abraham’s seed is that set of individuals who are “in” Abraham.
    - (B) Again, this does not explain why those who bless Abraham will be blessed, and those who curse him will be cursed.
  - c. The “blessing” is eternal life and the “great nation” is the great number of individuals who will be granted eternal life along with Abraham.
    - (A) This is not a straightforward way to construe the word “nation.”
    - (B) This promise to Abraham to make him a great nation is connected to a promise of a particular piece of real estate. There is no necessary connection between the land of Israel and the mass of people who will receive eternal life.

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- (1) The promise to make him a great nation in the land is also connected to the sign of circumcision. In the N.T., Paul specifically rejects a connection between circumcision and eternal life.
- (C) This promise to Abraham seems to make a clear distinction between the “great nation” that Abraham is to become and “all the families of the earth” who will find a blessing by being “in” Abraham.
- (1) In other words, a straightforward reading of this promise makes a distinction between the “seed of Abraham” that God will form into a great nation and the body of individuals who inherit the same blessing as Abraham (eternal life).
- (D) Later promises made to Israel are consistent with Israel having hegemony and mastery over other nations *in very explicit and specific terms*. We would have to see those as novel promises unrelated to the promise to Abraham here. But it seems likely that those later promises are an elaboration of this very promise to Abraham.
- (1) It is difficult to see how the great number of individuals who inherit eternal life (the church) could be said to enjoy hegemony [as a kingdom] over all the other nations in a way that corresponds to what the prophets describe. So, those other prophesies would have to be making a separate and distinct promise to the people of Israel.
- (a) Hence, if seeing Israel as a political entity about whom God is making promises for the future is problematic, it remains a problem. Removing it from one’s interpretation of *Genesis* 12 does not eliminate the problem.
4. There are attempts to interpret the promise to Abraham in such a way that the second promise has already been fulfilled.
- a. Specifically, to interpret the second promise as a promise that was fulfilled in the kingdoms of David and Solomon. Under this reading, the promise was a relatively modest promise to Abraham that he would be the progenitor of a substantial kingdom at a later point in history. Under this reading, it was a promise that did not promise anything especially unique to Abraham.
- (A) If all that “being made a great nation” means is to be the progenitor of a substantial ethnic group that will become identified with a substantial political entity at some later time in history, then many people have been made into “great nations.” It would not be something that is at all unique to Abraham.
- (1) But Paul seems to see this promise (e.g. *Romans* 4:13) as a *grand* promise, not a modest one. And he seems to see it as the promise of something unique. No one has reigned over the entire world as has been promised to the nation of Israel (the nation coming from Abraham).
- (a) See *Matthew* 5:5. Where does Jesus’s claim here in *Matthew* 5:5 come from if it does not come from *Genesis* 12:1–3, as understood together with

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the promise of the land that comes right after it? (*Genesis* 12:5, 13:12, 13:14–17)

5. There are attempts to interpret the promise to Abraham in such a way that the second promise has already been fulfilled in its literal sense, but that God intended for its literal fulfillment to be a “type” or “figurative anticipation” of another grander fulfillment—and that grander fulfillment was the mass of individuals who would inherit eternal life.
  - a. One could propose that the promises concerning the land, etc. were meant to be figurative all along and were never intended to be literal. While there may be some who would propose this, this is too implausible to be taken seriously (in light of how other biblical texts take these promises). I will not bother to critique this view.
    - (A) Its seeming plausibility relies upon—
      - (1) Ignorance of the complete content of the Old Testament.
      - (2) An aberrant understanding of the Bible that sees the institutionalized church and institutional Christianity as the sole focus and intended outcome of the biblical teaching.
    - (B) Hence, here is a more viable alternative: second promise (land and great nation) are literally fulfilled, but the fulfillment of that promise was intended to serve as a “type” or an “anticipation” of a grander fulfillment to come later.
  - b. There are problems with the notion of “a great nation” being a “type”:
    - (A) Usually interpreters who suggest this argue that there is no future for the nation of ethnic Israel, for God has already given ethnic Israel everything he intended for them as a mere type of what he was going to do for his “church.” But this doesn’t follow. Unless God is a liar, the literal reality that would serve as a “type” for the church has not yet ever been fully realized in history.
      - (1) The kingdoms of David and Solomon do not constitute a complete literal fulfillment of all that God said would come to pass politically in and for ethnic Israel.
      - (B) It is problematic to claim that A is a type of Z if and when there is no substantive analogy between A and Z. What substantive analogy exists between a political kingdom that has hegemony over all of the other political entities on the planet and a mass of individuals who all stand to be granted eternal life?
        - (1) Would any reasonable person who heard the promise that Israel would be made a great nation find himself thinking, “Then I fully expect that God is going to go on to create a large set of individuals to whom he grants eternal life”? Why would one think that the former would suggest the latter?
          - (a) And if it would not, then how could it serve as a “type”? Doesn’t the whole “image” of a type mean that the type “resembles” the reality that it



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anticipates? Where is the resemblance between the Davidic Kingdom (or something like that) and the body of saved individuals?

[A] One would have to construe a “type” as a totally or largely arbitrary symbol. What possible justification can be given for turning the elements of the Old Testament prophecies into symbols?

[1] It smacks of being an ad hoc, unjustified interpretive strategy intended to turn the prophetic promises into promises of eternal life.

c. There are also problems with the notion of “the land” being a “type”:

(A) Usually interpreters who suggest this argue that there is no future for the nation of ethnic Israel, for God has already given ethnic Israel everything he intended for them as a mere type of what he was going to do for his “church”—namely, bless them with eternal life. But this does not follow. Unless God is a liar, the literal reality that would serve as a “type” for the church has not yet ever been fully realized in history.

(1) Israel has never lived securely, peacefully, prosperously, and righteously in the land in a way that fulfills the complete prophetic picture. Hence, even if the “land” was intended only as a type of the blessing of eternal life for God’s “church,” God has not yet ever kept his promises with regard to the land and Israel.

(B) Furthermore, it is problematic to claim that A is a type of Z if and when there is no substantive analogy between A and Z. What substantive analogy exists between life on a particular piece of real estate and the gift of eternal life?

(1) Would any reasonable person who heard the promise that Israel would live securely and prosperously on a particular piece of land ever say, “Then I fully expect that God is going to go on to grant eternal life to anyone who believes him”? Why would I think that the former (land) would suggest the latter (eternal life)? What necessary connection between the two would lead me to anticipate the latter (eternal life) from the former (land)?

(a) And if no such necessary connection exists, then how could the land serve as a “type” of eternal life? Doesn’t the whole notion of a type (imprint) mean that the type resembles the reality that it anticipates (just like an imprint resembles the thing that leaves the imprint)? Where is the resemblance between the land of Israel and the gift of eternal life? If there is no resemblance between control over and prosperity in the physical land of Canaan and the blessing of eternal life, then how can it be taken to anticipate and suggest the blessing of eternal Life? And how can it meaningfully be said to be a “type” of eternal Life?

[A] I would argue that there is no such necessary resemblance between the land and eternal Life, and I would contend that one would posit that

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there is a resemblance only because he is looking for a reason to interpret God’s promise to Israel in a way that ignores the promise of the land in favor of the promise of eternal life.

[1] To call the land a “type” of eternal Life, one would have to construe a “type” to be a totally or largely arbitrary symbol. What possible justification can be given for turning the elements of the Old Testament promises into symbols?

[a] Doing so smacks of a completely *ad hoc*, unjustified interpretive strategy intended to turn the prophetic promises into promises of eternal life with no justification.

6. There are attempts to interpret the promise to Abraham in such a way that the second promise is fulfilled by something that transcends what was originally promised. In other words, God promised to make Abraham a “great nation,” but, in reality, he made him the paradigm member of the *ekklesia* instead. The latter (the paradigm member of the *ekklesia*) is a *much grander reality* than being the progenitor of a great nation.
  - a. How does this avoid making God into a liar? God said he would grant Abraham X and he did not do so. He granted him Y instead. The fact that the thing that he did do for Abraham (Y) is better than what he promised him (X) does not change the fact that God failed to do what he said he would do.
    - (A) If I promise my son that I will be home at a particular time to play a game with him and I come home too late to play the game with him, but I bring him a new puppy instead, have I kept my promise? No, I have not. The puppy is a wonderful gift. But I failed to keep my promise. With regard to my promise-keeping, the delightfulness of my gift does not compensate for the failure of my promise. Similarly, if God promises to make Abraham a great nation and never manages to do so, but, instead, he makes him the “father” of all those who believe, God has failed to keep his promise. It makes no difference that what he did do for Abraham might actually be a greater gift than what he promised him. God still failed to keep the promise he made to him.
      - (1) Such an understanding of the Bible creates serious problems for the notion that the Scriptures are inerrant.
        - (a) If God were to substitute a greater gift for the lesser gift that he promised, that would not necessarily impugn the character of God (it does raise questions with regard to his truthfulness however). However, even if one can maintain that it does not impugn the character of God, it does create a problem for the inerrancy of the Scriptures. The Scriptures made an assertion about what God promised to do that—under the current supposition—God would never, in fact, do. This means that, when all is said and done, God did not, in fact, do what the Scriptures clearly suggested he would do. That would be an *error* in what the Scriptures asserted through clear im-

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plication. It is difficult to square this with any substantive belief in biblical inerrancy.

- b. The "old covenant" becoming obsolete in the light of the "new covenant (as is maintained in the book of *Hebrews*) is not an example of God's fulfillment transcending the promise he made.
- (A) In the first place, the new covenant is not a promise-fulfillment, it is a new covenant, a new *torah*.
- (1) In other words, the new covenant does not "fulfill" some promise that God made (such that it could be a promise-fulfillment that transcended what the promise directly asserted). Rather, the new covenant is a contract relationship between God and Israel (and between God and mankind).
- (B) Furthermore, the "new covenant" does not really transcend the old covenant in the sense that the new covenant is fundamentally and essentially different from the old covenant.
- (1) At his essence, the new covenant is no different from the old covenant made at Sinai. It does not change the essence of that covenant. The alteration that makes it "new" is an adjustment to how the people of Israel must understand the "old" covenant. It is not an adjustment to the essence of the covenant itself.
- (a) Specifically, the new covenant alters how one understands the basis for the mercy that God offers under that original covenant.
- [A] No longer will one construe his animal sacrifices as the basis for God's mercy. Now one must understand the death and intercession of the Messiah, Jesus, to be the basis for God's mercy under the covenant (whether or not he offers up animal sacrifices in accordance with the covenant at Sinai).
- [1] Even though Moses wouldn't have known it, the death and intercession of the Messiah, Jesus, has always been the true basis upon which Yahweh would grant mercy to those under the "old" covenant. (It is "the eternal covenant.")
- (2) As a new *torah*, it does alter one's understanding of one element of the old *torah*. But it is important to note: God never said that he would never *clarify* any parts of the *torah*. (The *torah* itself would endure "to the end of time." But that does not rule out certain elements within it being more fully explained along the way. Hence, the new covenant does not make God a liar. For God is not rescinding his covenant. Neither is he doing anything that he promised he would never do. He is simply making an adjustment to how a certain, particular element of his *torah* is to be understood.)

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- (a) The new *torah* may alter the role for animal sacrifices in the Mosaic Covenant (although it is not obvious that that has to be). And this is because the Messiah, when he comes, “clarifies” what the basis for divine mercy had been all along—namely, his own intercession through his own sacrificial death.
  - (b) Under the old *torah* there had been an understandable misapprehension of what the basis for divine mercy was. But it was a misapprehension. God had never made animal sacrifices the true basis for his mercy. Hence, Jesus’s death does not change the basis for divine mercy. Rather, it makes clear what the true basis for divine mercy had been all along, as it creates a new *torah* with regard to what to do with one’s sins. Now, in the light of Jesus’s death, I place my trust in Jesus as my intercessor and true high priest as the basis for the forgiveness of my sins. I no longer place my trust in any animal sacrifice offered up as a propitiatory offering because of my sins.
- 7. This passage (*Genesis* 12:1-3) is such a key passage to understanding the Bible. In a nutshell, *all of the purposes of God that are to be fulfilled in human history are summarized in the promises expressed here.*
  - 8. The promise of eternal life corresponds to the “Gospel to Mankind” (as I have defined that in these notes); the promise to make Abraham a “great nation” corresponds to the “Gospel to Israel” (as I have defined that in these notes).

**E. *Genesis* 17:1–8**

- 1. In light of *Romans* 4:17, this passage is construed by some to rebut our reading of *Genesis* 12:1–9. However, this is a mistake. It is not inconsistent with *Genesis* 12:1–9.
    - a. Most directly, a “multitude of nations (and kings)” refers to the kingdoms of Edom, Moab, Ammon, the tribes of Medan, the tribes of Midian, various kings on the Arabian peninsula, etc. *This is a pretty amazing promise to make to a man who is old and childless.*
- (A) This reading is not contradicted by Paul’s parenthetical comment in *Romans* 4:17.
- (1) There, Paul seems to extend the phrase, “a father of many nations have I made you,” to include Gentiles, from many nations, who will be “spiritual” children of Abraham. However, we do not have to understand Paul to be suggesting that that is what was actually intended in *Genesis* 17:4-5. Rather, Paul is simply commenting on how *apropos* Abraham’s name is in view of the fact that he is the “father of us all” (that is, he is the father of everyone who imitates his faith).

**F. *Genesis* 17:15–22; 22:15–19**

- 1. The miraculous nature of Isaac’s birth can distract us from the significance of who Isaac is. Isaac is the child whom God had appointed to be the progenitor of the chosen people

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of God. Isaac inherits the special, unique promise made to Abraham with respect to himself and his "seed" (namely, the one briefly summarized in *Genesis 17:7–8*). The "seed" that is going to realize that particular promise is a "seed" that traces its origins back to Abraham through Isaac.

a. The blessing that God promised to Abraham appears to have been promised to Isaac as well, and it would appear that the intent of the narrative is to suggest that all of the special, unique promises made to Abraham with respect to himself and his "seed" were passed on, and repeated, with respect to Isaac and to his "seed."

(A) This is why Jacob (Israel) defrauding Esau of his father's (Isaac's) blessing and inheritance was a big deal. The "inheritance" that went to Jacob rather than to Esau was the set of promises that Isaac had inherited from his father Abraham.

(1) Note *Genesis 28:1-4*.

(a) *Genesis 28:4* does not have to mean that the land is the blessing of Abraham. More likely, it means that the blessing of Abraham (eternal life) is intimately tied to the promise of the land for Jacob (Israel) and his descendants.

#### G. *Genesis 18:16–19; 22:15–18*

1. Yahweh boils his various promises to Abraham down to two promises here. This is confirmation of the way we were looking at *Genesis 12:1-3* earlier in these notes. Yahweh boils his promises down to these two promises:
  - a. He will make Abraham a "great nation."
  - b. In Abraham, all the peoples of the earth will receive a blessing.

(A) And this latter promise is inseparable from the promise that God would bless Abraham personally.
2. *Genesis 18:19* makes clear that the promised blessings to Abraham...
  - a. are conditional—they depend upon Abraham responding in a particular way; and

(A) being "conditional" does not mean they are uncertain
  - b. are promised conditionally to Abraham's descendants as much as they are promised conditionally to Abraham himself.
3. *Genesis 22:16–18* makes clear that the promised blessings to Abraham are conditional.
4. *Genesis 22:16–18* reiterates the same promises that we have seen in other passages, boiling them down to two main promises:
  - a. Yahweh will bless Abraham and Yaweh will bless individuals from all the various peoples of the earth who are connected to him.

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- b. Yahweh will make from Abraham a large, numerous people group who will be given victory and ascendancy over all their enemies (that is, who will become a “great nation”).

H. **Genesis 26:1–5; 28:13–15**

1. The promises to Abraham are passed on to and repeated to Isaac.
2. The promises to Abraham are passed on to and repeated to Jacob (Israel).

I. **Genesis 32:28; 35:9–15**

1. Here we see how the “seed” from Abraham comes to be identified by the name “Israel.”
2. The blessing that God promised to Abraham appears to have been given to Jacob (Israel) as well, and it would appear that the intent of the narrative is to suggest that all of the promises made to Abraham and to his “seed” were passed on, and repeated, to Jacob (Israel) and to his “seed.”
3. Jacob (Israel) becomes the last of the forefathers of the people of Israel. After Israel, there is no further discrimination made among Israel’s offspring. It is not that some of Israel’s sons are explicitly said to be the promised seed while others of them are explicitly said not to be. So far as the narrative goes, all of Israel’s sons belong to the “seed” of Abraham with regard to whom the promises were made.
  - a. However, in the N.T., Paul will argue that “not all Israel is Israel”—that is to say, not every biological descendent of Israel is a child of Israel in the sense that he is a child of the promises. As Paul sees it, true Israel is that set of individuals who are the offspring of Israel, on the one hand, but who are also “believers” like their father Abraham was.
    - (A) To be qualified to be a genuine member of the chosen people of the promises, one has to (1) be descended from Israel (Jacob), and (2) have a believing heart in the likeness of Abraham’s believing heart.
    - (B) Just as Jacob was a child of promise, while Esau was not, similarly a *believing* Israelite is a child of promise while an *unbelieving* Israelite is not.

J. **Genesis 46:1–4; Exodus 32:7–10; Numbers 14:11–12**

1. The promise to Abraham that God will make him a “great nation” is, implicitly, repeated and passed on to Jacob (Israel) here.
  - a. And twice (*Exodus 32:10, Numbers 14:12*), God (Yahweh)—in a sort of testing of Moses’s faith—threatens to withdraw that promise from Israel and to grant it to Moses instead.
2. Implicitly, the promise of a “great nation” is closely linked to the promise of the land.

K. **Deuteronomy 4:1–40**

1. Things of note here:

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- a. As elsewhere, Moses takes the promise of the “land” that God made to Abraham to be a literal promise of the land of Canaan.
  - b. Moses understands that the “greatness” that God has promised to Israel in his promise to make them a “great nation” involves a *spiritual and moral greatness*. (See *Deuteronomy* 4:5–8.)

L. ***Deuteronomy 26:1-19***

1. Three things of note here:

- a. *Deuteronomy* 26:3 makes it clear that Israel’s possession of the land of Canaan was the very thing that Yahweh had promised to Abraham in *Genesis* 12:4–9, when he promised to give him “the land” that Yahweh had led him to (*Genesis* 12:1).
  - (A) So far as Moses is concerned, the original promise to Abraham with respect to the “land” was not a metaphor for something else. It was literally a promise that Abraham’s seed would be given possession of the piece of real estate known as the land of Canaan. (See *Genesis* 13:14–18 and *Genesis* 15:18–21.)
- b. *Deuteronomy* 26:5 reiterates what was said in *Genesis* 46:3. It was while they were sojourning in Egypt that the people of Israel first developed into a distinct and identifiable nation (*goy*) such that it began to be plausible that they might become a “great nation.”
- c. *Deuteronomy* 26:18-19 makes explicit for the first time how Moses understood God’s promise to Abraham: namely, Yahweh promised that he would make Israel (the seed of Abraham) into a nation that was “set high above all the nations that God had made,” and that Israel would thereby enjoy “praise, fame, and honor.”
  - (A) In other words, Moses understands the conditional promise that Yahweh made to Abraham and his seed to be that Yahweh would make the seed of Abraham into a great nation that would be greater than any other nation on the earth.
    - (1) Presumably, he would make them into a nation so great that no other nation throughout the whole history of the earth would surpass it in greatness. That is, God was promising Abraham that he would make him (through his descendants) the greatest nation (society / civilization) that ever existed throughout the whole of human history.
      - (a) God had promised to Abraham and to Hagar that he would make Ishmael into a “great nation” as well as Isaac. (See *Genesis* 17:20, 21:18.) However, *the promise to Isaac was unique*. While Ishmael would be made into a “great nation,” Isaac was to be—through the people of Israel—made into a nation so great that it was “above all the nations that God had ever made.”
      - (b) God calls various nations who will come up against Israel to “judge” them “great nations” as well. (See *Jeremiah* 6:22 and *Jeremiah* 50:41.) But,

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again, they are not as “great” as the nation that God has promised to make Israel.

**M. *Genesis 50:22–26***

1. In *Genesis 50:24*, Joseph affirms that Yahweh promised the land of Canaan to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob and that it is his purpose to take the people of Israel back to the land of Canaan and establish them there in that land.

**N. *Exodus 3:1–12; 6:1–9;***

1. God makes clear to Moses that his purpose is to keep a promise he made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Namely, he promised a particular piece of real estate (a “land”) to the forefathers of Israel. God’s purpose, under Moses, is to free the people of Israel from servitude in Egypt, to bring them out of the land of Egypt, and to bring them to the land that was promised to Abraham. et. al.
  - a. Furthermore, God makes clear to Moses that his purpose is to fulfill the promise he made to Abraham (*Genesis 13:15–17*) by making his numerous “seed” (Israel) into his people, even as he would be their god.

**O. *Deuteronomy 7:1–16;***

1. In Deut. 7:6 we see that the people of Israel have a unique relationship to God. They are uniquely the “possession” of God. That is a significant amplification of God’s promise to Abraham. They (Abraham’s descendants) will be God’s people; and he will be their god.
2. In Deut. 7:7–8, we see that God did not make Israel his people because of their significance. God chose them even though they were insignificant.
  - a. As we shall see, the irony in God’s purposes is this: God is going to take an insignificant people group (Israel) and, before history has come to an end, make it into the most significant people-group in all of human history.
3. In Deut. 7:9, it says that God keeps his *hesed* to the thousandth generation. In this context, it means that God is of such a character that he will take care to do what he has promised to do, and he will never forsake his promise to the people of Israel, even if, after a thousand generations, his people continue to be disobedient and unfaithful to their God.
  - a. Note this important theme: God is a God who exhibits *hesed* !
4. It is clear in Deut. 7:12 that the promise to which God will be faithful is a promise that he made to Abraham (and the other forefathers).

**P. *Deuteronomy 26:16–19; 28:1–2; 28:7–15; 28:25; 28:43–45; 29:1–30:10; 30:15–20***

1. Several statements in Moses’s discourse here make it clear that what God purposes to do in and for the people of Israel is *not* a NEW thing. It is a fulfillment of promises that he made to their forefathers (e.g., Abraham).



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- a. *Deuteronomy* 26:3, 5, 15, 18; 27:3; 28:11; 29:13; 30:5, 9, 20; 31:7–8
- (A) It becomes evident in this discourse that what Moses is promising Israel—if and when they keep the covenant that he is making with them—is the very same set of blessings that he promised to Abraham many generations before.
- (B) In fact, this Mosaic covenant is simply an elaboration of and an enactment of the Abrahamic covenant. It is a detailed spelling-out of the conditions that must be met by Israel in order for God to grant them the blessings that he promised in the Abrahamic covenant.
- (1) The primary, express purpose of the Mosaic Covenant is the above. It is not to place undoable moral demands upon Israel such that they will come to know that they cannot make themselves worthy of any blessing from God.
- (a) Paul acknowledges the latter as an important role played by the Mosaic Covenant. But, in view of *Deuteronomy* here, it is not the primary, express purpose of the Mosaic Covenant. It is, at best, a secondary purpose.
- (2) These passages make clear that the purpose of the Mosaic Covenant is to define how Israel must live in order to be the people of God.
2. From these passages we can see that the promise that God made to Abraham (and that God is setting before Israel here through Moses) is that—if they keep God’s instructions— he would make them into a great nation that is “high above all the nations.”
- a. God is promising Israel that—if they keep his instructions— he will cause their enemies to be defeated.
- b. God is promising Israel that—if they keep his instructions— he will make them the head and not the tail in relation to the other nations. In other words, he is promising them hegemony over the other nations.
- (A) God warns Israel that exactly the opposite is the case if they fail to keep his instructions: he will make them the tail and not the head in relation to the other nations. In other words, he is warning them of humiliation by all the other nations.
3. These passages make clear that what God requires of Israel is a particular heart-attitude toward God and toward the covenant he is making with them. God requires inner obedience to his demands; not mere outward conformity to them.
4. We can summarize (from these passages) what God is promising Israel in this way: If Israel will—from their heart, from their inner being—be a people who seek to obey God’s instructions, God will ...
- a. establish them as his unique people and he will be their god, keeping them safely in possession of the land that he is giving them (and that he promised to Abraham);
- b. protect them from their enemies and give them victory over all their enemies;

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- c. grant them hegemony over all the nations, making them the greatest nation that has ever existed (just as he promised to Abraham);
  - d. make them prosper materially, making them successful in all that they do (just as he promised Abraham);
  - e. multiply them, increasing their numbers (just as he promised Abraham)

**Q. 2 Samuel 7:1–29; 1 Chronicles 17:1–27**

1. The core promise that God makes to David is that his descendants will have a perpetual claim to rightful rule over the people of Israel; God will never take that claim away from him or his descendants. Furthermore, God promises that that reign will be to the end of time. And finally, God will establish a "Father-Son" relationship with the Davidic king who is enthroned over Israel.
  - a. The "Father-Son" relationship is a relationship where the human Davidic king (the Son) is the locus of God's (the Father's) very own rule and authority.
2. Other things of note in these passages:
  - a. As was the case in the promise to Abraham, God's promise entails that David's name will be made great by what God is going to do. (2 Samuel 7:9; 1 Chronicles 17:8)
  - b. God's promise includes a promise that the people of Israel will be planted immovably in a particular place and that God will keep them safe and protected from enemies in that place. (2 Samuel 7:10-11; 1 Chronicles 17:9)
    - (A) This is reminiscent of the "land" that God promised to Abraham whereupon God was going to make his "seed" into a "great nation." Arguably, the "place" that God is going to grant to the people of Israel is the "land" that God promised to Abraham.
  - c. Note the parallel between *Psalms* 8 and 2 Samuel 7:18–21 and 1 Chronicles 17:16–20.
    - (A) Unlike a typical reading of *Psalms* 8, *Psalms* 8 is not a meditation on how marvelous and wondrous is the dominion of human beings over creation; rather, it is a meditation by David on how marvelous and humbling is the role and status that God has given to him and his descendants.
  - d. In view of 2 Samuel 7:14, it is clear that the descendant of David of which God speaks in this passage is not Jesus. Indeed, it is Solomon. Hence, Solomon is directly being promised that God will make him his "Son" in this passage.
    - (A) The title "Son of God" is not the name of some person of a triune godhead (for Solomon is not a person of a triune godhead nor the incarnation of one). Rather, the "Son of God" is the name of the human descendant of David with respect to whom God promised that he would make him as a "Son."

**R. Psalm 2 (psalm written by David)**

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1. Speaking with regard to the Davidic king (Solomon?) reigning as king over Israel, the Psalm suggests that God’s intention is for “all the kings of the earth” to “do homage” to the Davidic king reigning over Israel (that is, to do homage to “the Son”).
    - a. Implicit in this is that it is God’s intention that the Kingdom of his Son will rule over and dominate all the other nations of the world.
  2. Where does David’s understanding here come from? It is not explicitly a part of the Davidic Covenant. So, if it does not come from the promise made to Abraham that God would make him a “great” nation, then where does it come from? It would seem that it can only come from the promise made to Abraham.
    - a. The same argument could be made with respect to many other statements David makes, including several other Psalms (e.g., *Psalms* 21 and 22.) If not from God’s promise to Abraham, where would David get the idea that the kingdom that God was promising to establish under David’s descendent would be a kingdom that would have victory over all the other kingdoms?
      - (A) And even if one could find a place where God does articulate an explicit promise to David that David’s kingdom will have ascendancy over all the other kingdoms of the earth, does it not stand to reason that that very promise was being anticipated in and by the promise that Yahweh made to Abraham when he told him that he would make him a “great nation”?
        - (1) At least, it stands to reason that that promise anticipates it—under the assumption that all of God’s promises and predictions throughout history are united by their giving expression to the coherent and interconnected purposes of God for human history.
        - (2) In other words, the kingdom of God ruled over by God’s Son is, in all likelihood, the same political entity that was in view when God promised Abraham that he would make him a “great nation.”
          - (a) *Psalm* 2 is clearly speaking of a time when God’s Messiah rules over all the nations. But when will that be? We would not know the answer to that from *Psalm* 2 alone. But will it not be when the promised Kingdom of God is established, during the predicted thousand year reign of the Messiah? And is it not probable that, when God establishes the Kingdom of God under the reign of his Messiah, Abraham will have been made a “great nation”—just as God promised Abraham at the very beginning.
- S. *Psalm* 89 (psalm not written by David)
1. After rehearsing the substance of the covenant that God made with David (the promise of an everlasting throne), the psalmist bemoans the state of abject defeat within which the throne of David is now to be found—due to the sins and transgressions of David’s sons. Then he cries out to God to remember the promises he made to David, and to show his

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faithfulness to those promises. Then the psalmist appeals to God to act out of his faithfulness and to act as he has acted previously to establish David’s throne.

2. For our purposes, of particular note are the following:
  - a. *Psalm 89: 1–4* > God promised David that the reign of his line over Israel will endure forever.
  - b. *Psalm 89: 17–18, 21* >
    - (A) The Davidic king is the “shield” (protector) of Israel.
    - (B) The Davidic king of Israel has a unique relationship with Yahweh. The Davidic king “belongs” to Yahweh.
  - c. *Psalm 89: 20* > David (and his sons) hold the title “The Anointed One of God” (= the Messiah).
  - d. *Psalm 89: 23–29* >
    - (A) God will empower the Davidic king to “crush” his adversaries and the adversaries of God.
    - (B) Apparently, God’s power over nature itself will be delegated to God’s chosen “David.”
    - (C) Just as God promised in the Davidic covenant itself, God will be a “Father” to his chosen David.
    - (D) God will give his chosen David hegemony over all the kings of the earth.
    - (E) God will establish the line of this chosen David in this throne forever.
  - e. *Psalm 89: 30–37* > God will remain completely and absolutely faithful to keep his covenant with David. He will do everything that he promised David he would do. If David’s sons are disobedient, he will deal with them; he will punish them appropriately. But he will never forsake the covenant that he has made with David.

T. *Psalm 110:1–7* (psalm written by David)

1. Note that David does not believe that God’s promises to him will be fulfilled in him personally. They will be fulfilled in some individual who is descended from him. (Note: “Yahweh says to my [David’s] lord... .” Who is this individual [“my {David’s} lord”] except Jesus, a son of David?)
2. Apart from one very important assertion that this son of David will be a “priest according to the order of Melchizedek,” this psalm concerns itself exclusively with affirming the promise God made to the Davidic dynasty—namely, that a Davidic king will have complete victory over the enemies of God.

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- a. This victory over the enemies of God is an important element of the “greatness” of the nation which God had promised Abraham that he will bring about among his descendants.

U. ***Psalm 45:1–7*** (psalm not written by David)

1. God granted to David (and his seed) to have sovereign reign over Israel forever.
2. The condition placed on the authority to be given to David was his righteousness and uprightness. It follows, therefore, that the rule of God’s Messiah will be a righteous rule.
  - a. This is consistent with what we will ultimately conclude: the “great nation” that God had in mind when he made his promise to Abraham was a righteous society ruled over by a righteous king (the Messiah) that would prosper materially and would be safe from and have hegemony over all the other nations in the world.

V. ***Psalm 72:1-19***

1. This is another excellent example of a “Messianic Psalm”—by which I mean a Psalm that explores the implications of the Davidic Covenant for what the permanent reign of David’s house should look like.
2. Note these themes:
  - a. The Messiah’s reign will be a reign of justice and righteousness.
  - b. The Messiah will be honored and esteemed by all the kings of the earth; and/or he will be feared by his enemies.
  - c. The Messiah’s reign will lead to peace and prosperity for his people.
3. Note how this picture of the reign of God’s Messiah over the people of Israel is consonant with God’s promise to Abraham that God would make him a “great nation.”

W. An important issue that emerged when God made his Covenant with Israel at Mt. Sinai (in the book of *Exodus*) was whether and in what sense God would be “with” Israel. In what sense would he be present with them? The answer there was that he would appear in the tabernacle made for him by Moses. In a sense, God lived among them and along side of them in his own tabernacle. But in the promise to David (the Davidic Covenant) we have God’s final answer to whether and in what sense God will be “with” Israel. If and when Israel finally decides to be God’s people (by obeying God’s commandments), God will choose to be present with Israel as a human being who lives among them and rules over them as their king. Because the “Son” is the embodiment of Yahweh’s person and sovereign rule, if the Son is dwelling among them, then Yahweh is dwelling among them. Hence, that son of David who will finally and truly be the Son of Yahweh is the way in which Yahweh himself will enter into history and be present with and in the midst of his people, Israel.

1. God promised Abraham that He would be Israel’s god, and Israel would be His people. In the Davidic covenant, God spells out an important aspect of what it would look like for

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him (Yahweh) to be Israel's god. Specifically, he would dwell among them and rule over them in the form of that human individual whom Yahweh appointed to be his "Son."

- X. Turning to the writings of the prophets, here are the assumptions that underlie my interpretation of the prophetic predictions found in the prophetic writings: (I will sometimes state my assumptions relative to the prophet Isaiah. However, everything I say here with regard to what I assume as I approach the task of interpreting Isaiah could also be said with regard to any other prophet.)
1. **ASSUMPTION #1:** Isaiah's understanding of reality is God's understanding of reality.
    - a. The understanding of Isaiah (insofar as that is expressed in and by his language) is an understanding of reality that was inspired in him by God.
  2. **ASSUMPTION #2:** A particular prophetic prediction by Isaiah must be understood in light of the message and worldview of the entire Bible.
    - a. If the Bible is the authoritative word of God, then the discipline of so-called "biblical theology" is fallacious and illegitimate.

(A) No one biblical author's theology can be rightly understood without understanding it in the light of everything else the Bible teaches.
    - b. How I understand a prophetic prediction made by Isaiah will be governed by how I understand the message and worldview of the Bible as a whole.

(A) To interpret a prophecy made by Isaiah, I will have to engage in a dialectic. How I interpret Isaiah's prophetic prediction will effect my understanding of the message and worldview of the Bible as a whole. But how I understand the message and worldview of the Bible as a whole will effect how I understand the specific prophetic prediction by Isaiah. I must navigate this *hermeneutical circle* by going back and forth between prophetic prediction and biblical worldview, making the appropriate changes and adjustments to one or the other or both until it all finally "clicks" as I realize that I have made contact with the mind of Isaiah (and God).
  3. **ASSUMPTION #3:** A prophetic prediction by Isaiah will be directly *relevant* to Isaiah's original audience.
    - a. The direct relevance of Isaiah's prophetic prediction to his original audience need not be that his original audience will *experience* or even *witness* the event that Isaiah is predicting.
    - b. The event being predicted in a prophetic prediction by Isaiah must solve some problem or answer some question that is a live problem or question for his original audience.

(A) Prophetic prediction by Isaiah is not a matter of God "showing off" what he can do. God does not predict the future just because he can. His prediction serves some purpose in the lives of Isaiah's audience.

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- c. The intended relevance of a prophetic prediction by Isaiah to his original audience is more likely to be broad in scope and spiritual and theological in nature. It is less likely to be narrow in scope and concrete and practical in nature.
4. **ASSUMPTION #4:** The purpose of a prophetic prediction by Isaiah will, typically, be to reassure his audience that the future will unfold in such a way that what God has promised will, in fact, be fulfilled.
- a. The purpose of a prophetic prediction is not typically to satisfy human curiosity about what exactly is going to occur in the future and when it is going to occur.
- (A) Typically, prophetic prediction does not include enough detail that it actually describes the future in advance. Rather, it typically includes only enough detail to present a sketchy outline of the predicted event. Its purpose is usually to assert ***that*** an event is going to occur, not ***how*** and ***when*** it is going to occur.
- (1) Typically, what has direct relevance to the live issues or questions of Isaiah’s audience is the fact that the predicted event will occur, not the how and when of it.
- b. With certain notable exceptions, the purpose of a prophetic prediction is not typically to give Isaiah’s audience information to guide them in their own personal decision-making. Rather, it typically gives them information that will equip them to understand and make sense of history and to understand and make sense of their own personal experience.
5. **ASSUMPTION #5:** Isaiah is intending to say something helpful and meaningful to his audience in the sense that any event that he predicts will address a problem, an issue, or a question that exists in the mind of any and every righteous Jew in his audience—specifically, it will address a problem, an issue, or a question that will have arisen because of the circumstances in which Isaiah’s audience finds itself.
- a. Now, in the case of *Isaiah*, the circumstances that form the context for his audience’s questions or issues are not always or necessarily their own actual circumstances. In other words, the question-provoking circumstances for Isaiah’s audience are not always or necessarily circumstances that his audience finds themselves in. Rather, they are often the circumstances of some future generation of Israelites who will undergo the various things that Isaiah has predicted in some of his other prophecies.
- (A) To be specific, the problems, questions, or issues that Isaiah’s predicted event addresses are often those that have arisen because of the circumstances that Israel will find itself in during the Babylonian captivity. The questions or issues that arise for Isaiah’s audience are questions and issues that arise because of something that will occur to other people—to a future generation of Jews.
- (B) Note the significance that this has for what kinds of “remedies” Isaiah’s predictions are offering: the “remedies” must be theological/spiritual in nature rather than practical in nature.

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- (1) A practical “remedy” would only be relevant to the generation that actually experiences the adversity that is being predicted by Isaiah. (I.e., it would only be relevant to the generation that experiences the Babylonian exile and captivity. Some in Isaiah’s audience will never actually experience the exile and captivity that Isaiah predicts.)
  - (2) A theological/spiritual “remedy” would be relevant to any and every individual within any generation of the Israelites that has seen the relevant question or issue arise.
    - (a) However, note that a theological/spiritual “remedy” (e.g., God has not forsaken his promises to Israel) would only be valued by individuals who are interested in a theological/spiritual “remedy.” Any individual who would prefer a practical “remedy” (e.g., God will guarantee that you, in particular, prosper) will find little profit in many of Isaiah’s prophetic predictions.
  - (C) In our efforts to understand a prophetic prediction by Isaiah, we should assume that most of Isaiah’s prophetic predictions predict theological/spiritual remedies, not practical ones.
  - b. Isaiah is intending to say something helpful and meaningful to his contemporary audience.
    - (A) How we understand what Isaiah is predicting will be effected significantly by what we understand to be the issues, problems, or questions that Isaiah thinks (and that God knows) his audience has (or should have).
      - (1) To interpret one of Isaiah’s prophetic predictions correctly depends completely on my correctly identifying the issue, problem, or question that the predicted event is intended to address.
      - (2) The issues that God addresses by a prophetic prediction will be the issues that God would want and expect the audience to have, not the issues that some individual audience member might actually have as a matter of fact.
  6. **ASSUMPTION #6:** The following is a valid requirement to place on any interpretation of a prophetic prediction by Isaiah: the question, issue, or problem that—according to my interpretation—is being addressed by the prediction of the event in question must be a question, issue, or problem that God would likely want to address.
    - a. Any interpretation of a prediction by Isaiah that does not identify what question, issue, or problem is being addressed by the predicted event is an unfinished interpretation. An adequate interpretation of a prophetic prediction must offer an answer to the following question, “what question, issue, or problem is being addressed by the predicted event?”
  7. **ASSUMPTION #7:** I must not dismiss a lack of correspondence between the prediction being made by Isaiah and the event that is supposedly being predicted by saying that the prophetic prediction is speaking *hyperbolically*. In other words, I must assume that Isai-



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ah’s prediction will be fulfilled by an event that truly corresponds to the event that Isaiah describes in his prediction. I cannot offer up an event that is somehow less than or more modest than the event that Isaiah described in his prediction and claim that it was the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prediction.

a. Given biblical inerrancy, I should expect a description of the actual facts that unfolded during an event that was predicted by Isaiah to match the description of the facts that were outlined by Isaiah in the prophetic prediction itself.

(A) If I have to dismiss discrepancies between the prediction of an event and the event that allegedly fulfills the prediction by declaring that the fit is “close enough,” then it is likely that I have not identified the predicted event correctly.

b. Note: *Isaiah* 52:1-10 (esp. 52:1, “For the uncircumcised and the unclean will no longer come into you.” This is implicitly a prediction.)

8. **ASSUMPTION #8:** The various prophetic passages that are placed one after another in Isaiah are discrete instances of prophecy, and they are not necessarily connected to one another.

a. Note: *Isaiah* 52:1-10 *vis à vis* *Isaiah* 52:11-12

b. This is another way of remembering that the chapter-verse divisions in our typical Bible are not a reliable guide to what parts of Isaiah’s prophecies are connected to other parts of Isaiah’s prophecies.

9. **ASSUMPTION #9:** The problems, issues, and questions that God believes should be in the minds of Isaiah’s audience will—as often as not—be “answered” by the final events of history. Hence, unless he has good reasons to think otherwise, one should assume that what is being predicted by Isaiah in any given prophetic prediction is an event or set of events that will occur at the end of history.

a. The events with the greatest explanatory power—the events that best explain every other event in history—are those events at the end of history that constitute the last chapter of history.

(A) The story of history does not finally reach its culmination until the end. It is the end of the story that finally resolves each and every unresolved issue within the story.

Y. *Isaiah* 54; 59; 60:1–22; 65:1–25; 66:1–24

1. *Isaiah* 54:1-10

a. Yahweh predicts a time when the *Israel of God’s promises* will be populated with *many* members—in particular, with *more* members than the population of *rebellious, unfaithful Israel*.

(A) The “barren one” (= “the desolate one”) represents “the Israel of God’s promises.”

(B) The “married woman” represents “rebellious, unfaithful Israel.”

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- (C) As confirmation of the two designations above, note how Paul interprets this statement by Isaiah in *Galatians* 4:24–28. He interprets it just as I have above.
- b. In *Isaiah* 54:3, Yahweh predicts that the members of “the Israel of God’s promises”—at such a time in the future when God (in keeping with his promise to Abraham) will make the members of Israel to be numerous—will “possess nations” and will “resettle the desolate cities.”
- (A) Note how this corresponds to what Moses predicted in *Deuteronomy*, chapters 26–31).
- c. Yahweh predicts a time of wonderful reversal where Israel will no longer bear the embarrassment and shame of being barren (that is, Israel will no longer be unable to produce members who love, honor, and obey God), but will have cause for joy and pride as she produces *many* members who love, honor, and obey God.
- (A) Israel will no longer remember the shame and embarrassment of earlier times, when she was barren—that is, when she failed to produce righteous sons.
- d. Like a husband who temporarily rejected his young bride because she displeased him, Yahweh has *temporarily* rejected Israel because Israel has displeased him. But Yahweh’s *chesed* is permanent. Out of his *chesed*, Yahweh will show compassion on Israel and will return to serve as her Protector and Benefactor.
- (A) Yahweh will make a promise to Israel akin to the promise he made to Noah—a promise to never again “reject” Israel in his wrath. Up until the time of his reconciliation with them [in our future], Yahweh will have done just that. (He will have temporarily rejected them in his wrath.) But once he reconciles with them [in our future], Yahweh will never again “reject” them in his wrath. (*Isaiah* 54:9–10)
- (1) Note that the holocaust and many other events of history—all of which come after the return of the Jews from exile in Babylon—are incompatible with the promise made here. Hence, what is predicted here cannot possibly be fulfilled by the Jews’ return from Babylon. Nor has it ever been fulfilled subsequent to the return from Babylon—up to the present time. It must, therefore, be that it will be fulfilled at some time yet in our future.
- e. The issue or concern that is being addressed by this prediction is this: God made a promise to Abraham that he would make his “seed” (Israel) a “great nation,” and that he would be their God, protect them, prosper them, and give them the upper hand over their enemies. Will this promise ever be kept?
- (A) Issues or concerns not being addressed:
- (1) I—Mr. Individual Israelite (in the time of Isaiah)—want to get back to the land of Israel and to have prosperity there. Is God going to make that happen?
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(2) I—Mr. Individual Israelite (in the time of Isaiah)—want to know what my future has in store for me so that I can make plans accordingly. Can I have that information?

2. *Isaiah* 54:11-17

- a. In that future time when “barren” Israel will become fruitful, Yahweh will do all of the following for the members of Israel in that day:
  - (A) He will make their fortifications secure. That is, he will protect them from their enemies.
  - (B) He will make them all to be “taught of Yahweh” (= taught to know Yahweh, or = taught true wisdom by Yahweh himself).
  - (C) He will make them all to abundantly prosper in material possessions.
  - (D) He will establish them in righteousness (= he will create a righteous society among them).
  - (E) He will protect them all from oppression and from every cause of terror.
  - (F) They will all be servants of Yahweh who are protected by Yahweh from any and all of their enemies.
    - (1) In that day, Yahweh will not bring any enemy against Israel to judge Israel.
      - (a) If an enemy does assail Israel, it will not have come in divine judgment against Israel.
      - (b) Hence, if an enemy does assail Israel, it will fail.
    - (2) There is no enemy of Israel who is not a creation of Yahweh and who is not completely under his determinative control.
- b. *Isaiah* 54 is answering this question: in light of Israel’s present unrighteousness and God’s impending judgment (that you *Isaiah* have been predicting), will God’s promise ever come to pass—his promise to make Israel “his people” and to make them a great nation” whom God will make to prosper?
- c. No period of history to date could possibly be a fulfillment of the promises made by God in this prophecy. Israel has never had the kind of security, protection, righteousness, (and greatness) that this prophecy promises.

3. *Isaiah* 59:1-21

a. *Isaiah* 59:1-15a

(A) *Isaiah* describes the state of the people of Israel (a state that has persisted throughout their generations). Unrighteousness prevails among them and that unrighteousness has created a chasm between Israel and their God, Yahweh. There are among them individuals who long for justice, truth, and light—they long for God

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to bring about justice and righteousness—but the character of the people as a whole is, and has always been, thoroughly unrighteous.

b. Isaiah 59:15b–19

(A) Isaiah describes what Yahweh, at some particular unspecified point, will choose to do in response to the state of affairs where Israel is characterized by unrighteousness: he will deliver some within Israel from the oppression caused by the unrighteousness that is in Israel, but he will come in judgment and wrath against the unrighteous individuals both within Israel and outside Israel.

(1) Presumably, the unrighteous Israelites will be destroyed at that time, but the righteous Israelites will be saved and will be set free from the injustice, unrighteousness, and oppression under which they had been suffering.

(2) Apparently, it will be a judgment not only of unrighteous Israel, but of all the Gentile enemies of God and Israel as well. It will be a swift and comprehensive judgment that brings destruction to all the enemies of God.

c. Isaiah 59:20–21

(A) Masoretic text:

(1) “One bringing redemption will come for Zion, even for those turning from rebellion in Jacob,” declares Yahweh. “As for me, this is my covenant with them.” “My Spirit that is upon you, and my utterances that I have put in your mouth, these shall not depart from your mouth, nor from the mouth of your descendants, nor from the mouth of your descendants’ descendants,” says Yahweh, “from now until the end of time.”

(B) Septuagint (LXX)

(1) “The Deliverer will come for the sake of Zion and he will take ungodliness away from Jacob. Indeed, this is my covenant with them,” says the Lord. “My Spirit that is upon you and the utterances that I gave into your mouth, they shall not leave your mouth, nor from the mouth of your descendants”—indeed the Lord says—“from now until the Age.”

(C) Greek of Paul’s citation of *Isaiah 59* in *Romans 11:26–27*

(1) “The Deliverer will come with regard to Zion [*ek* Zion, where Paul uses *ek* in a relatively unusual sense] and he will take ungodliness away from Jacob. Indeed, this is my covenant with them {when I take away their sins}.”

d. Reconstructing the meaning of the text of *Isaiah 59:20–21* from the Masoretic text, the LXX, and its citation by Paul in *Romans*, Isaiah is saying:

(A) One who redeems will come for the sake of Zion. He will reject and remove the ungodly individuals from Jacob (by destroying them). But he will redeem those

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individuals who have repented. This is the covenant that Yahweh will make with Israel (namely, that he will one day come and remove ungodliness from Israel).

(1) Then Yahweh goes on to say one of these two things:

(a) The Spirit that I have placed upon you (Isaiah)—and the words of my Torah that I have put in your mouth, from the day that I keep my covenant with Israel and remove ungodliness from them, those words of Torah will never depart from the mouths of the Israelites from that day forward until the end of that Age.

(b) The Spirit that I have placed upon you Isaiah—to be specific, the words of promise that I have put in your mouth—they will remain in the mouth of your descendants after you until the day comes—at the end of history—when I will fulfill this promise that I have given to you. {This latter reading seems to be the more straightforward of the two.}

e. Isaiah 59 presents the picture of an age to come in the future that God (presumably through the work of his Messiah, when the Messiah has returned as Israel's Redeemer) will inaugurate by judging unrighteous Israel, destroying the ungodly individuals among the Jews. (From other prophetic passages we know that, at the same time, God will pour out his Spirit on all the Jews who survive and are not destroyed such that every individual among them is sanctified.) The ensuing age, therefore, will be peopled by righteous Jews who establish a righteous society and culture. No longer (for many generations after) will there be any unrighteousness in Israel.

f. Isaiah 59 is answering this question: in light of Israel's present unrighteousness and God's impending judgment (that you Isaiah have predicted), will God's promise to make Israel "his people" ever come to pass?

g. No event in history to date could possibly be a fulfillment of the promise made by God in this prophecy. Israel has never experienced the kind of wholesale judgment, as well as the kind of complete liberation from evil and oppression, that this prophecy promises.

(A) Jesus's entrance into the world was not a fulfillment of this prophetic prediction. (And Paul, in *Romans* 11, is not saying otherwise.)

(1) The "redemption" that Jesus made possible by his death on the cross is not the "redemption" that is in view here in Isaiah 59.

(a) The redemption (freedom) that is in view here is this: the freedom from being oppressed by, victimized by, and restricted by the sin of ungodly men (whether fellow Jews who are ungodly or ungodly Gentiles).

#### 4. *Isaiah* 60:1-22

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- a. This would appear to be Yahweh addressing the people of Israel, personified as an individual, at some point in the future. Yahweh describes the status of the people of Israel in that future day.
- b. All of the following will describe the people of Israel in that day:
- (A) They will be an enlightened people who can share their light with all the other nations. They will have emerged as enlightened out of a world that was experiencing great darkness.
  - (B) All the surviving Jews will be gathered together to the land of Israel.
  - (C) The wealth and abundance of the world will flow to Israel.
  - (D) The temple in Jerusalem will function as a place for worshipping Yahweh.
  - (E) All the Gentile nations will be attracted to Israel and will be eager to supply what Israel needs in order to build the temple and the city and to worship Yahweh.
    - (1) Nations who do not "serve" Israel will be destroyed; nations who do "serve" Israel will be rewarded.
  - (F) A great reversal will take place—the sons of those who formerly despised Israel and held them in contempt will praise them, honor them, and serve them. The sons of those who were superordinate to Israel will now be subordinate to Israel.
  - (G) Israel will enjoy peace, security, and a lack of violence or destruction.
  - (H) Israel will have Yahweh for its light, no longer needing the sun and the moon for its light.
    - (1) ?? Israel will gain its knowledge of reality and its knowledge of how to be and what to do from Yahweh. No longer will it get such knowledge from its own experience, perception, and observations.
      - (a) No longer will the people of Israel "see" because the sun allows them to see. Now they will "see" because Yahweh makes it possible for them to see.
  - (I) Israel will never again have any reason to mourn.
  - (J) Israel will be righteous.
  - (K) Israel will possess the land for all time. Never again will they be dislodged off the land.
  - (L) The least among the people of Israel will be "great" in relation to the rest of the world.
- c. When is the day that is being predicted?
- (A) None of the characteristics under point b. above would accurately describe the state of Israel at any time between the time of Isaiah and the time of Jesus.

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- (B) None of the characteristics under point b. above would accurately describe the state of Israel at any time in and around the time of Jesus.
- (C) None of the characteristics under point b. above would accurately describe the state of Israel at any time between the time of Jesus and the present.
- (D) By process of elimination, Isaiah’s prediction must be predicting a time in the story of Israel that is yet to come (in our future)—a time at the end of history.
- d. Objections to above:
- (A) But Isaiah’s predictions are not literal predictions of a time in the life of Israel; they are predictions of the emergence of the Christian church.
- (1) But how would the emergence of the Christian church be at all meaningful to Isaiah’s audience? The issue for Isaiah’s audience that would need to be addressed is this: has God forsaken Israel, or will God fulfill the promises that he made to Israel?
- (a) If God addressed their question by saying, “I will raise up a man named Buddha who will start a new religion in the world,” that would not meaningfully address their concern. How would “I will raise up a man named Jesus who will start a new religion in the world,” address it any better?
- (2) To see any of the characteristics under point b. above as metaphorical descriptions of Christianity and its role is a real stretch. It takes a great deal of hand-waving and squinting to make such a claim.
- (B) But Isaiah’s prediction does not literally predict a time in the life of Israel; it predicts the emergence of the eternal Age.
- (1) But the emergence of the eternal Age, while a hopeful and positive prediction, would not be a prediction that is relevant to Isaiah’s audience. The issue for Isaiah’s audience that would need to be addressed is this: Has God forsaken Israel, or will God fulfill the promises that he made to Israel? The emergence of the eternal Age would address their concern only if the promise that they were looking forward to being fulfilled was the promise of eternal existence.
- (a) The promise that they would be a “great nation” does not really make sense as a symbol of the eternal Age.
- [A] In the eternal Age there will be no Israel-Gentile nations, how does it make sense to compare Israel to the Gentile nations when one is describing the eternal Age?
- [B] In general, the promises that God makes to Israel clearly describe history as we know it. How can predictions about the state of history as we know it be apt symbols of the state of the eternal Age—given that there are important qualitative differences between them?

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- (2) Compare to *John* 11:20-27. Being assured that there was a general resurrection coming did not comfort Martha. What she hoped for and wanted from Jesus was something else—namely, to have her brother back now.
- (3) Captivity in Babylon would not create a problem for the promise of everlasting life in the eternal Kingdom of God. But it clearly does create a problem for the promises God made to Abraham (and others) with regard to the prospering of Israel in the land.
- (C) But God intends for this to be a “type” of Christianity and the role the church.
- (1) It cannot be a type unless it first comes about as a historical reality in its own right.
- e. Will Jesus, the Messiah, be physically present when this event occurs?
- (A) No indication in *Isaiah* 60 one way or the other.
- (1) But note *Isaiah* 61.
- (a) Jesus identifies himself as “fulfilling” *Isaiah* 61. (See *Luke* 4:16-21) Jesus is the one that Yahweh has “anointed” (*massah*). Jesus is the Anointed One (the *messiah*).
- [A] He would not have to be physically present to fulfill this prediction. But, when one puts together everything that the Bible teaches, it would appear that Jesus’s being physical present to rule over Israel is, in fact, the expectation.
5. *The entire section from Isaiah* 61:1–66:24 most naturally reads as a prediction of the fulfillment of God’s promises to Israel (to make them a “great nation” etc.) at the end of this present created order, the end of history.

## Z. *Jeremiah* 30–31

1. *Jeremiah* 30:1-3
- a. A straightforward promise that God will restore Judah and Israel to the land, where—presumably—he will bless them with the blessings that he promised to them.
- (A) This is likely a prediction of the Kingdom of God in history at the end of this present created reality.
- (1) This has never, to date, been fulfilled. The Jews are in the land, but not in possession of and sovereign over all that has been promised to them.
2. *Jeremiah* 30:4-11, *Jeremiah* 30:23-31:1
- a. The prediction of a day coming that will be a time of great turmoil and distress for Israel. During that time, Yahweh will—on the one hand—partially destroy Israel as he punishes the wicked in Israel for their sin. But—on the other hand—God will completely destroy Israel’s enemies and rescue Israel from them. As a result, Israel will be



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set free from the domination of other nations. Israel will serve Yahweh and "David their king."

(A) This has never happened to date. It seems clearly to be an event that remains in our future.

(1) In view of other prophetic predictions in the Bible, this is referring to the "great and terrible day of the Lord," that will occur at the return of Jesus and immediately prior to the establishment of the reign of Christ in Israel.

3. *Jeremiah 31:2–9*

- a. Yahweh explains that it was his *hesed* (his "constancy," the trait that ensures that he will keep his promises and not be unfaithful to the commitments he has made) that led him to bring Israel out of Egypt and into the promised land. That same *hesed* will lead him to rebuild Israel, gathering all the Israelites who have been scattered back together into the land and making them prosper there. Captivity in Babylon will make it appear that all of God's promises will come to nothing. But that is not so. Because of God's *hesed*, he will once again work to fulfill every promise he has ever made to Israel.

4. *Jeremiah 31:10-14*

- a. Prediction that God will bring it about that the nations around Israel are the tail, and Israel is the head (*a la* Deuteronomy [see note at M.2 above]), and that Israel will prosper.

(A) This has never come to pass to date. It still remains in the future.

(B) It is a stretch to construe this as a prediction of eternal Life.

(1) It makes sense to promise Israel dominance over its enemies within this present created reality, for we know that they have enemies in the here and now. But what enemies would Israel have in the new created order, the eternal Age? Will not any enemy of Israel (and God) have been destroyed in God's judgment?

(2) Furthermore, in the new created order, the eternal Age, will there be a distinction between nations? And, even if there are, will some nations be righteous and some unrighteous? To be consistent with what the Bible suggests, it would seem that, in the eternal Age, evil and unrighteousness will no longer exist at all. And, it would seem that in the eternal Age, the distinction between Jew and Gentile will have ceased to have any meaning or significance. (Hence, *Galatians 3:28*.)

(a) For this reason, given the nature of such promises, any and every promise to Israel as a nation will have to be fulfilled in the context of this present created reality. Hence, these cannot be promises fulfilled in and by the eternal people of God (the "church") in eternity.

5. *Jeremiah 31:15-22*

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a. *Jeremiah 31:15*

(A) The vision here is of an imagined Rachel deeply grieving because the descendants of her children and grandchildren (Benjamin and Ephraim and Manasseh) are experiencing a judgment from God (in the form of the Babylonians taking them captive) which—from all appearances—would make it impossible for God’s promised blessings to ever be realized. In other words, Jeremiah’s vision is predicting a judgement of such a scope that there would seem to be no hope for the people of Israel ever realizing the blessings that God had promised Abraham.

(1) Objection: the tragedy being mourned is not the defeat of God’s promises; it is, rather, the defeat, destruction, and captivity itself.

(a) Answer to objection: but note that it is not a contemporary who is mourning the captivity, it is an ancestor, Rachel. The tragedy is not a tragedy merely for the contemporary generation (the generation that will suffer under the indignities of the captivity). It is a trans-generational tragedy. The seeming nullification of the promises made to the Jews is trans-generational in effect. But the tragedy of the captivity itself would not be trans-generational.

[A] Note that Matthew’s citation of this in *Matthew 2:18* does not make much sense if Matthew understands Jeremiah’s vision to predict the tragedy of the Babylonian captivity *per se*. In what sense would an entirely different tragedy (the murder of the tots in Bethlehem several generations later) “fulfill” what Jeremiah is predicting—if what Jeremiah is predicting is the practical sufferings of the Babylonian captivity *per se*? But, if Matthew understands Jeremiah’s vision to predict the tragedy of God’s promised blessings to Israel seeming to be defeated and nullified, and if the people of Bethlehem understood the significance of Herod’s murderous act to be *that the Messiah had been killed* (because they lacked the knowledge that the Messiah had escaped), then the murder of the infants and tots of Bethlehem could quite reasonably be understood to be an even fuller instance of what Jeremiah’s vision was predicting. In other words, it could aptly be said that Herod’s murderous act “fulfilled” the words of Jeremiah when he described Rachel crying for her children.

[1] Interestingly, Matthew does not, in his account, describe exactly what the people of Bethlehem experienced as a result of Herod’s murderous act. It would appear that Matthew uses the citation of *Jeremiah 31:15* to describe their experience for him. Presumably, in the wake of Herod’s slaughter of their young sons—with the express purpose of killing the newborn Messiah—the people of Bethlehem experienced a deep and grievous despair at the prospect of

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God’s plans, purposes, and promises being thwarted by Herod’s diabolical action.

[a] This is a rare citation from the Old Testament. It is not given after the gospel writer’s finished narrative of and commentary about the event. In this instance, it is actually a substitute for part of Matthew’s narrative of and/or commentary about the event.

(B) If the promise that God made to Abraham was that he would establish a “church” from all the different peoples of the earth, then how would the Babylonian captivity be a source of profound sorrow to Rachel? The Babylonian Captivity of Judah poses no threat to God’s promise to build a multi-ethnic “church.” So, if Jeremiah’s vision presents that Captivity as a threat to God’s promises to Israel (in all of its generations), then God’s promise cannot be that he will form a multi-ethnic church. It has to be that he will establish Israel as an ascendent political power on the land promised to Abraham.

(C) If the promise God made to Abraham was that he would establish a multi-ethnic Kingdom in the eternal Age to come, then exactly the same objection can be raised. How would the the Babylonian captivity pose any threat to the fulfillment of that promise?

(1) And, as we have seen, it does no good to propose that the sorrow being described is not over the seeming defeat of God’s promise but is over one generation’s hardship and humiliation at the hands of Babylon.

(a) This cannot explain why Rachel would be the one in deep sorrow.

(b) The hope described in *Jeremiah* 31:16-17—a hope never realized by any, but a very few, of the captives themselves—addresses the issue of God’s promises to Israel being thwarted, but it does not address the issue of God’s judgment involving hardship, defeat, and humiliation.

b. *Jeremiah* 31:16-17 [and see *Jeremiah* 31:23-26 and *Jeremiah* 31:27-30]

(A) The comfort offered here is fundamentally a declaration that, while having Israel removed from the land of God’s promise certainly looks like it creates an insurmountable obstacle to the realization of God’s promises to Israel, it does not in fact do that. God will see to it that Israel returns to the land of God’s promise such that it will once again be possible for all of the blessings he has promised to them to be realized. He will see to it that they prosper in the land when he restores them to the land, just as he promised (from Abraham onward).

c. *Jeremiah* 31:18–20

(A) God will have mercy on Israel (Ephraim), because he will create in it (in a believing remnant) the desire to repent and return to Yahweh.

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- (1) Note the divine determinism lying behind this claim. Why does any human being freely do what he chooses to do (whether repent or harden his heart)? Because God, the author of all reality, creates it to be so.

d. *Jeremiah 31:21–22*

- (A) This is an exhortation to Israel to make plans to return to the land, for God has every intention of doing a “new thing” in relation to Israel. He will bring them deliverance and salvation in the land. Hence, he exhorts wayward, unfaithful Israel to stop wandering and to return to hoping in what God has promised them.
- (B) “How long will you wander, O faithless daughter? For Yahweh has created salvation for a new beginning [planting]. In that salvation, men will travel about.”
- (1) It seems to me that the Septuagint (LXX) translation preserves a more accurate reading than the Masoretic text does here.
- (2) Not sure how best to translate this. The point seems to be to promise that God has a whole new beginning in store for Israel. They will be “saved” and, on the basis of that salvation, they will live out their lives in the context of the blessings that God had promised to Israel several millennia before.

6. *Jeremiah 31:31–34*

a. My translation of my reconstruction of the text:

- (A) “Behold, days are coming,” declares Yahweh, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be in accord with the covenant that I established with their fathers in the day of my taking them by their hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt such that they did not continue in my covenant and I neglected them,” says Yahweh. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” declares Yahweh. (31:31–33a)
- (B) “I will put my Torah within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, ‘Know Yahweh,’ for they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,” declares Yahweh, “for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.” (31:33b–34)

b. A common reading of this prophecy construes the “New Covenant” as the promise to pour out his Spirit. *This is a misreading of this prophecy.*

- (A) God does promise to pour out his Spirit here. But that promise is a separate and distinct promise from the “New Covenant” that Yahweh will make with the house of Israel and the house of Judah in “days that are coming,” and it is separate and distinct from any promises contained in the New Covenant.
- (1) According to Jesus, the New Covenant is centered in his crucifixion. (“this is the New Covenant in my blood”)

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(a) When all things are considered, the New Testament generally understands the New Covenant to be this: *if you believe in God’s Son Jesus, then Jesus—on the basis of his offering up his life on your behalf—will intercede for you and secure mercy and Life from God.*

[A] The distinction between the “old” and “new” covenants is this: According to the Old Covenant, one might understandably believe that the basis for God’s mercy is the animal that he has offered as a propitiatory offering, in accordance with the Mosaic covenant. According to the New Covenant, it is clear that the basis for God’s mercy is Jesus’s death and intercession. With the coming of Jesus, God has made clear that the one and only basis for God’s mercy is Jesus’s death and intercession. So, with the coming of Jesus, God has made a “new covenant.”

[1] The “New Covenant” isn’t so much a new *covenant* as it is a new and better understanding of God’s purposes and intentions in the Mosaic Covenant. From the standpoint of Israel it is “new,” for the Israelites initially had no understanding of the role of Jesus’s death and intercession. However, from the standpoint of God, it is not new at all. From God’s standpoint, it is the the basis for God’s mercy from before the foundation of the world. But in what he calls “the New Covenant,” the eternal basis for God’s mercy is clearly and explicitly spelled out.

[B] The “new covenant” that was inaugurated by Jesus when he came into the world is the “new covenant” that Jeremiah’s prophecy predicts. It is the “new covenant” that Jeremiah predicted God would make in “days that are coming.”

(2) The promise of the Spirit that is predicted by Jeremiah here is an explanation for why the “new covenant” was going to be *significantly different* from the “old covenant.”

(a) The “old covenant” was not accompanied by a commitment from God to create a willing and obedient heart inside the people of Israel.

(b) The “new covenant” will be accompanied by such a commitment from God. In connection with the “new covenant,” God is committed to creating a willing and obedient heart inside the people of Israel. Hence, the outcome of the new covenant is going to be quite different from the outcome of the old covenant.

[A] The people of Israel did not keep the “old” Mosaic Covenant and were cursed rather than blessed as a result. Because of the work of God’s Spirit in their lives, the people of Israel (the remnant at the end of this

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age) will keep the “new” Mosaic Covenant and therefore will be blessed rather than cursed.

- c. This prophecy speaks of a time when there will be a universal desire to keep God’s Torah and a universal knowledge of Yahweh among the people of Israel. Clearly, this time has not yet ever arrived in history. It is a prediction that remains to be fulfilled in the future.

(A) It appears to be a description of Israel in contradistinction to other nations and other peoples at the time. Hence, it must be fulfilled at some point during the present created order. It is not a description of eternity and everlasting existence.

(1) The prediction that God will be Israel’s God and Israel will be God’s people assumes a world of peoples and nations who do not have God as their God, and who are not the people of God.

7. *Jeremiah 31:35–37*

- a. Yahweh declares that it is a solid and unchangeable fact that God will not forsake Israel as his chosen nation (no matter what it might look like in the present circumstances). The order of the cosmos itself will be changed before God will change his commitment to Israel as a nation. Since that commitment involves promises that he has made to prosper them in various ways, God will as certainly bring prosperity to Israel in the future as he will sustain the order of the cosmos.

(A) In view of everything we have seen, God’s promises of blessing and prosperity will be fulfilled in an age at the end of history, at the end of this present created reality. Eternal existence is an entirely different thing and is not in view in prophetic predictions like this one.

8. *Jeremiah 31:38–40*

- a. This prediction is very detailed, very specific, and very tangible. It is not plausible to take it as a “symbol” of eternal life or of anything else. In order to serve as a symbol or metaphor, it would not need to be that detailed and specific.
- b. This is predicting a time (in our future) when Jerusalem will be rebuilt and will be notable for being—

(A) “holy to Yahweh” (even the parts that at the time of Isaiah’s prophecy are unclean)

(B) no longer vulnerable to being overthrown, being protected by Yahweh until the end of time

- c. Note: The phrase, “Behold days are coming,” introduces a prediction that has theological/spiritual significance, not practical significance.

(A) The prophecy is not concerned to tell the audience *when* the thing is going to happen. Its concern is to tell the audience THAT the thing is going to happen.

**AA. *Note these three significant prophecies in Jeremiah:***

1. *Jeremiah 33:1–26*
  - a. Note: the fulfillment of the promises to Israel and the promise to David are as certain and inevitable as the fixed laws of nature.
2. *Jeremiah 46:25–28*
  - a. Note: at the end, Yahweh intends to punish the people of Israel; but he will not totally destroy them (as he will their enemies who have oppressed them).
3. *Jeremiah 50:17–20*
  - a. Note: the people of Israel at the final stage of history (when God fulfills all his promises to them) will be without sin; they will be a wholly righteous people.

**AB. *Ezekiel 11:14–25***

1. This prophesy was made before Jerusalem had been destroyed.
2. Context similar to Jeremiah (except Ezekiel, a priest, is already in exile while Jeremiah was still in Judah).
  - a. The issue being addressed by every prophesy of the restoration of the people of Israel by Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel is this: has God forsaken his people, Israel, or will he fulfill the promises that he made to them.
3. The emphasis in this prediction that God will fulfill the promises he made to Israel is twofold:
  - a. when God brings the Jews back into the land that he has given to them, he will transform their inner being such that each and every one of them will have an inner desire to do the Covenant that God made with Israel (in the time of Moses) [See 11:17–21.]; but,
  - b. at the same time, God will utterly destroy those Jews who have never repented of their faithlessness and idolatry.
4. This passage is not talking about “Christians.” Christians are not made to “walk in Yahweh’s statutes and keep his ordinances and do them.” [11:19–20] This foresees a time in the future when the Jewish people are finally obedient to God’s covenant that he made with them in the time of Moses.

**AC. *Ezekiel 16:60–63***

1. Note: speaking of the latter days when God begins to fulfill his promises to the people of Israel, it will entail God’s forgiving Israel for all the sins that they have committed.
  - a. “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

**AD. *Ezekiel 20:33–44***

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1. Note: it is clear that in the day when God gathers his people back into the land, he will sort them out. He will destroy those who persist in rebellion and evil, he will forgive those who do not.
  2. Note: when God restores the fortunes of Israel, they will have repented of their evil, having come to a clear self-knowledge of that evil.
  3. Note the persistent theme: God will bring Israel back and bless them for his own name’s sake; not because of Israel’s righteousness.

AE. ***Ezekiel 28:25–26***

1. Note: it is in the land that Yahweh swore to give to their fathers that all the promised blessings will be given to the people of Israel.
2. Note the persistent theme: Yahweh will vindicate himself and his name when he restores Israel to the land and blesses them in keeping with what he promised them.

AF. ***Ezekiel 34:11–31***

1. Unlike the predictions of Isaiah and Jeremiah, this prophesy by Ezekiel occurs AFTER Jerusalem and the kingdom of Israel have been destroyed.
2. Note: Ezekiel too describes as part of the same set of events the “healing” of the “broken and sick” among the people of Israel alongside a judgment and destruction of the “fat and strong” among the people of Israel.
3. Note: in that day Yahweh will place “one shepherd” over his sheep (the people of Israel)—namely, “David” (=Jesus, the Messiah).
  - a. Yahweh will be “their God.” And David (Jesus) will be their Prince.
4. Finally, he promises security and safety, prosperity and abundance, a reversal of fortunes relative to their enemies (so that they are no longer in slavery to other nations)

AG. ***Ezekiel 36:1–39:29***

1. **36:1–21** > Due to God’s chastisement of his people, Israel, the mountains of Israel (the land of Israel) have been made the possession of the surrounding godless nations who are enemies of Israel. The people of Israel have brought dishonor to God, for they are not prospering in the land God gave them but, rather, are scattered among the nations. But God—***in order to restore honor to his name***—is going to create a great reversal. The surrounding godless nations will be made to feel the shame and degradation that God’s people Israel have heretofore been made to feel. And, at the same time, the “mountains of Israel” will be blessed with abundance and prosperity as they become the possession of God’s people Israel once again.
  - a. This cannot be fulfilled by Christians in the church. The “contest” between the surrounding godless nations who have possessed the mountains of Israel and the people of Israel has no counterpart in my life as a Christian. Israel’s being blessed is their en-



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emies defeat. My being blessed in Christ is NOT anyone's defeat; it is not at the expense of anyone.

2. **36:22–38** >

- a. God emphasizes that it is not for Israel's sake, but for his own name's sake, that he is going to restore Israel's fortunes.
- b. Note here the fact that, at the time God restores Israel's promised inheritance to them, God will renew them spiritually. He will pour out his Spirit upon them with the result that they will be made to "walk in God's statutes and ordinances."

(A) Note *John* 3:5–12 in the light of this passage.

- c. On the day that God renews the people of Israel spiritually, he will cause them to grow and prosper in the land.

(A) Because of this, the honor of God's name will be restored. All the nations will know that Israel's prosperity is due to Yahweh, their God.

3. **37:1–14** >

- a. The famous vision of the valley of dry bones.
- b. Yahweh's point in this vision is to send the following message: not even the death of an individual Israelite can cut him off from the blessings that God promised to Abraham and to his seed. When the time comes for God to fulfill the promises that he has made to Israel, Yahweh will bring the righteous individual up out of his grave so that he can experience the blessings that Yahweh will pour out on his chosen people Israel.

4. **37:15–28** >

- a. When Yahweh decides to fulfill his promises to Israel, he will reunite the two kingdoms of the Jews into ONE kingdom, he will "cleanse" them of their evil rebellion, he will place "David" (=Jesus) as king over them, he will cause them to keep his covenant, and they will live on the land until the end of time.

(A) Furthermore, he will plant them on land, he will multiply them there, and he will place his sanctuary [=temple] in their midst. He will be their God; and they will be his people. All the nations will know that God is Yahweh, who sanctifies Israel.

5. **38:1–39:29** >

- a. The prophecy predicts an attempt (by Gog) to come up against Israel to destroy it just as Yahweh—having gathered his people back into the land—is right on the threshold of fulfilling his promises to Israel. In that day, Yahweh will come against Gog and all his armies in wrath and will supernaturally destroy the armies of Gog. Gog will be utterly destroyed and the whole world will know that God is Yahweh.

(A) Note God's summary in *Ezekiel* 39:25–29.

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1. In this prophesy, Yahweh has Hosea engage in an acted out parable in order to describe for his audience what the future held for the northern kingdom, Israel. Israel is, and will continue to be, analogous to a woman who unfaithfully cheats on her rightful husband (Yahweh), playing the role of a harlot. But God is committed to playing the part of a faithful husband to Israel. Though Israel is unfaithful, Yahweh will nonetheless, in time, bring Israel back to himself. And in that day, Israel will be the people of God, and God will be Israel’s God.
    - a. This clearly has never happened in all of human history up to now. It is a prediction that has yet to come to pass and, therefore, must come to pass sometime in our future.
      - (A) It is not plausible to see this prediction as being fulfilled in and by “the church” (the group of individuals—Jew and Gentile—who belong to Jesus). There are a number of reasons for this, but the most important reason is this:
        - (1) The collection of individuals who make up the “church” is not a group that has a clear, discernible history and identity prior to their being formed into the “church.” Hence, they cannot meaningfully be described as being unfaithful to the one who is rightfully their God [=Yahweh, their husband]. Before they believed in Jesus, many of the members of the church had NO commitment to Yahweh of any kind. Neither did they have any sort of commitment from Yahweh. In no meaningful sense had Yahweh been a husband to whom they had been unfaithful. Rather, Yahweh had been a stranger whom they did not know at all. (At least that is the case for a significant portion of the “church.”)
          - (a) Hence, the acted out parable that Hosea engages in does not meaningfully reflect the history of the church.
          - (b) However—on the assumption that Israel will one day be restored to being the people of God—this parable would tell their story quite well. It is a very apt and meaningful analogy to their story.
  2. Is there an alternative way to understand what Hosea is doing in his prophecies?
    - a. My assumption is that God is describing what will, in fact, be the story of Israel, the Jews. I believe that such an assumption is what is most consistent with everything else that we find in the Bible and allows for the most coherent view of everything we find in the Bible.
    - b. However, is it possible that, through Hosea’s prophecies, God is not describing what will, in fact, happen? That, rather, God was describing how he, at that time, wanted the story of the Jews to go?
      - (A) And, if so, is it possible that the course of the story described by God through Hosea could get diverted—hijacked by various intervening events and purposes (by, e.g., Jesus, the church, etc.)? In other words, could God be induced by circumstances and intervening events to change his plans?

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- (1) To answer "yes" to these questions would require my believing that God is not the God that I think he is. For I do not believe that God lacks knowledge, that God changes his mind, that God misleads, nor that God lies.
- (a) To answer "yes" to these questions would entail a rejection of biblical authority. For God, in the Scriptures, has predicted a particular story. If God changes his mind such that the story changes, then the Bible was in error.
- c. Alternatively, is it possible that, in and through his prophecies, Hosea is giving us his take on what he would like to see God do with respect to Israel and that Jesus (or Paul) comes along and adopts Hosea's vision, adapting it to his own agenda?
- (A) This would entail that Hosea is not predicting objective reality as it will unfold. Rather, he is describing the reality that he would like to see unfold.
- (B) This would entail that Hosea is not giving us a divinely inspired prediction of what will, in fact, come to pass. He is simply laying out his wishes and desires.
- (C) This would suggest that reality does not fulfill divinely inspired predictions. Rather, Jesus (or Paul) establishes his own agenda and, as part of his agenda, he incorporates Hosea's wishes and desires into it, and works to bring his agenda to fruition.
- (D) This would assume that Jesus (or Paul) "invented" Christianity out of the materials given to him by the Judaism of his day.
- (1) In contrast, the explicit view of the Bible is that Jesus was the fulfillment of those purposes and promises of God that had been preserved in the Jewish Scriptures of Jesus's day and that both Jesus and Paul interpreted Jesus's work to be such.
- (E) To answer "yes" to this "alternative" would entail a total rejection of biblical inerrancy.
- (F) It does not matter that one claims divine inspiration for Jesus (or Paul) when he "invented" Christianity. If the "Christian faith" is in conflict with what the Torah actually predicts and describes, then it is not from God.

**AI. *Zechariah 13:7-14:21***

1. In 13:7-9 it is clear that the promise to the forefathers that Yahweh will be Israel's God and Israel will be God's people will only finally be fulfilled at some later point in history. At a time when two parts of the people have been destroyed and the third part has been "purified" by God.
- a. There will be a "scattering" of the Jews that occurs after the crucifixion of Jesus (the striking of the Shepherd). It is during that time that the process begins of judging two parts of Israel while the third portion of Israel is refined.
- (A) See *Matthew 26:31* / *Mark 14:27*

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(1) In these passages, Jesus predicts that his disciples will “fall away” in the evening ahead (that is, they will be caused to hesitate in their relationship to him, their confidence in him will be shaken). Why? Because God is about to “strike him down” (referring to his upcoming crucifixion). Jesus alludes to *Zechariah* 13:7 as a prediction of the crucifixion that is about to take place. However, his allusion to *Zechariah* 13:7 does not mean that he thinks that passage directly predicted how Jesus’s close disciples would respond to his death. As a matter of fact, *Zechariah* 13:7 does not directly predict that Jesus’s close disciples would be “scattered” by his death. (And that is not what Jesus intends to suggest.) Rather, it predicts the consequences of Jesus’s death on the people of Israel as a whole. Being liable to God’s wrath because of the Messiah’s death (and being left without a shepherd), the people of Israel will be scattered and lost. So, while Jesus’s close disciples will be temporarily shaken by his death (which is what Jesus predicts), the people of Israel as a whole will be thoroughly and irremediably (for most) “scattered” by it (which is what *Zechariah* predicts).

2. In 14:1-21, *Zechariah* describes a series of events where
- a. The Gentile nations gather together to come against Jerusalem to destroy it.
  - b. These Gentile attackers will capture, plunder, and ravish the city, sending half of it into exile.
  - c. At that point, Yahweh (probably in the form of, or possibly alongside of, Jesus the Messiah) will rescue the remnant of Jews in Israel whom he has purposed to save for himself by coming against the Gentile attackers and destroying them.
    - (A) The remnant will escape via a valley that is formed by an earthquake that occurs when Yahweh (Jesus) appears and sets his feet on the Mt. of Olives.
    - (B) Yahweh (Jesus) and all of his “sanctified ones” will wage battle against the Gentile attackers.
      - (1) In a variety of ways and through a variety of means, Yahweh will thoroughly destroy the Gentile attackers in the midst of and with the help of dramatic and spectacular astronomical and geological events.
    - (C) In the aftermath of that remarkable day, Jerusalem will have been raised up higher than the surrounding plain (which the rest of the land of Israel has become as a result of the earthquake) and a spring of water will emerge from underneath Jerusalem (the temple) that perpetually feeds a stream running eastward and another stream running westward from Jerusalem.
    - (D) From that remarkable day forth,
      - (1) Yahweh will be king over all the earth; he and only he will be acknowledged as God;

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- (2) The Jews will live securely in Jerusalem;
  - (3) The wealth of the nations will be gathered into Jerusalem;
  - (4) All the Gentile nations—on pain of having the rain withheld from them— will come up to Jerusalem to celebrate Succoth (the Feast of Booths);
  - (5) Every aspect of Jewish society, even the most mundane aspect, will be “holy” (sanctified) to Yahweh [in other words, Jewish society will be a thoroughly and completely righteous and believing society]; and
  - (6) There will no longer be any unbeliever who enters the temple to Yahweh.
3. There are a few things worth noting about this passage:
    - a. This is not the only passage that describes this dramatic and remarkable episode in history. The prediction of a “day” when many of these events and realities will come about is a common refrain in various prophets.
      - (A) There are certain details that are unique to this prophecy. But the main outline of this prophecy can also be found in other prophecies.
    - b. The events predicted here clearly have never occurred in history to date and—if they are ever to occur at all—they remain to occur yet in our future.
      - (A) The reading of prophecy that sees all these prophecies as fulfilled by the church must try to see the “events” predicted here as some sort of parable of spiritual things. (That is, these are not events that are going to occur. Rather, they constitute a parable that reflects what is going to occur.) To make this reading of Zechariah work, the interpreter must be very selective in his focus. It may be possible to see one element or another of the described events as analogous to some spiritual reality within Christianity, but one must pass over, ignore, and neglect so many other elements of the prophecy. This prophetic prediction here in Zechariah cannot reasonably be seen—in detail and in whole—to be a parable of the spiritual triumph of the gospel.
        - (1) E.g., if this is a parable, why are the landmarks of the city of Jerusalem included? What possible purpose would those specific landmarks serve?
      - (B) To see this prophecy as some sort of parable will be attractive to anyone who finds the literal description of this event to be fantastical.
        - (1) But why would I find the literal description to be fantastical? For example, if I believe that Noah’s flood occurred, there can be little difficulty believing that a literal fulfillment of this prophecy could occur.

AJ. ***Malachi 2:17–4:6***

1. *Malachi 2:17*

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- a. The "live issue" that is being addressed by the prophecy that follows is this: Why is Yahweh blessing evil people rather than righteous people? I thought he was a God of justice? When is he going to show himself to be a God of justice?
- (A) The following prophetic prediction answers this question. The day will come when God is going to vindicate his name and bring about justice. On that day, the righteous will be rewarded and the evil will be condemned.
2. *Malachi* 3:1–6
- a. *Malachi* 3:1 > Yahweh (the *angelos* [translated "messenger"] of the covenant) is coming to be present in his temple once again. Before he comes, he will send his messenger [*angelos*] to prepare the way.
- (A) Note the confusing ambiguity of the word *angelos* [translated, "messenger"] in this verse. The first use of *angelos* denotes a human messenger who is coming to "prepare" the way before Yahweh. The second use of *angelos* denotes a theophany of Yahweh that will appear in the temple. This *angelos* is called the "*angelos* of the covenant."
- (B) The human messenger = the same Elijah that is mentioned in *Malachi* 4:5.
- (C) Yahweh's coming could possibly be in the form of Jesus, his Son, when Jesus returns to rule over Israel. But, more likely, it will be in the form of the *angelos* of Yahweh who manifests himself physically in the temple once again (as it did in the time of Moses, when Yahweh led Israel during the exodus).
- (1) Most likely, the coming of Yahweh is both of these at the same time. But, the aspect of Yahweh's coming that is in view here in this verse seems to be the appearance of the *angelos* of Yahweh in the temple.
- (a) In any event, this coming of Yahweh will occur on the occasion of Jesus's return into history.
- b. *Malachi* 3:2-5 > this coming of Yahweh will be a time when he purifies the nation of Israel. The unrighteous will be eliminated; only the righteous will remain. Hence, because Israel will have been made clean through the events of this day that is coming, their worship will once again be acceptable to God.
- c. *Malachi* 3:6 > the reason God will spare Jacob (Israel) from complete and utter destruction on the day that he returns in judgment is due to his constancy (his *hesed*). God made promises to Israel and he will absolutely be faithful to keep those promises.
3. *Malachi* 3:7–12 > even at the end of history, Yahweh is still wanting and demanding that Israel keep the Torah that he imparted to them in the time of Moses.
- a. If and when the people of Israel "return" to Yahweh and keep his Torah (most notably the "tithe"), Yahweh will bless them in accordance with the promises contained in the Mosaic Covenant. They will become a prosperous nation.

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4. *Malachi* 3:13–15 > this is a return to the sentiment expressed in 2:17.
  5. *Malachi* 3:16–4:3 > a day is coming that will have a two-fold significance. For those who are righteous in Israel, it will be a day of freedom, healing, and joy. For those who are unrighteous in Israel, it will be a day of wrath and complete destruction, a day of judgment. It will be the “great and terrible day of Yahweh.”
  6. *Malachi* 4:4–6 > God will send Elijah to prepare the way before this great and terrible day of Yahweh
    - a. The reason Yahweh will not destroy the land is because, in that day, Elijah will restore the hearts of the children of Israel to that state of belief and obedience that existed in their fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
    - b. In view of the coming great and terrible day of Yahweh, the Jews must remember the covenant that God made with them at Sinai.
  7. These prophetic predictions by Malachi are predicting events at the end of this present age of history. These are events that immediately precede the return of Jesus. None of these predictions pertain to Jesus’s first emergence into history. They all refer to his return.
    - a. None of these predictions have come to pass in history up to now.
      - (A) John the Baptist was not the Elijah predicted here in *Malachi* 4:5.
        - (1) *John* 1:21; 1:25
          - (a) When asked point blank whether he was Elijah, John the Baptist answers “No, I am not.”

[A] Presumably, the questioners were asking John the Baptist if he was the Elijah predicted by Malachi.

[1] The Elijah predicted by Malachi could be one and the same individual as the prophet who prophesied to Israel, or he could be some other individual who is simply reminiscent of that prophet. We won’t know which until he comes.
        - (2) *Matthew* 11:14
          - (a) It is true that Jesus does say that John the Baptist is Elijah, “if you are willing to receive it.” But, here, Jesus is suggesting that the role of John the Baptist has the same import as the role of the Elijah in *Malachi* 4:5 (namely, that his presence precedes and prepares the way for the arrival of God’s *messiah*). However, he does not mean to suggest that John the Baptist is the same individual that *Malachi* 4:5 was predicting.

[A] John the Baptist heralded the arrival of Jesus, the Messiah, on Jesus’s *first* entrance into history. Another individual (identified as “Elijah” in *Malachi* 4:5 ) will herald the arrival of Jesus, the Messiah, on his *sec-*

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**and** entrance into history. It is the Messiah’s second entrance into history, not his first entrance into history, that is in view in Malachi’s prophecy here.

(b) This, I think, is why Jesus says, “John is Elijah, *if you are willing to receive it.*” That is, if you are willing to think about it analogically rather than literally, then John the Baptist is, in a sense, the Elijah predicted by Malachi. But if you insist on thinking about it literally, then John the Baptist is NOT the Elijah predicted by Malachi.

(3) *Matthew 17:10–12; Mark 9:9–13*

(a) This is the same point that Jesus made in *Matthew 11:14*. Analogically speaking, Elijah has indeed already come. (That is, John the Baptist came to prepare the way for Jesus the Messiah.) And the people of Israel killed him. They are going to do the same thing to the Messiah.

(4) *Luke 1:17*

(a) John the Baptist played an analogous role to the Elijah mentioned in *Malachi*, but he was not the same individual that was being predicted there. That is why John the Baptist is described as coming in “the spirit and power” of Elijah rather than being described as actually being Elijah himself.

#### AK. *Joel* (the whole book)

1. For an excellent exposition of the book of Joel, see “The Prophecy of Joel: With Help From Jeremiah 23 and Acts” by Earle Craig. You can access this paper by going to <https://biblicalphilosophers.com/earle-old-testament> where you can find it under “Other Old Testament Prophets” and download it. Or, simply [click here to go to the section of the Biblical Philosophers’ website](#) where you can find Earle’s paper listed under “Other Old Testament Prophets” and download it.

2. *Joel 2:28-3:3*

a. In the context of Joel’s prophesy about a coming day—the “great and awesome day of Yahweh”—where an army will come against the land of Israel as divine judgment for their unrighteousness, this prophesy is clearly about the land of Israel and the Jews.

(A) “It will come about after this” refers to coming about after the suffering and destruction brought against the land and the people by God’s judgment on the great and awesome day of Yahweh.

(B) Yahweh will pour out his Spirit on “all flesh.” (Not, “all mankind.”) This refers to God’s pouring out his Spirit on every Jew in Israel who has not been destroyed by the invading army coming against Israel in judgment.

(1) The result will be divine enlightenment of all the surviving Jews. By the Spirit of God, they will see, know, and understand. They will—one way or another—



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er—be taught by the Spirit of God. No longer will they dwell in ignorance. The whole society, from least to greatest, will be made wise with a wisdom inspired by the Spirit of God.

- (C) Joel predicts various dramatic “signs” in the sky and on the earth to presage the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord.
  - (D) All of these Jews who are enlightened by the Spirit of God will call on the name of Yahweh and will be saved from being destroyed by the invading army that God has brought against Israel. They will be saved by responding to God’s instruction to escape to Mount Zion and Jerusalem.
  - b. This prophecy does not pertain to the sanctifying work of the Spirit of God on everyone who comes to believe in Jesus. Rather, it pertains to a specific group of sanctified Jews who will experience God’s sanctifying work at the very end of this age at about the time of Jesus’s return.
    - (A) Peter’s point in *Acts* 2:17–21 is not that the events on that day of Pentecost in the early first century were predicted by Joel. Rather, his point is that the dramatic effects that the people were seeing occur right before their eyes were the result of the Spirit of God at work. Specifically, they were the result of the work of the same Spirit of God that the prophet Joel predicted would produce even more dramatic effects among the people of Israel at the time of the great and awesome day of Yahweh.
- AL. There are several other passages within the prophets that corroborate the understanding that I have outlined above with regard to God’s promises to the people of Israel and his purposes for them.
1. *Jeremiah* 23:1–8, 30:18–31:1.
  2. *Zechariah* 2:1–13, 3:8–10, 8:1–23, 9:1–10:12, 12:1–13:6.
  3. *Amos* 9:9–15.
  4. *Obadiah* 15–21.
  5. *Micah* 4:1–5:15, 7:7–20.
  6. *Zephaniah* 3:8–20.
  7. *Haggai* 2:1–9.

AM. ***The New Testament in General***

1. Not infrequently, critics of the interpretation of what I am calling the second promise to Abraham (that God will make him a great nation)—that is, critics of the view that I am expounding in these notes (or critics of the idea that Israel remains to become a great nation at the end of history)—will suggest that the New Testament authors *never speak of it*. Hence, they argue, if the New Testament authors do not teach it, it cannot be the truth from God.

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- a. It may be true to say that (excluding the book of *Revelation*) no N.T. author ever explicitly lays out a view of history wherein God finally establishes an earthly, historical kingdom where Jesus—being physically present as the king of Israel—rules over all the nations. Yet it is nonetheless **false** to say that the N.T. authors never speak of such a kingdom, nor teach such a thing.
  - b. With regard to the perspective that Jesus will one day return into history and will rule (literally, bodily, and personally present) as the king of Israel over all the nations of the earth—it is true that the N.T. authors are more inclined to **tacitly assume** this perspective than to explicitly articulate it. However, while they never really articulate it explicitly, it is most certainly the case that it is precisely this perspective that is believed and assumed by the N.T. authors.
2. In the notes that follow, we will consider a few of the more important places in the N.T. where it becomes clear that the perspective I have been articulating in these notes is tacitly assumed by the New Testament authors.
- AN. The entire ministry of Jesus is characterized in the gospels as proclaiming that the “Kingdom of God (Kingdom of Heaven) is at hand,” and as instructing the crowds with respect to what qualifies an individual to enter into and experience the “Kingdom of God.”
1. For example: *Matthew* 3:2 [John the Baptist], 4:17, 4:23, 5:3–10 {Beatitudes}, 6:9–13 {Lord’s Prayer}, 9:35, 10:7 [Jesus’s disciples]; *Mark* 1:15; *Luke* 4:43, 8:1, 9:2 [Jesus’s disciples], 9:11, 9:60.
  2. So, if we were to conclude that the Kingdom of God of which Jesus (and his disciples and John the Baptist) spoke was the reign of the Messiah over the Jewish people in the land of Israel in fulfillment of promises made to David and to Abraham, then the promise to Abraham that God would make him a great nation (in the sense in which we have been exploring it in these notes) is assumed **everywhere** in the gospel accounts. It is the primary focus of the gospel that Jesus proclaims. Likewise, it is the primary focus of the gospel that John the Baptist and Jesus’s disciples proclaim.
    - a. It is very puzzling that the “gospel” proclaimed by Jesus, his disciples, and John the Baptist is described as “the gospel of the kingdom.” [See *Matt.* 4:23, *Matt.* 9:35, *Luke* 16:16] It is not described as the gospel of our salvation, or the gospel of God’s forgiveness, or the gospel of eternal life. (Later, Paul can and will describe the gospel he proclaims along just such lines. But that is not how the “gospel” that Jesus proclaimed is described.)
      - (A) The question is this: what was the content of Jesus’s proclamation such that it gets described as the “gospel of the kingdom”?
        - (1) On the heels of all the O.T. prophets, the most likely meaning that would occur to Jesus’s audience is the good news that God has come to bring into existence the kingdom that he had promised. Namely, the kingdom where God’s

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Messiah rules as king over a righteous Israel who will reign supreme in all the earth.

- (2) The only description of the content of Jesus’s teaching that we ever see is this: “*The kingdom of God is at hand.*”
- (a) If we understand Jesus to be saying that the beginning of God’s work to bring about the existence of his promised Kingdom is now upon you (is “at hand”)—that is, that God has begun to fulfill his promise of a Kingdom by bringing the King of that kingdom into being and placing him within history—then the content of Jesus’s teaching is exactly as we would have expected on the heels of all that the prophets said. Namely, Jesus is announcing the “nearness” of the fulfillment of God’s promises to Abraham, David, and Israel that he would make them a great nation by establishing them as a kingdom over which his chosen Messiah would reign as king. And how is it “near”? The obstacle of there being no king to rule in that kingdom has been removed.
- (3) There is only one way that one could maintain that the gospel of the Kingdom (that Jesus proclaimed) is one and the same as the gospel of eternal life—nothing more and nothing less. One would have to completely misconstrue what the N.T. means by the “Kingdom of God.”
- (a) One would have to fallaciously take the “Kingdom of God” to be a metaphor for eternal life (or, more often, “heaven”).
- [A] To interpret Kingdom of God as “heaven” is to misconstrue what the N.T. means by the “Kingdom of Heaven.”
- [1] The “Kingdom of Heaven” is synonymous with the “Kingdom of God.” “Heaven” is being used as a pious, indirect way to refer to God. (It is a way to speak of God without naming his name.)
- (b) It is surely a stretch to take the content of the gospel that Paul proclaims and see the “Kingdom of God” as an apt metaphor for the blessing of *dikaiosisune* leading to eternal life upon which Paul focuses. One is being tendentious to think that it makes sense to capture the blessing of eternal life in all its complexity as “the Kingdom of God.”
- [A] Note that in e.g. *Luke 9:2*, Jesus instructs his disciples (some of whom have only just a short while before heard Jesus proclaiming the Kingdom of God) to go out and proclaim the kingdom of God and perform healing. If “proclaiming the kingdom of God” is equivalent to teaching the content of Paul’s gospel, how could these individuals possibly be equipped to do that? Surely they have no mastery of Paul’s theology. However, perhaps these individuals whom he is sending out have understood Jesus’s message to be this—You know how God promised to bring a Kingdom into existence with God’s Messiah reigning as King?

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Well, he has begun to bring that promise about; it is at hand. If that is the message they heard Jesus proclaim, then they are fully capable of going out and proclaiming that same thing in their own right.

[B] While it is true that the believer is destined to live in an everlasting age where Jesus reigns as King forever, this is never Paul's emphasis. His emphasis is that God's salvation is a rescue from death and destruction into an existence that is everlasting. What makes his gospel "good news" is the fact that I will live and not die, not that God's purpose to bring about an everlasting Kingdom will come to pass. It wouldn't be "good news" if I did not go to be there.

[1] In contrast to this, the "gospel of the kingdom" is precisely the good news that God's purpose (and promise) of a historical kingdom within history where all of his promises to the Jewish people will be realized is in fact going to come to pass. This is good news whether I participate in it or not.

[a] As a matter of fact, the Jesus-believer will witness it and participate in it, but its being "good news" is not strictly dependent upon that fact.

b. The only way someone can maintain that the New Testament does not speak of any future role for Israel (in the way that I have defined that in these notes) is by reinterpreting what the Kingdom of God is. One would have to deny that it has any continuity with all that the prophets had promised and with all that the Jewish people expected. But this is fallacious. It is a very common fallacy. But it is nevertheless a fallacy.

(A) In view of all that the prophets promised and all that the Jewish people of Jesus's day expected, the burden of proof is on the interpreter who would deny that Jesus's reference to the Kingdom of God is a reference to the establishment of an earthly, historical kingdom where the Messiah will reign as king.

AO. Objection: *John 18:36*

1. "My Kingdom is not of this world."

2. Objection: Isn't Jesus, in this interchange, suggesting that the Kingdom of God is a spiritual and "heavenly" reality, and not an outward, observable, material reality?

3. Answer to objection:

a. Pilate's interrogation of Jesus is focused on whether or not Jesus's claim to be a king is any threat to Roman rule. Is Jesus a rival to Pilate's boss Caesar? Does Jesus intend to establish a political reality to rival the political reality of the Roman empire? It is precisely this question that Jesus answers in his response to Pilate.

(A) Jesus's response should be translated something along the lines of "My kingdom is not of this order. If my kingdom were of this order, my assistants would be re-

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sisting so that I would not be delivered over to the Jews. But now my kingdom is not from here.”

- (1) By “from here” Jesus means from out of the normal processes of history. In other words, it will not come into existence and maintain its existence through war, struggle, and military action. Therefore, your boss Caesar has nothing to worry about. It is not God’s purposes for me to take up arms against Caesar.
- (2) However, note that Jesus is telling Pilate that this is true of his kingdom *now*. His kingdom will not arise out of military action *now*. However, when the time does come for Jesus to bring the Kingdom of God into actuality, he will do it through military action. According to the prophets, Jesus and his “hosts” will destroy the invading armies who are invading the land of Israel. It is after a dramatic victory over the Gentile enemies of God who are coming up against Israel that Jesus will take up his rule over Israel and establish the Kingdom of God.
  - (a) Consistent with what Jesus is telling Pilate, however, this kingdom that he is destined to establish through military victory will arise at the end of this present age, long after Caesar is gone. Hence, Jesus tells Pilate rightly that Caesar has nothing to worry about. Jesus has no intention to rival the might and authority of Caesar. That is not God’s purpose for him. For Jesus’s kingdom is not a part of Pilate’s place in history.

[A] Pilate only partly understands what Jesus is saying to him here. On the one hand, he does seem to understand that Jesus is saying that he poses no threat to Caesar. On the other hand, he seems to understand Jesus to be a dreamy philosopher who is thinking of himself as some sort of metaphorical king over a metaphorical kingdom. He likely has no reason to know that Jesus is predicting a literal kingdom at the end of this present age.

- (b) To absolutize Jesus statement into a statement about the heavenly, spiritual, and invisible nature of his kingdom (thereby denying that it will ever have a visible, physical manifestation in history) is to completely misunderstand what Jesus is saying to Pilate.

AP. Objection: *Luke 17:21–22*

1. “Now having been questioned by the Pharisees as to when the kingdom of God was coming, He answered them and said, “The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, ‘Look, here *it is!*’ or, ‘There *it is!*’ For behold, the kingdom of God is within you (in your midst).”
2. Objection: isn’t Jesus, in this interchange, denying that the Kingdom of God is an outward observable kingdom? Isn’t he saying that it is an inner, subjective reality in the heart of the Jesus-believer?

3. Answer to objection:

a. The Pharisees' question has undoubtedly been triggered by Jesus's repeated claim that "the Kingdom of God is at hand." In the face of that claim, the Pharisees' question is, "Okay, so when is it [the Kingdom of God] going to come?" In order for Jesus not to be talking past them, Jesus's answer here must correspond in meaning to what he has meant when he has said that the "Kingdom of God is at hand." Hence, Jesus is explaining when the Kingdom of God will come, in the same sense of "coming" as what he has meant when he says "the Kingdom of God is at hand."

(A) When Jesus has said that the Kingdom of God is at hand, he has meant nothing more, and nothing less, than that the One who will reign over Israel (and the world) as King in the promised Kingdom of God in the land of Israel has now entered into history. The King of the Kingdom of God—namely, Jesus himself—is now on the scene. Hence, God's purpose to establish the Kingdom of God, just as he promised, has started. It is now "at hand."

(B) So, in responding to the Pharisees, Jesus's response is to identify the very beginning of the process of God's Kingdom being established. That is, it is to identify the point at which the future King of the coming Kingdom of God enters history. So, when is that? It is right now. The Kingdom is now "in your midst." The beginning of the Kingdom of God, unheralded and inconspicuous as it is, has already come! For I, Jesus, am the beginning of the Kingdom of God.

(C) Therefore, in answer to the stated objection, Jesus is not saying here that the promised Kingdom of God is not an outwardly observable kingdom. An outward observable kingdom is precisely what the promised Kingdom of God will be. But the promised Kingdom of God is small, inconspicuous, and unobservable in its earliest beginnings. From its small beginnings it will eventually become the substantial kingdom that amounts to everything that the Pharisees are expecting. But in its earliest beginnings, one will not even notice that it has begun, and hence arrived.

(1) Note Jesus's parable comparing the Kingdom of God to a mustard seed planted in a garden.

4. Note: Jesus's description of the coming of the Kingdom does not apply to his return to take up his active rule in Israel at the end of this present age. He explicitly says that his return at the end of the age will be accompanied by signs, and that it will be observable (indeed, blatantly obvious). So, that is not what he is talking about when he responds to the Pharisees here.

a. It is critical that we make a distinction between the inconspicuous beginnings of the Kingdom of God and the completely conspicuous fruition of the Kingdom of God. In these verses, Jesus is talking about the Kingdom's inconspicuous beginnings. Elsewhere, he speaks of the Kingdom's completely conspicuous fruition at his return.

AQ. *Luke 1:46-55; 1:67-79*

1. *Luke 1:54-55*

- a. "He gives help to Israel his servant, in remembrance of his mercy [*hesed*], just as he said to our fathers, to Abraham and his descendants forever." = "He gives help to Israel his servant, in remembrance of his *hesed*, in keeping with what he promised to our fathers, to Abraham and his descendants until the end of the Age."
- b. While it is not definitive, it is highly probable that what Mary intends by the "help in keeping with what he told [promised to] our fathers, to Abraham and his descendants until the end of the Age" is God's moving to fulfill his promise to make Abraham and his descendants into a great nation in the land that God promised to the forefathers.

(A) If that is right, then Mary understands Jesus's birth as the birth of the King of Israel who will reign over the people of Israel in the kingdom of God that will emerge in history. Jesus's role as the source of eternal Life is not likely a part of what Mary has in view here.

- (1) The Jews at the time Jesus entered history did not have a view that the Messiah, when he came, would be a person with authority to determine who got the blessing of Life and who was instead condemned to death.

2. *Luke 1:68-71*

- a. The redemption and salvation that Zacharias has in view here is "freedom" [redemption] from being oppressed by their Gentile enemies and "rescue" [salvation] from their subjugation to Gentile nations. This is what the Messiah will do when he arrives. He will establish the Kingdom of God in the land of Israel. When he does that, fortunes will be reversed. Israel will rule over the Gentiles. No longer will the Gentiles rule over the people Israel.

3. *Luke 1:72-75*

- a. To show "mercy" to our fathers is to show *hesed* to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant.

(A) His "holy covenant" is the promise to Abraham that he would make him a great nation (when God sent his Messiah to establish the Kingdom of God in the land of Israel).

  - (1) Note that Zacharias describes the covenant as that which God swore to Abraham our father (not that which God promised to David).
  - (2) Note that Zacharias describes the covenant sworn to Abraham as one where "we, being rescued from the hand of our enemies, might serve him [God] without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all our days."

4. *Luke 1:76-79*

- a. Zacharias describes the role and ministry of his son, John the Baptist:
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(A) John will prepare the way for the coming Messiah by proclaiming the truth that God—through his Messiah—has entered history to bring “salvation.” What is that “salvation”? It is rescue from their downtrodden state of being oppressed by their enemies.

(1) This “salvation” will come because God, out of his compassionate *hesed*, will forgive the people of Israel for their sins.

(2) The compassionate *hesed* of God will enter history to act when the Messiah (the Sunrise from on high) enters history to dwell among us (“visit” us) in order to enlighten us, who live in darkness and the doom of death, and to guide us into an understanding of how to attain *shalom*.

(a) The Messiah (and John preceding him) will teach the need for repentance as the prerequisite for the “salvation” that the Messiah will bring. He will teach the people that repentance is the prerequisite for God’s forgiveness and *shalom*.

**AR. *Matthew 11:11-15; Luke 16:16-17***

1. *Matthew 11:12* [NASV] > “From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence {βιάζεται}, and violent men {βιασταί} take it by force.”

a. I reject the typical reading of this verse by our English translations.

b. My translation: “*From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven is being urged and those who are urged are grabbing it.*”

2. *Luke 16:16* [NASV] > “The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John; since that time the gospel of the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is forcing his way {βιάζεται} into it.”

a. I reject the typical reading of this verse by our English translations.

b. My translation: “*The Law and the Prophets persisted until John; since that time the good news of the kingdom of God is announced, and everyone is being urged into it.*”

3. In both of these passages, the “kingdom” that is being proclaimed by John the Baptist is none other than the kingdom that the Messiah will establish in the land of Israel to fulfill the promise made to Abraham and his offspring that God would make them a great nation.

**AS. *Matthew 25:31***

1. Because this is a well-known passage used to promote the idea that the Jesus-follower is required to care for people’s physical well-being, we immediately focus on that and fail to notice the particular details that provide clues to Jesus’s actual meaning.

a. Note that this judgment of the “nations” is a judgment of individuals, not a judgment of nations as a whole. (Individuals are given either *aionic* life or *aionic* punishment.)



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- (A) The word "nations" here is not used to specify "Gentiles." Here the word "nations" denotes the various people groups within history. It includes both Jews and Gentiles. Jesus will judge individuals from every people group on earth.
- b. Note that this teaching is parabolic in nature. It employs simile. The division of individuals is likened to a shepherd dividing sheep from goats. However, the judgment being described appears to be an actual judgment that will take place.
- (A) Like most descriptions of judgment in the Bible, there is no reason to think that it is a literal description of that judgment. There is no reason to think that the actual judgment is going to take place exactly as described here.
- c. This is a judgment that is going to occur in conjunction with Jesus's coming back into history to reign on his glorious throne.
- d. Note that the basis of judgment is not whether one gave care to one's fellow human being. The basis of judgment is whether one gave care to the "brother" of Jesus (which seems to be a distinct sub-class of human beings).
- (A) It seems likely here that the "brother" of Jesus is not a fellow-Jew; rather, the "brother" of Jesus is the individual (Jew or Gentile) who identifies himself with Jesus and with all that Jesus represents.
2. Jesus's statement here is that there will be a time when Jesus returns back into history (coming into "his glory" with all the angels with him) in order to establish his reign over the people of Israel ("sit on his glorious throne").
- a. As part of his reign (at an unspecified time), he will proceed to judge "the nations" (Jews as well as Gentiles). [See 25:32–46]
- (A) His judgment will be based on their attitude toward the "brothers" of Jesus. In other words, it will be based on their attitude toward Jesus himself, because one who loves Jesus will love those who love him, and one who hates Jesus will hate those who love him.
3. This primary purpose of Jesus's teaching here does not seem to be to inform his audience of eschatology. He is not offering a literal account of the coming judgment.
- a. Rather, the primary purpose of Jesus's teaching seems to be to offer a general teaching about what qualifies a person for eternal life at the judgment (whatever it is and whenever it comes).
- (A) The qualification for eternal life is not that one has offered care for one's fellow human being.
- (B) The qualification for eternal life is that one has loved Jesus, God's Messiah, as evidenced by the fact that one has loved those individuals who have identified themselves with Jesus.
4. It is my assessment that the judgment being described here is one and the same with the judgment that will occur in direct connection with the return of Christ. Those who are to
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be “saved” and given immortality will, upon Jesus’s return, rise up, meet Jesus in the air, and be instantaneously transformed into immortal beings. (That corresponds to the “sheep” who are given eternal life here in this passage.) Others who are not destined for eternal life—but to punishment instead—are not instantaneously transformed into immortal beings at the return of Jesus. (They correspond to the “goats” who are given *aionic* punishment here in this passage.)

- a. Note the following passages: *John* 5:19–30; *1 Corinthians* 15:50–57; *1 Thessalonians* 4:13–18.
- b. The distinctive feature in this passage is that it identifies a criterion that will be used when individuals are judged at the return of Jesus: namely, only those who love Jesus will be given eternal life.

(A) Hence, the purpose of this parabolic teaching is to emphasize the importance of being rightly related to Jesus as well as to emphasize the importance of loving those who belong to Jesus.

**AT. *Luke 22:30***

1. If Jesus does not believe that he will return into history to rule over the people of Israel and that he will enlist the help of his followers to aid him in that rule, then I find it impossible to make sense of Jesus’s statement here.
  - a. To “judge” the twelve tribes of Israel is to “rule over” the twelve tribes of Israel. That is, to “judge” in the same sense that the ancient “judges” judged Israel.
  - b. Hence, the twelve disciples of Jesus will have a distinctive role to play in co-reigning with Jesus, the Messiah. They will each be given authority to rule over one of the tribes of Israel during the millennial reign of the Messiah.

(A) Is there any room in the traditional understanding of “heaven” for such a claim?  
(B) Is there any room in the the biblical understanding of the eternal age to come for such a claim?

**2. *Revelation 3:21***

- a. This seems to describe the reality that Jesus’s followers will be given the role of embodying the reign and authority of Jesus himself, just as Jesus embodies the reign and authority of God himself.

**3. *Revelation 20:4***

- a. This describes the fate of those who had remained faithful to Jesus during the terrible persecution that will occur at the end of this present age: they will be raised from the dead and will be given the role of reigning with the Messiah for a thousand years.

(A) While the focus is on a particular sub-set of Jesus-followers, there is other evidence [see *Revelation* 20:6] that to reign with the Messiah for a thousand years is, in fact, the destiny of any and every authentic follower of the Messiah.

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(1) *Revelation* 1:6, 5:10

(2) *Exodus* 19:6

(3) *1 Peter* 2:9

**AU. *Matthew* 8:5–13**

1. Now when Jesus heard *this*, He marveled and said to those who were following, “Truly I say to you, I have not found such great faith with anyone in Israel. I say to you that many will come from east and west, and recline *at the table* with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven; but the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” *Matt.* 8:10-12
  - a. Jesus makes the point that a number of Gentiles (those who come from east and west) will recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. At the same time, a number of Jews (sons of the kingdom) will be destroyed rather than be given a place in the kingdom of heaven.
  - b. What is in mind when Jesus says that Gentiles who have faith will “recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven”?
    - (A) Does he have in mind their going to heaven in the traditional Christian sense? That would be an odd description of “going to heaven.”
    - (B) Does he mean simply enjoy “eternal Life”? Again, that would be a rather odd way to describe “eternal Life.”
    - (C) Does it not make more sense to think that Jesus is speaking quite literally. A day will come when God has made Israel the greatest nation in the world and the patriarchs have been raised from the dead so that they can participate in and enjoy this great nation. When that day comes, there will be great feasts and celebrations in the Kingdom of God that has been established. Gentiles who have believed will be included among those who are allowed to participate in those great feasts and celebrations.

**AV. *Luke* 13:23–30**

1. Although this describes a different occasion and a different context, the message of Jesus here is essentially the same message as his message in *Matthew* 8:5–13 above.

**AW. *Mark* 14:22–25; *Luke* 22:14-16**

1. Triangulating from the Mark account and the Luke account to what Jesus was communicating to his disciples, he seems to be suggesting that this will be his last Passover feast until the day comes when, in the coming Kingdom of God, he will celebrate a new, revised feast celebrating the “fulfilled” Passover.
  - a. It would be very odd for Jesus to be suggesting that he will celebrate the Passover, with wine, in “heaven” (in the traditional sense).

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- b. It makes far more sense to think that, in the literal physical kingdom of God that will come about at the end of history, the people of Israel will celebrate Passover (apparently a newer, revised version of it). Jesus is telling his disciples that he will not drink any Passover wine with them again until he partakes of it with them during the revised Passover celebration in the coming Kingdom of God.

AX. **Summary** so far: Contrary to what some bible teachers will tell you, there are several examples of the New Testament assuming—if not explicitly mentioning—what I have called the “second promise” to Abraham (the promise to make him a “great nation”), which is understood to be a promise that will be fulfilled in, through, and for the Jewish people.

- 1. We fail to recognize this fact (and think that the N.T. is silent about the historical fulfillment of God’s promise to the Jews about becoming a “great nation”) precisely because we read our New Testaments through the lens of Christianity and the church and, therefore, falsely interpret the Jews and the nation of Israel right out of our New Testaments.

AY. **Matthew 13:1–35**

- 1. If we rightly understand these “Kingdom” parables—that is, if we understand these parables the way Jesus intended for them to be understood by the audience to whom he delivered them—then we see that the historical kingdom of heaven at the end of history was front and center in Jesus’s teaching while he was addressing his fellow-Jews in the first century.
  - a. As Christians, we have tended to interpret these parables through the lens of the Christian religion and the church. That is wrong. It has led to our misinterpreting these parables.
    - (A) Jesus’s audience would have known absolutely nothing of the Christian religion and the church. But they would have had a fairly clear and definite notion of what the “Kingdom of Heaven [God]” was.
      - (1) Their notion of the “Kingdom of Heaven [God]” would have been akin to the notion of a “great nation” that had been promised to Abraham (as we have seen that notion developed throughout the Old Testament).
      - (2) The issue in Jesus’s parables is this: will you or will you not get to experience, and have a place in, the fulfillment of the promises to Abraham and to David to the effect that God would make the Jews into a “great nation” ruled over by a righteous Davidic King?
- 2. Jesus describes his teaching in these parables as “secrets” (“mysteries”) about the Kingdom of God. He calls them secrets because he is revealing truths about God’s purposes with regard to establishing his Kingdom that run contrary to popular expectations. He is teaching things that are not commonly known and understood.
- 3. The two main aspects of Jesus’s teaching here that are new and different (even revolutionary) are these:

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- a. Not every Jew will be qualified to experience the coming Kingdom of God. Some are qualified; many are not. But this flies in the face of Jewish expectations at the time. Namely, the Jewish people expected that if they were Jewish, then they were automatically qualified to enjoy the Kingdom of God.
  - b. The beginning of the Kingdom of God would not come about through dramatic and spectacular military or political action. It would come about quietly, inconspicuously, and invisibly. This was contrary to Jewish expectations. Typically, the Jews would have expected a social-political uprising led by the Messiah to be the beginning of the Kingdom of God.
4. Parable of the Sower [13:1–23]
    - a. Only one kind of human heart will respond to the announcement of the Kingdom of God in a way that qualifies that person to participate in God's coming kingdom.
    - b. Contrary to popular expectations in Jesus's day, not every Jew has a place in the Kingdom of God.
  5. Parable of the Wheat and the Tares [13:24–30]
    - a. In and among the Jewish nation are two different kinds of individual. One kind of individual is destined to have a place in the Kingdom of God (analogous to the wheat). The other kind of individual is not destined to have a place in the Kingdom of God (analogous to the weeds [tares]). Hence, contrary to popular expectations in Jesus's day, not every Jew has a place in the Kingdom of God.
  6. Parable of the mustard seed [13:31–32]
    - a. The Kingdom of God (by which Jesus means the historical, physical, geo-political reality of the Jewish nation becoming the most important nation in the world) will come about in just this way: its initial beginning will be virtually invisible and inconspicuous, but such inconspicuous beginnings will not prevent it from becoming the dramatically powerful and important kingdom that all the prophetic predictions promised it would be.  
  
(A) This parable is about something Jesus's audience would understand: the historical, physical, geo-political reality of the Jewish nation becoming the most important nation in the world. It is NOT about the growth and progress of Christianity and/or the Church (except to the extent that those things might contribute to any progress toward the Kingdom of God at the end of history.)
    - b. Contrary to popular expectations in Jesus's day, the beginning of the Kingdom of God is not going to come about in and through dramatic military victory.
  7. Parable of the leaven [13:33]
    - a. The Kingdom of God (by which Jesus means the historical, physical, geo-political reality of the Jewish nation becoming the most important nation in the world) will come about in just this way: its initial beginning will be virtually invisible and inconspicuous.
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- ous, but it will quietly and inconspicuously persist until it reaches its ultimate maturation. Its progress will be unhindered and inexorable. When it has finally come to fruition, it will be the dramatically powerful and important kingdom that all the prophetic predictions promised it would be.
- (A) This is virtually the same teaching as the mustard seed parable, just a different analogy.
- b. Contrary to popular expectations in Jesus's day, the beginning of the Kingdom of God is not going to come about in and through dramatic military victory.
8. Parable of the hidden treasure [13:44] and Parable of the Valuable Pearl [13:45-46]
- a. Getting to experience the Kingdom of God is so valuable that it would be worth sacrificing everything else that one has in order to acquire a place in the Kingdom of God.
- (A) Contrary to popular expectations in Jesus's day, not every Jew has a place in the Kingdom of God. Only those who are willing to give up their life for the sake of the Kingdom of God are the one's who will have a place in the Kingdom of God.
9. Parable of the dragnet 13:47–50]
- a. The seminal events that mark the beginning of the Kingdom of God will be analogous to fishing with a dragnet in the following sense: just as fishermen sort out the good fish (fish they are going to keep) from the bad fish (fish they are going to discard) when they have a large catch of fish in a dragnet, so likewise God is going to sort out the Jews he is going to "keep" (as citizens in the kingdom he intends to establish) from the Jews he is going to destroy. Contrary to popular expectations in Jesus's day, not every Jew has a place in the Kingdom of God.
- (A) Note that the event being described will occur at the "end of the age."
- (1) In other words, there will be a great sorting out of God's people that will occur at the end of the present age as it transitions to the next age.
10. Parable of the householder [13:52]
- a. A true student of God's purposes with regard to the Kingdom of God will find himself in much the same situation as a householder going into his treasury. Just as a householder possesses things in his treasury that are old and familiar as well as other things that are new and unfamiliar, so will a student of God's purposes with regard to the Kingdom of God discover that the truth about the kingdom of God is such that it contains some old and familiar notions alongside other new and unfamiliar notions.
- (A) This captures the purpose of Jesus's teaching these parable to begin with. Alongside old and familiar ideas, Jesus is attempting to introduce to his audience new and unfamiliar ideas about God's kingdom and how it is going to be realized. The truth about the Kingdom of God contains both sorts of notions.
- (B) Note that Jesus explicitly states that the truth about the Kingdom of God includes old and familiar ideas alongside new and fresh ideas. The Kingdom of God that

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Jesus proclaims is not a completely new and different idea that departs radically from all that the prophets have taught and proclaimed. His audience does have some wrong notions that Jesus needs to correct. But, alongside those wrong notions, his audience have many right notions that they have been taught by the prophets. Jesus has no intention of correcting or disabusing them of those notions.

(1) Jesus did not intend to give his audience a completely different take on the Kingdom of God. His intention was only to correct and clarify what needed to be corrected and clarified.

(a) To take Jesus’s message as a radically new and different conception of the Kingdom of God is to badly misunderstand what Jesus was about.

**AZ. John 14:1–6**

1. Interpreted through a traditional Christian lens: God is building a huge apartment complex in heaven. I (Jesus) am going away to finish constructing the apartment complex. I am preparing an apartment for each one of you (Jesus’s disciples). I will come back and get you and take you to that apartment complex in heaven and that is where we shall live for eternity.
2. Interpreted the way Jesus intended it and the way Jesus’s disciples could have heard it: There are many spots for people who will populate the Kingdom of God that God intends to establish (that is, there are many spots in God’s household, if you will). I am going away now to make it possible for you to have one of those spots (specifically, by dying on the cross for you). I will return one day to establish the Kingdom within history. When I return, I will receive you to myself and together we will dwell in the promised Kingdom of God in the land of Israel.
  - a. **OBJECTION:** participation in the historical kingdom of God is not nearly so grand as everlasting existence in the eternal Age to come, why would Jesus focus on the former and not the latter?
    - (A) The reward of everlasting existence in the eternal Age to come is not as easy to relate to as the reward of enjoying the historical kingdom of God. The former is more abstract and more difficult to wrap one’s mind around. What will eternal Life be like? We don’t really have a clue. Hence, it is difficult for it to resonate with us. Not so, the historical kingdom of God. We can have some sort of idea of what that might be like—that is, we can imagine a life of ease and abundance that is void of injustice, oppression, unrighteousness, cruelty, etc.
    - (B) There is every reason to think that the focus of Jesus here (and of the apostles elsewhere) is not a focus on the historical kingdom of God *instead of* a focus upon everlasting existence in the eternal Age to come. Rather, their focus is upon the historical kingdom of God *as the necessary prerequisite to* everlasting existence in the eternal Age to come. Hence, their focus is on *both at the same time*. It is not upon the historical kingdom of God instead of upon the eternal Age. Their

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focus is upon both the historical kingdom of God and the eternal Age as being part and parcel of one and the same blessing.

BA. *Acts*

1. *Acts 1:1–11*

- a. 1:6 > “**Lord, is at at this time that you are restoring the kingdom to Israel?**”
  - (A) 1:7–8 > “He said to them, ‘***It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by his own authority***; but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.’”
- b. Significantly, when Jesus’s disciples asked Jesus whether it might be **now** that Jesus was going to restore the kingdom to Israel, Jesus did not disabuse them of any notion that God intended to restore the kingdom to Israel. Jesus responds to them as if their question is a perfectly valid question. But he answers them that it is not for them to know the timing of such an action by God.
  - (A) The translation “restore the kingdom to Israel” is somewhat misleading because of how we would hear that in our idiom. They are not asking if the kingdom of God is going to be “restored” to Israel so much as they are asking if the promised kingdom of God is going to finally be realized. That is, will the people of Israel now by given the status and standing that was promised to them as a birthright?
    - (1) To “restore” something as it is used in the N.T. (unlike in our idiom) is *not* to return something to its *previous* state. Rather, it is to return something to its *proper* state.
  - (B) If Jesus’s teaching involved a radical reinterpretation of the prophets—a reinterpretation that suggested that it was not any part of God’s purpose to establish a concrete historical geo-political entity in the land of Israel in the future (in other words, if Jesus had abandoned the idea of a literal fulfillment of all the prophetic predictions concerning a kingdom in the land of Israel)—then would he not have responded to his disciples’ question here quite differently? Would he not have instructed them to stop expecting God to “restore the kingdom to Israel”?
    - (1) In no way does Jesus suggest here that they are mistaken to think that such a future kingdom remains a part of God’s purposes.
    - (2) On the contrary, he simply suggests that the timing of the emergence of that Kingdom is not something that God has given them to know.
      - (a) Jesus’s answer clearly implies that his disciples are correct in their thinking that such a future kingdom does remain a part of God’s purposes. It is just not for them to know the time when that kingdom will be realized.



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[A] This further implies that Jesus is not of the belief that the Kingdom has already been realized. It remains to be realized sometime in the future. It is not for the disciples to know when.

- c. This brief interchange offers a very significant clue with respect to what Jesus taught his disciples. Over the previous few years of teaching them, Jesus did not discourage his disciples from thinking in terms of a literal fulfillment of the promises of a future kingdom in Israel. Hence, it is highly improbable that Jesus's teaching involved a radical reinterpretation of the prophets that rejected a literal fulfillment of the prophetic promises of a kingdom.
  - d. What is the relevance of Jesus's further comment: "but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth"?
- (A) It would seem that Jesus interprets his disciples' query to amount to this: "okay, now that you are back—raised from the dead—are we supposed to doing something now to facilitate bringing about the promised kingdom of God? Is that what you plan to do next?" Jesus's answer to that is "No, that is not next on the agenda. We do not know when God intends to bring the promised kingdom into being. What you are given to do is to be 'my witnesses.' Go out into the whole world and proclaim the truth that I, Jesus, am the Messiah of God. Tell the whole world that the king of God's coming kingdom has entered into history."
- (1) Note how very "Jewish" was this message that Jesus's disciples were to proclaim to the world. It was not the Gentile Christian message that we are so very familiar with. ("Come to Jesus and he will meet your every need and make your life so much better.")

## 2. Acts 3:1–26

- a. Acts 3:17–20 > "And now, brethren, I know that you acted in ignorance, just as your rulers did also. But the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled. Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that **times of refreshing** may come from the presence of the Lord; and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, whom heaven must receive **until the period of restoration of all things** about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time."
- (A) Peter anticipates a time, when Jesus the Messiah returns into history. At that time, God will forgive the sins of Israel (having inwardly sanctified the people of Israel by giving them a new heart) and will bless them with all the blessings that he had promised to them down through the ages. In particular, God will give the people of Israel "rest from their enemies" ["times of refreshing"] as he prospers them and protects them from any who would oppose them. This will happen because God will send the Messiah into history to reign as king over Israel. Messiah Jesus will establish peace, righteousness, and prosperity in the nation. At that time, the expe-

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rience of the people of Israel will be brought into conformity with all that belonged to them as their birthright—they will realize the fulfillment of all that God had promised to them. In other words, that time will be the time of “the restoration of all things.” Peter calls his audience to repent and to return to God in anticipation of that reality.

- (1) The time of the restoration of all things is not a time when the condition of Israel is returned to some previous state. It is a time when Israel is put into that state of peace, prosperity, and prominence that God had promised to them in the covenants that he had made with them.
- b. Note how in this passage and in all of the early proclamations in the book of *Acts*, the message of the apostles amounts to this:
- (A) “You unjustly murdered the Messiah. He performed many different signs, giving you proof of who he was. But you killed him. Yet that was to fulfill everything that had been prophesied concerning the Messiah. Then God vindicated Jesus’s claim to be the Messiah when he raised him from the dead. So, since Jesus is the Messiah, you must repent and believe in him so that your sins might be forgiven. God will send Jesus back to fulfill all that the prophets promised concerning him at the appointed time. It is he who is the touchstone of whether you will live or die. Turn from you wicked ways and believe in him.”
- (1) “And now, brethren, I know that you acted in ignorance, just as your rulers did also. But the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled. Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, whom heaven must receive until *the* period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time. Moses said, ‘THE LORD GOD WILL RAISE UP FOR YOU A PROPHET LIKE ME FROM YOUR BRETHREN; TO HIM YOU SHALL GIVE HEED to everything He says to you. ‘And it will be that every soul that does not heed that prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.’ And likewise, all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and *his* successors onward, also announced these days. It is you who are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, ‘AND IN YOUR SEED ALL THE FAMILIES OF THE EARTH SHALL BE BLESSED.’ For you first, God raised up His Servant and sent Him to bless you by turning every one *of you* from your wicked ways.” [Acts 3:17–26]
- c. Note the significant contrast that exists between these early apostolic pronouncements that seek to proclaim the gospel to their contemporaries and the proclamations of the gospel that you would hear from modern Christian teachers. Namely –
- (A) Believe in Jesus and he will make your life so much better.
- (1) This message completely ignores the distinctive Jewish elements to the gospel.

### 3. *Acts 28:16–31*

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- a. 28:20 > “because I am wearing this chain for the sake of the hope of Israel”
  - b. 28:23 > “explaining to them by carefully bearing witness to the Kingdom of God, seeking to persuade them about Jesus from both the Torah of Moses and from the Prophets...”
  - c. 28:31 > “proclaiming the Kingdom of God and teaching with all boldness, unhindered the things that concern the Lord Jesus the Messiah.”
  - d. the message of the “the hope of Israel” = bearing witness to and proclaiming the Kingdom of God = teaching and persuading his audience with regard to Jesus being the Messiah
- (A) Paul’s message: Jesus is the promised Messiah, hence, the Kingdom of God is “at hand”

BB.. *I Thessalonians* 1:10, 5:1-11

- 1. *1:10* > “and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come.”
  - a. The most probably meaning of Paul here involves a claim that the “Son” is going to return into history.

(A) Such a claim is incompatible with any view that sees the believer going to heaven to be with Jesus as the future the believer has awaiting him. We do not go to be with Jesus, Jesus returns to be with us.
  - b. The idea that we are rescued from “the wrath to come” would be compatible with virtually any eschatology.

(A) As a matter of fact, Paul likely means the wrath that will come upon the people of Israel and the Gentile enemies of God on the day of wrath that is the “great and terrible day of Yahweh.”
- 2. *5:1-11*
  - a. *5:1-2* > “as to the times and epochs, brethren, you have no need of anything to be written to you. For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night.”

(A) Coming like a thief in the night means that the exact date and time of the Day of the Lord (the Day of Yahweh) cannot be known nor pinpointed by any human being. So, Paul cannot offer them anything beyond what they already know with regard to when the Day of Yahweh will be.

    - (1) But, as we shall see, the fact that the Day of Yahweh cannot be pinpointed with regard to date and time does NOT mean that it cannot be anticipated as one begins to see various signs and indicators of its approach. [*5:3-4*]
    - (2) The ones who will be caught off-guard by the day of wrath to come are those who are “in darkness” and who are of the darkness. Those who are “of the

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light” and who, as a result, stay sober and alert—they will not be caught off-guard by the day of Yahweh. For, as children of light, we are not destined from wrath, but for salvation through Jesus. [5:5–9]

- b. 5:9–10 > “For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who dies for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep, we will live together with him.”

(A) The wrath that Paul references here is likely the wrath that will be poured out on the “great and terrible Day of the Lord [Day of Yahweh]”.

(B) The salvation that Paul references here is a reference to the event that will occur when Jesus enters back into history where, if we are “awake,” we are taken up into the air and, if we are “asleep,” we are raised up out of our grave, and we are given immortal, eternal existence of the same sort that Jesus has been granted. We avoid the wrath that is coming upon the earth, and are given eternal Life instead.

#### BC. 2 *Thessalonians* 2:1–12

1. “...with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to him...”
  - a. This language “fits” the picture we can glean from elsewhere (John 5; I Corinthians 15; 1 Thessalonians 5). Namely, Jesus will return into history by descending from the sky. As he does so, those who are “in him” (whether they are alive on the earth or dead in the ground) will rise up into the sky to meet him as he comes.
    - (A) See *John* 5:
    - (B) See *1 Corinthians* 15:
2. “you not be disturbed ...by...a message...to the effect that the day of the Lord is upon us” {Not: “has come”}
  - a. One would be disturbed by a message that the day of the Lord is upon us because that day is going to be a day of great wrath.
3. “...that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of his mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of his coming...”
  - a. Paul clearly has a view of Jesus’s return as being significantly more consequential than simply floating in the sky above the earth and inviting those who belong to him to join him in heaven.
  - b. If we fill this in by what we see in the prophets (and the book of *Revelation*) we understand what Paul is saying: Jesus will return into history to destroy all the enemies of God and his people who are coming to destroy the Jews (as an act of divine wrath and judgment against them). Jesus will completely destroy the enemies of God and will set up a kingdom over the remnant of Jews who are saved from God’s wrath

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where he will build a nation of Jews that fulfills every promise that God ever made to the Jews.

**BD. Revelation**

1. What are the events that lie ahead? If we put together the data from the prophets, Jesus, and Revelation, we come up with something like this:
  - a. GREAT TRIBULATION: From the time of Jesus's rising up into the sky and disappearing among the clouds up to the present moment, God has been engaged in disciplining his people Israel.
  - b. SIGNS IN THE HEAVENS AND UPON THE EARTH: Sometime in the not too distant future, there will appear four "signs" on the earth and in the heavens that will serve as warning signs that the Day of Yahweh is about to come upon us.
    - (A) These are the first four trumpets of *Revelation* 8:1–13. There is no clear indication of what period of time might be spanned by these four "signs". It could be a few years, or it could be a few months.
  - c. THE DAY OF THE LORD (The Day of Yahweh): Following the final "sign" that serves as a harbinger of the Day of Yahweh, the Day of Yahweh will finally come. There is no clear indication of what period of time might be spanned by the Day of Yahweh. It could be a few years, or it could be a number of months. It would appear that it must last several months at a minimum.
    - (A) The first phase of the Day of Yahweh is the strange event described in connection with the fifth trumpet. (*Revelation* 9:1–12)
    - (B) The second phase of the Day of Yahweh is the invasion of the army from the East described in connection with the sixth trumpet. (*Revelation* 9:13–21)
      - (1) God will use his two witnesses to protect the 144,000 during this phase (and earlier phases) of his wrath.
    - (C) The third and final phase of the Day of Yahweh is the series of events that are described by the seven bowls of the wrath of God described in *Revelation* 16:1–21. The very last significant event described there is a very great earthquake.
      - (1) Some specific events described by the prophets are likely more detailed descriptions of certain aspects of these events described by the bowls of wrath.
      - (2) Sometime at the very end of this final phase of the Day of Yahweh, Jesus will return. He will gather to himself all those who belong to him as he returns and he will bless them with immortality and eternal existence. Then, having returned to earth, Jesus will destroy all the the enemies of God gathered in the Valley of Armageddon (as well as the beast, etc.), and he will set up his reign over Israel and over the world in Jerusalem.
  - d. THE MILLENNIAL KINGDOM OF GOD: Then Jesus reigns over Israel and over the world from Jerusalem for a very long time ("1,000 years"). And during his reign,

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God will bless Israel with every blessing that he ever promised them through his prophets. The Millennial Kingdom ends when God releases Satan from his imprisonment, Satan goes forth to deceive the nations, and the nations come up against Jesus and Israel to destroy them. God destroys the enemy armies before they can harm Israel.

- e. FINAL JUDGMENT: God brings back into existence those unbelieving humans who have been lying in their grave this whole time and he judges them. Presumably, they are duly punished for the evil that they did during their lives. Then their judgment is completed by destroying them.
- f. THE TRANSFORMATION OF CREATED REALITY: God then destroys the whole of this present created reality and creates an entirely new reality (a "new heavens and a new earth").
- g. THE KINGDOM OF GOD IN ETERNITY: Then begins an eternal Age in the new created reality where the people of God will dwell eternally. *Revelation 22:1*, in connection with a description of the new Jerusalem, refers to "the throne of God and of the Lamb." It would appear that the new created reality is a sort of kingdom where God and his Son reign as king.
  - (A) This eternal kingdom of God is clearly distinct from the historical (millennial) kingdom of God, but it is also continuous with it.
    - (1) It is distinct in that it exists in an entirely new and different created reality from the reality in which the millennial kingdom of God will exist.
    - (2) It is continuous in that anyone who has an inheritance in the historical (millennial) kingdom of God will also have an inheritance in the eternal kingdom of God. And, anyone who has an inheritance in the eternal kingdom of God will also necessarily have an inheritance in the historical (millennial) kingdom of God. Participation in both manifestations of the kingdom of God (the historical as well as the eternal) is the single blessing that God has promised to those who belong to him.

BE. **Romans 9:1–11:36**

- 1. The key verse is 9:6. That verse introduces the next line of objection to Paul's gospel that he intends to respond to in the letter. What is the objection? It amounts to this: "*Paul, if your 'gospel' is true, then God has failed with respect to the promises that he made to the people of Israel. God would never do that. He would never fail to keep his promises to Israel. Therefore, your 'gospel' cannot be true.*"
  - a. How exactly does this objection suppose that God failed to keep his promises to the people of Israel, should Paul's gospel be true?

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- (A) To answer this question, we need to note Paul’s immediate, direct response to the objection: “For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel....” [Literally, “For, not the case—everyone who is from Israel, these are Israel.”]
- (1) In other words, Paul’s answer to the objection is that not every member of ethnic Israel is an individual who stands to receive what has been promised to Israel.
- (a) Paul’s response to the objection is that not every descendent of Israel is a child of promise any more than every descendent of Abraham is a child of promise. Isaac inherited the promise while Ishmael did not. Similarly, one child of Israel will inherit the promise while another one will not.
- (b) In order for this to make sense as a direct response to the objection, the objection must assume that, according to Paul’s gospel, some of the people of Israel are excluded from the promise while others are not. And the objection must be based on the further assumption that every member of the people of Israel stands to benefit from the promise (or, promises) made to Israel. [That is, it must be based on the assumption that the promise of a blessing to the Jews meant that every Jew will receive that blessing.]
- [A] More accurately, the objector here probably assumes that every member of Israel *in good standing* (because he honors the Mosaic covenant) stands to benefit from the promise (or, promises) made to Israel.
- [B] Paul’s response is to directly contradict this assumption. It is not the case, he says, that every member of ethnic Israel (in good standing) stands to benefit from the promise (or, promises) made to Israel.
- (B) Paul’s gospel asserts that only those who believe in Jesus the Messiah are *dikaios* in the eyes of God. This seems likely to be the basis for the objection: If Paul’s gospel is true, then not every Jew who honors the Mosaic Covenant is *dikaios* in the eyes of God. But this cannot be right. For God promised that every Jew who honors the Mosaic Covenant will be granted the promised blessing.
- (1) What “blessing” is in view here? Both the promise of eternal Life and the promise that he would make them a great nation, for those promises are inextricably bound together.
- (a) At first, in chapters 9 and 10, it is only implicit that both promises are in view. But when we get to chapter 11 we see a number of statements that Paul makes that make best sense if Paul has in mind everything that God has promised to the Jewish people—not only the blessing of eternal Life, but also the promise to make them a great nation when he enthrones his Messiah as king of the Jews in the land of Israel.

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[A] It is true that, unlike several of the prophets, Paul never fully explicates what the fulfillment of God’s promised blessings would look like. And, in fact, what is foremost in Paul’s thinking through the whole section (chapters 9-11) is *dikaiosune* and the corresponding blessing of eternal Life. But some of the statements that Paul makes seem to indicate that Paul understands, is aware of, and is mindful of the fuller prophetic picture. Paul knows that the ultimate reward of *dikaiosune* (and the belief upon which it is conditioned) includes more than salvation from condemnation into eternal Life. It includes everything that God had promised his people Israel from Abraham forward. Some of the statements that Paul makes in chapter 11 tend to imply that Paul has that fuller prophetic picture in view.

[1] In 11:1, immediately following a citation from *Isaiah* 65, Paul writes, “God has not rejected his people, has he?” In the context of *Isaiah* 65—a prophetic passage that clearly has the full prophetic picture of all that God had promised Israel in mind—Paul says rhetorically that “God has not rejected his people.” We can only presume that Paul has in mind everything that God had promised them, since he has just cited *Isaiah* 65. To reject his people Israel would mean that he had forsaken them and no longer had any intention of keeping any of his promises to them. To *not* reject his people would mean that he had *not* forsaken them and that he had every intention of keeping all of his promises to them.

[2] In 11:2, Paul writes, “What Israel is seeking, that Israel has not obtained.” Now, on the one hand, what Israel is seeking is clearly the favor of God. They seek to be viewed as *dikaioi* in God’s eyes. But we cannot ignore the context for such a desire. The context for it is formed by their own actual hopes and expectations and by the promises of God made to them through God’s prophets over many generations. So, in the right context, why does Israel want God’s favor? Why do they want *dikaiosune*? Because they want to be blessed with all the blessings that God had promised them down through the centuries. That includes eternal Life, but it includes other things as well (especially, it includes the promise that God would make them a great nation when he enthroned their Messiah as king in the land of Israel.) Does Paul understand that that is what Israel seeks? How could he not? Hence, in this very statement, the fuller prophetic picture is lurking just under the surface.

[3] In 11:11, Paul writes, “they do not trip such that they fall, do they?” Who is Paul talking about? In the preceding paragraph, Paul has been describing blinded, unbelieving Jews. Is he saying that those blinded, unbelieving Jews do not trip such that they fall?



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That makes no sense. Of course they fall. In the context of *Romans* 11, the “they” Paul has in mind are the people of Israel viewed as a corporate entity. So what kind of claim is Paul making then? This claim only makes sense in the context of the fuller prophetic picture. God, through his prophets, has promised the people of Israel as such (viewed as a corporate entity), that it will one day be the great nation that God promised to make Abraham (and the promise of a number of different things that go along with that promise). To say that they (=the people of Israel as such [viewed as a corporate entity]), given their present unbelief, do not “trip such that they fall” is to say that the promise that one day God would make them a great nation is, in fact, going to be realized. Their present unbelief does not negate the reality of that promise. It does not cause God to rescind that promise.

[4] In 11:12, Paul writes “Now if their transgression is riches to the world and their failure is riches to the Gentiles, how much greater will their *pleroma* be. Given the antithetical parallelism of this statement, Israel’s *pleroma* must be the antithesis to their transgression. Israel’s specific transgression is their failure to receive the Messiah, and, hence, their failure to trust Yahweh. Or, more generally, their transgression is their failure to meet their obligations to Yahweh as his people. Since their *pleroma* is the opposite of that, then their *pleroma* is their **fulfillment** of their obligations to Yahweh as his people. In the context into which Paul is writing, Israel’s fulfillment of their obligations to Yahweh as his people will include their honoring and keeping the covenant that Yahweh made with Israel in the time of Moses, just like the prophets predicted. So, what is Paul saying here? He is asserting that the riches that will come to the Gentiles when Israel fulfills its obligations to Yahweh as his people are most certainly going to be even greater than the riches that are coming to the Gentiles because Israel has transgressed its obligations to Yahweh as his people. This statement is being made from the standpoint of the full prophetic picture. While—in keeping with the purposes of God—Israel, as a corporate entity, might currently be unfaithful and wayward, the day will come, as predicted in the prophets, when they will become faithful and righteous as the people of God and will honor God and keep his covenant. At that time, there are very specific blessings that will come to Israel, in keeping with all that God has promised them. And the prophets predict that the whole world—all of the Gentile peoples—will benefit from the blessings that flow to and through Israel in that day. Those benefits to the Gentiles will be

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even greater than the benefits that have come to them because of Israel’s rejection of God’s *messiah*.

[5] In 11:15, Paul writes, “if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be, but life from the dead?” What is he saying? He is saying this: if God’s rejection of his people Israel leads to and results in significant numbers of individuals within the Gentile nations being reconciled to God, then what will God’s acceptance of his people of Israel be except a sort of resurrection from the dead. Here is his point: it is a remarkable and startling reality that God, in his purposes, has occasioned the reconciliation of Gentile people to himself in connection with his hardening the hearts of his own people and cutting them off from the blessings that he had promised to them. But that startling and ironic reality is not the end of the surprises God has in store. He has an even more remarkable and startling reality in store. The day will come when—after many generations of rebellion against him—God will open the hearts of his own people, will accept them, and will, as a consequence, bless them with every blessing that he had ever promised them. It will be as remarkable as a resurrection from the dead when the people of God who were dead to him are once again made alive to him. In his speaking of their “acceptance,” Paul is clearly speaking from the standpoint of the full prophetic picture that predicts the restoration of the people of Israel to full acceptance by God.

[6] In 11:16, Paul writes, “If the first piece is holy, the lump is also; and if the root is holy, the branches are too.” His point is that if the fathers of Israel were “holy” within the purposes of God, then so is every ethnic Jew and every generation of ethnic Jews that are descended from them. Paul clearly means to suggest that every ethnic Jew has a special, distinct status within the purposes of God. And in the context here, this is true, irrespective of whether that Jew is a believing and obedient Jew or not. That is why, when a generation of Jews comes along that is believing, obedient, and blessed by God, it will be like life from the dead. (Note the assertion that immediately precedes this one.) Being believing, obedient, and blessed by God is the normal, expected, and healthy state of the “holy” people of Israel. That is what they were chosen for. So, when they are restored to that state, it will be as if the people of God who have died have been brought back to life.

[7] In 11:18, Paul writes—as he warns Gentiles not to be arrogant—“you [branches that were grafted in] do not bear the root, the root bears you.” A common perspective within Christendom is that the

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main channel of God’s blessings and purposes transitioned away from the people of Israel and over to the church of Jesus Christ. Paul’s statement here is most certainly at odds with that common perspective. The common perspective is, in effect, that the “root” is now the Gentile Christian church and that the Jews have been sidelined. Paul is quite clearly suggesting that the “root” is and always has been the people of ethnic Israel. So, he warns Gentile believers not to be arrogant. It is not as if they have replaced ethnic Jews as the “root.” They have not replaced ethnic Jews as the main channel of God’s blessings and purposes. It is, and will always remain, ethnic Israel that is the main channel of God’s blessings and purposes. This is completely compatible with the full prophetic picture. It is from that standpoint that Paul can make this assertion here.

[8] In 11:28–29, Paul writes, “As far as their response to the good news is concerned, they [the Jews] are enemies with respect to you. But, as far as God’s choice is concerned, they are loved because of the fathers; for the gifts and appointment [calling] of God are irrevocable.” Here, Paul is expressing exactly the same idea that he did earlier when he said “If the first piece is holy, the lump is also; and if the root is holy, the branches are too.” Irrespective of whether they embrace the gospel or not, the Jews (of Paul’s day and of every generation) have a special and distinct status in the eyes of God because of promises and commitments he made to the “fathers” (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob). Paul asserts that the gifts and appointment (calling) of God are irrevocable. The promises that God made to the fathers were not of such a nature that God would rescind them. He made promises to them that he was unfailingly committed to keeping. Those promises concerned the ethnic people of Israel who would be descended from the fathers. Accordingly, the ethnic people of Israel are still special and distinct in the eyes of God. It is in and through them that God will keep the promises he made to the fathers.

[a] It is not an uncommon perspective that, because the Jews rejected Jesus the Messiah, God withdrew the promises that he had made to them and transferred those promises to the church of Jesus Christ. This perspective is directly contradicted by what Paul writes here. Paul understands the blessings that God promised to the fathers to be irrevocable. God would never withdraw those promises in order to give them to someone else. To think that he would is to not know God and to fail to understand his purposes.

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[9] It is impossible to make any sense out of the assertions that Paul makes in 11:30–32 unless Paul is speaking from the standpoint of the full prophetic picture that we have outlined in these notes—a picture where the chosen people of God, who over several generations has rejected God, returns to God, receives mercy, and is blessed with all the many blessings that have been promised to them down through the years. While Paul’s focus in this paragraph is on the mercy that leads to eternal life, what he writes here makes no sense unless we keep the full prophetic picture in mind.

[B] It is undoubtedly true that one could imagine another way to construe each and every one of the assertions discussed in the notes above. However, one could do so only by removing each of them from the context of first-century Judaism and the Scriptures of the Jews (that is, to remove them from the context that serves as the standpoint from which Paul wrote his letter to the Romans.) and by looking at them from the standpoint of some other context (e.g., Christianity and the Christian church). To do so is exegetically and hermeneutically fallacious.

**BF. Ephesians 2:9–3:13**

1. There can be no doubt that Paul is arguing here that, in Christ, God has created a new reality that involves a unity of Jew and Gentile. Believing Jews and believing Gentiles have been brought together and united into *one new man*. Gentiles have been made to be fellow-citizens with the holy ones (Jews). They have been made to be members of *one and the same* family (household). Gentiles are being built into a holy temple for the Lord right along with Jews who believe in Jesus. Gentiles are fellow heirs with believing Jews and are fellow members of *one* body. Gentile believers are fellow beneficiaries of the promise that, according to the gospel, comes to one who is in Messiah Jesus.
2. So, there can be no question but what Paul is contending here that *God’s purposes involve creating a **unity** of Jew and Gentile*. But here is the question: does Paul view this unity of Jew and Gentile to be a *homogenous* unity? Or does Paul view it as a *unity amidst diversity*? In other words, does Paul believe that God has purposed that every child of God be the same kind of person, have the same destiny, and experience his promised blessings in just the same way? Or, does Paul believe that, while there is one and only one people of God—each and every member of which qualifies equally for the same eternal reward—there will be different kinds of persons who will have different kinds of destinies (that is, different roles and different standings), and who will have different experiences with respect to how they experience the promised blessings?
  - a. There are two kinds of unity—(i) unity formed on the basis of homogeneity and sameness, and (ii) unity within diversity. Which kind of unity does Paul believe God is creating between believing Jews and believing Gentiles? Does God intend for believing Gentiles to come to be the same as believing Jews and for believing Jews to

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- come to be the same as believing Gentiles? Or, does God intend for believing Jews—*as distinct and as different from Gentiles as they are*—to be joined together with believing Gentiles into one “body” of people who share one highly significant thing in common (specifically, a “peace” with God that results in one and the same eternal reward)?
3. In my judgment, Paul does not say anything specific enough in this passage to allow us to reach a definitive answer to this question *on the basis of this passage alone*. However, it is unthinkable to think that Paul would believe anything that is not compatible with the Old Testament scriptures and with the prophetic picture of how God intends to fulfill his promises to his people of Israel. Therefore, any interpretation of the “unity” espoused here that would require us to understand God’s purposes in a way that is incompatible with the Old Testament scriptures and with the full prophetic picture found there cannot be what Paul had in mind. In other words, any interpretation of the “unity” espoused here in *Ephesians* that would require a change or alteration in the substance of God’s purposes for Israel (or for mankind) cannot be what Paul intends to teach here.
    - a. Any interpretation of Paul here that would entail that God was not being straightforward in what he promised the Jews through his prophets (that is, any interpretation of Paul here that would entail that one cannot take what the prophets said at face value) must be rejected. In the absence of an explicit announcement by Paul that God had changed his plans and was going to do something different from what he said, it is unthinkable that Paul—steeped in the Jewish Scriptures as he was—would espouse a unity of believing Jew and believing Gentile that would entail that God had changed his plans and was taking his purposes in a completely new and different direction.
  4. If Paul is espousing a *homogenous* unity at all, then it would have to be that Gentiles are now to live exactly like Jews do and that they will have exactly the same blessings promised to them as the Jews do. It is unthinkable that Paul would espouse a *homogenous* unity that would require Jews to live exactly as Gentiles do and would require them to trade in their distinctive hope as Jews for the same hope of salvation that Gentiles have. That is, it is unthinkable that Paul would intend to suggest that Jews must abandon their distinctive Jewishness altogether.
    - a. In his other writings, Paul clearly rejects the idea that Gentiles must become exactly the same as Jews.
    - b. Since Paul does not require Gentiles to become as Jews, and he does not require Jews to become as Gentiles, then it follows that Paul cannot possibly be espousing any sort of *homogenous* unity between believing Jew and believing Gentile. It follows, by process of elimination, that Paul is espousing a *unity within diversity*. Paul does not believe that Jews and Gentiles become the same in Christ, they do not become *homogenous*. His contention, rather, is that—*different though they remain*—believing Jews and believing Gentiles become united in their being fellow-members of the eternal people of God.
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**BG. Brief statements that articulate the worldview that underlies the above passages:**

1. ***STATEMENT #24:** The Jews are the ethnic group descended from the man Jacob (renamed “Israel” by God). They are the ethnic group chosen by God to play a unique, distinctive role in the story of created reality. The Jews are a special people group to whom God has made unique promises and with whom God has entered into a unique agreement. No other people group in all of human history has a comparable relationship to God. They are the people group at the center of the most important subplot within the overarching storyline of created reality being authored by God.*
2. ***STATEMENT #25:** The story of the Jews is a story that dramatizes not only the righteousness and purity of God, but also the forbearance, constancy, and mercy of God. On the one hand, it is the story of how God—out of his uncompromising righteousness and opposition to evil—ultimately judges the Jewish people for the evil that they manifest in their stubborn refusal to acknowledge him. But, on the other hand, it is the story of how God eventually blesses that same people (the Jewish people) with every blessing that he had ever promised to them, even though—over the span of countless scores of generations—they had repeatedly failed to acknowledge him.*
3. ***STATEMENT #26:** The story of the Jews is a story of dramatic irony and inversion. It is the story of how a relatively small, unimportant, and subordinate people group becomes, at the end of history, the most important and most influential people group in the entire world.*
4. ***STATEMENT #27:** The subplot concerning the Jews is centered in the unique relationship that God promises to establish with the people of Israel—namely, that he will be “their god” if they will be “his people.”*
5. ***STATEMENT #28:** The terms and conditions of the unique relationship that God promises to establish with the Jews are all spelled out in a Covenant that God made with Israel in the time of Moses—namely, in the Law of Moses (the Mosaic Covenant). The subplot of the Jews centers in their interaction with and confrontation with this covenant that God made with Israel in the time of Moses.*
6. ***STATEMENT #29:** The subplot concerning the Jews is the story of Israel’s continuing and repeated failure to keep the terms of the Mosaic covenant juxtaposed against the repeated and ongoing willingness of God to forgive them their failure and to be faithful to keep the promises that he made to Israel.*
7. ***STATEMENT #30:** In the covenant that God made with Israel (the Mosaic Covenant), God promises to be their “god” (and therefore bless them in unique ways) if they will be his people (and therefore commit to honoring and respecting the unique requirements that his covenant places upon them). In his covenant with Israel, God promises to bless them with a specific set of blessings if they will simply strive to obey the demands that his covenant places on them. At the same time, he promises to curse them if they disregard those demands.*
8. ***STATEMENT #31:** The specific set of blessings that God promised to bestow upon his people, the Jews, if they would but obey his Law (his covenant) consists of the following promises: (1) he would make the Jewish people secure within a specific piece of real estate (namely, the land of Israel, a land which God had promised to give to Abraham and his descendants), (2) he would give Israel peace by protecting them from their enemies, (3) he would prosper Israel, showering them with material abundance, (4) he would dwell among them and be present with them (in the form*

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of his Messiah), (5) he would establish justice, truth, and goodness among all the people of Israel, and (6) he would give the people of Israel hegemony over all the other people groups on the earth.

9. *STATEMENT #32: After thousands of years of Israel disregarding God’s covenant with them, God will finally come in judgment against the Jews, his chosen people. God will destroy all of them except for a remnant. And, though the Jews had rejected God and failed to honor his covenant with them for thousands of years, yet God will forgive the people of Israel for its stubborn rejection of him and will—at the very end of history—bring into existence the Kingdom of God (in its historical manifestation). The Kingdom of God (in its historical manifestation) is the reality that God had repeatedly promised through his prophets to bring into being. The historical Kingdom of God will consist in this: from the remnant of Jews who survive the day of God’s wrath, God will raise up an entire population of Jews who will faithfully honor God by keeping his covenant. God will, in turn, bless that population of Jews with every blessing that he had ever promised the Jewish people throughout their generations—including the promise that Israel will have hegemony over all the other people groups on the earth. In this way, the people of Israel will experience the fulfillment of the promised Kingdom of God in history.*
10. *STATEMENT #33: Certain historical events have important implications for the people of Israel and are of such a nature that they amount to “good news” to the people of Israel. These “good news” events have one or more of the following implications: (1) God has not forsaken or rejected the people of Israel; God remains committed to being their God and to making them his people. (2) God is acting concretely within history to work toward the fulfillment of the promises that he has made to Israel. (3) God remains committed to blessing Israel with every blessing that he has ever promised to grant to them.*
11. *STATEMENT #34: The most important event that would amount to “good news” to the people of Israel would be the coming of God’s Messiah into history. The coming of the Messiah into history—after centuries of seeming silence and inactivity by God—would be an occasion of great joy to the Jews, because the coming of the Messiah would amount to God acting concretely to fulfill the promises he had made to Israel—for the Messiah is that particular individual who will reign as king of the Jews when God establishes the coming Kingdom of God in the final age of history. It is for this reason that Jesus identified his coming into history as “good news.”*
12. *STATEMENT #35: The DAY OF THE LORD is that time in the future when God’s Messiah, Jesus, will return into history to bring judgment against the people of Israel and then to establish the Kingdom of God within history. On the DAY OF THE LORD, God will judge and destroy every unrighteous Jew who has refused to honor God and his covenant. At the same time, he will spare and preserve a remnant of righteous Jews who are members of his chosen people Israel.*
13. *STATEMENT #36: The coming of the DAY OF THE LORD is not “good news” for any unrighteous Jew. The DAY OF THE LORD will be a terrible day for him. But the coming of the DAY OF THE LORD is “good news” for any righteous Jew. It will be a very good day for him.*

## Part Six: The Significant Roles Played by Jesus

(Some of the themes and passages highlighted in the notes below were already mentioned above in *Part Three: The Nature and Import of Jesus*. I include them again here simply for the sake of completeness.)

### A. Jesus serves as the centerpiece of the entire narrative being authored by the transcendent author.

#### 1. *Hebrews 1:2*

- a. Literally, "...whom he appointed heir of all things, with a view to [*dia*] whom indeed he made the ages [*aionas*].  
(A) A typical English translation mistranslates *aionas* as "world." Paul here is viewing God as the author of history [the ages] not as the craftsman of the material universe.
- b. Paul's explicit purpose here is to highlight the importance and significance of the one who has brought the newest and fullest revelation from God. Who is this one? He is the individual who is so important and significant that the entire narrative of created reality [the "ages"] is authored with a view to featuring him (with a view to exalting him).
- c. Paul is suggesting here that all of history (and hence, all of created reality) was made with Jesus, the Son of God, in view. In what sense is that true? Most probably in the sense that all of created reality has been created to lead to the exaltation of Jesus, God's Son.  
(A) Jesus is the centerpiece of the narrative being created by God in the sense that the entire narrative is designed to glorify Jesus and make him the foremost creature with regard to significance and importance.  
(B) It follows that everything that exists derives its meaning and significance from the man Jesus. One's meaning and significance is determined by one's relationship to Jesus.

2. *1 Corinthians 8:5–6* > "For even if there are so-called gods whether in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords, yet for us there is *but* one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we *exist* for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we *exist* through Him."
  - a. Paul's purpose here is to explain why a believer who understands the truth about who God is will not be inclined to view food that has been offered up to pagan idols in an act of religious worship as having any substantive significance. There are no gods except the one true God. So, food offered up to such false (non-existence) gods in worship is food being that is being used as part of a meaningless religious act. Therefore, whether one eats such food or does not eat such food is of no real consequence.



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- b. In the course of making the above point, Paul describes God himself as the one “*ek* [from] whom are all things.” Then Paul states that, corresponding to that truth, “we are *eis* [for] him. In other words, because God is the author and creator of every one of us, each and every one of us exists for [*eis*] him—which is to say, each and every one of us exists to benefit him and to serve his purposes.
- c. Paul then goes on to make the point that, for those of us who believe in Jesus, there is but one Lord (in contrast to the many fictional “lords” acknowledged by the pagans)—namely, Jesus the Messiah. Paul then describes Jesus the Messiah as the one *dia* [by] whom are all things. And then Paul states that, corresponding to that truth, “we are *dia* [through] him.
- (A) Contrary to how the typical English translation seems to understand Paul’s point here, Paul is not attributing to Jesus the Messiah some role as an agent in our creation. We were not created *by* Jesus. Rather, we were created *with a view to* Jesus. In other words, the fact that God’s end purpose for created reality was to bring glory and honor to Jesus the Messiah was the fact in view whenever God created or authored anything that he created and authored. In other words, Jesus the Messiah was the one *with a view to* [*dia*] whom all things exist. It follows from that—Paul asserts—that we Jesus-believers exist *with a view to* [*dia*] him [Jesus] as well. In other words, it is the purpose I serve *vis à vis* Jesus that gives meaning, purpose, and significance to my existence. It is to him that I owe the very meaning of my existence. Hence, setting aside my obligation to God, it is to Jesus (and Jesus alone) that I owe any allegiance as “Lord.” It is to him (and him alone) that I owe worship.
- d. So, expressed concisely in the two simple assertions about Jesus here—[1] δι’ οὗ τὰ πάντα = with a view to whom are all things; and [2] καὶ ἡμεῖς δι’ αὐτοῦ = and we exist with a view to him—is a very profound truth. Everything that exists and everything that occurs does so in order to bring glory and honor to Jesus the Messiah. Jesus is the centerpiece of God’s created narrative. Every other part of God’s narrative exists to contribute to the ultimate exaltation of Jesus the Messiah. Everything else in God’s narrative (God’s creation) derives its purpose, meaning, and significance from its relation to Jesus.
3. **Colossians 1:16** > “For by [*en*] him all things were created, *both* in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities — all things have been created through [*dia*] him and for [*eis*] him.”
- a. Paul’s purpose here is to articulate the important, exalted status of Jesus, the Son of God, whose kingdom we have inherited through our belief in him. In this verse, Paul makes three significant assertions:
- (A) All things were created *en* Jesus. = All things were created for Jesus. = All things were created for the benefit of Jesus.
- (1) **Not**: all things were created *by* him.

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- (B) All things have been created *dia* Jesus. = All things have been created with a view to Jesus. = All things have been created for the purpose of doing for Jesus exactly what God had purposed for him. = All things have been created for the purpose of bringing glory and honor to Jesus.
- (1) **Not:** all things were created *through* him.
- (C) All things have been created *eis* Jesus == All things have been created for Jesus = All things have been created for the purpose of doing for Jesus exactly what God had purposed for him. = All things have been created for the purpose of bringing glory and honor to Jesus.
- (1) This is just another way of saying, in a slightly different way and from a slightly different angle, the same thing that Paul just stated in the preceding assertion. (See the note just above.) Paul just uses a different preposition here to make what is essentially the same assertion.
- (a) While an unlikely sentence, we would have no difficulty, in English, understanding someone saying, "That team was beaten with and by defense." But what is the difference between being beaten with defense and being beaten by defense? None, really. One would include both for some sort of rhetorical effect.
- (2) Typical English translation is, I think, correct: all things were created *for* him.
- b. Paul's point in the assertion taken in its entirety is, quite simply, that everything that is and everything that occurs does so to benefit Jesus, to serve God's purposes for Jesus, and to lead to the exaltation of Jesus.
- (A) In other words, everything that is and everything that occurs does so in order to bring glory and honor to Jesus the Messiah. Jesus is the centerpiece of God's created narrative. Every other part of God's narrative exists to contribute to his ultimate exaltation. Everything else in God's narrative (in God's creation) derives its purpose, meaning, and significance from its relation to Jesus.
4. **Romans 11:36** > Speaking with reference to *God* himself (and not Jesus), Paul writes, "For from [*ek*] him and through [*dia*] him and to [*eis*] him are all things."
- a. Note that, just as he does in *1 Corinthians* 8:5, Paul states that all things are from [*ek*] God. There is no instance where Paul states that all things are from [*ek*] Jesus. It is unique to God that he is the source of and agency behind all things that exist. God is the creator. Jesus is not.
- b. Note that Paul states here that all things are *dia* [*with a view to* {not through}] God. As we saw above, Paul makes a parallel statement with regard to Jesus. All things are *dia* [*with a view to* {not through}] Jesus. Both of these claims are true. On the one hand, everything that exists does so in order to advance the purpose of bringing honor to [*dia*] God. On the other hand, everything that exists does so in order to advance the

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purpose of bringing honor to [*dia*] Jesus. For one of God's central purposes in created reality is to glorify and exalt Jesus.

- c. Note that, consistent with what he states in *1 Corinthians* 8:5, Paul states here that all things are for [*eis*] God. As we saw above, Paul makes a parallel statement with regard to Jesus. All things are for [*eis*] Jesus. Both of these claims are true. On the one hand, everything that exists does so in order to serve the purposes of and to benefit [*eis*] God. On the other hand, everything that exists does so in order to serve the purposes of and to benefit [*eis*] Jesus. For one of God's central purposes in created reality is to glorify and exalt Jesus.
5. **Revelation 22:13** (Jesus speaking) > "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end."
- (A) Jesus is saying that, at the very beginning of created reality, he is there as the one in view of whom everything that God plans to bring into being will be brought into being. [He is the Alpha.] AND, he is the one toward whom everything that God brings into existence is aimed at serving in some way. [He is the Omega.]
- (1) This is equivalent to saying that Jesus is the one *dia* whom are all things [the Alpha], and Jesus is the one *eis* whom are all things [the Omega]. [See *Colossians* 1:16]
- a. **Revelation 1:8** (God himself speaking) > "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."
- (A) Being "the Alpha and the Omega" is not synonymous with him being he "who is and who was and who is to come" anymore than it is synonymous with him being "the Almighty." These are three separate and distinct descriptions of God.
- (B) It seems likely to me that being described as "the Alpha and the Omega" here is meant in the same sense that it is in *Revelation* 21:6. See below.
- b. **Revelation 21:6** (God himself speaking) > "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end."
- (A) God is saying that, at the very beginning of created reality, he is there as the one in view of whom everything that he plans to bring into being will be brought into being [he is the Alpha]. AND, he is the one toward whom everything that he brings into being is aimed at serving in some way [he is the Omega].
- (B) These different assertions, in *Revelation* 22:13 and in *Revelation* 21:6 and 1:8, are not in conflict with one another. Both are true. God is the **ultimate, uncreated** Alpha and Omega of created reality. Jesus is the **created** Alpha and Omega of created reality.

**B. Jesus is a human being who is the image of the invisible God.**

1. Traditional Christianity tends to view Jesus as being God, in the form of a man.

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- a. The typical view within traditional Christianity is that, simply speaking, Jesus is God. Yet, at the same time, Jesus is a human being in some significant sense.
  - b. He is God having condescended to appear in the form of a human being.
  - c. In other words, Jesus is a person who is ontologically one and the same with the transcendent God, but he is that transcendent God located within the confines of a human being.
  - d. Emphasis is upon Jesus being God.
2. The Bible views Jesus as being a human being, who is God.
    - a. The biblical view is that, simply speaking, Jesus is a human being. Yet, at the same time, Jesus is God in some significant sense.
    - b. Jesus is a person who is ontologically human, but he is a human being who uniquely images the particular, individual person who God himself is.
    - c. Jesus is a human being who represents and reflects the person of the transcendent creator. He is a human being who serves as the presence of God himself dwelling with and among us.
    - d. Presumption is that Jesus is a human being. But he is a unique human being, for he uniquely represents the very person of the transcendent creator.
  3. ***Colossians 1:15*** > “He [Jesus] is the image [*eikon*] of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.”
    - a. God himself is invisible and unseeable. Paul’s point is that God created Jesus to be a concrete, tangible, visible expression or representation of himself. In a significant sense, in Jesus, the invisible God made himself visible.
    - b. In this statement, Paul is concisely expressing his view that, in Jesus, we have an image or reflection of God himself.
      - (A) It seems clear to me that Paul is saying more than that, in Jesus, we have an image or reflection of deity. Rather, he is saying that, in Jesus, we have an image or reflection of that specific, particular, individual person who is the transcendent author of all reality.
        - (1) Genesis states that mankind in general was created in the image of God. This is an entirely different claim than what Paul is making here about Jesus. A human being exists in the “image of God” because the personhood of a human being reflects and imitates the personhood of God himself. Jesus IS the image of the invisible God because he uniquely represents and reflects the particular person that God is.
    - c. The “firstborn of all creation” asserts that Jesus is the one who has inherited the very authority of God himself over the created order. He is the firstborn in the sense that he

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is the heir of all that God gives and of all that God is. He, therefore, is the creature who possesses a higher authority than any other creature. See *Psalm* 89:27.

4. **Hebrews 1:1-4** > God, having spoken in past times in many portions and in many ways to the fathers through the prophets, has in the last of these days spoken to us through the Son—the one whom he appointed heir of all things, the one with a view to whom he did, in fact, make the ages, **the one who, being a shining forth of the Glory, is indeed the stamp of his particular personal identity**—even supporting everything that the Son said by the divinely powerful utterance spoken by him. When he had performed the ritual cleansing for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much greater than the *angeli* as the name he had inherited was more distinguished than theirs. {my translation}
- a. The phrase, “who...is the stamp of his particular personal identity” is the way I have rendered “who is the *charakter* of his *hupostasis*.”
- (A) The word *charakter* means a stamp. If one were to take a signet ring and “stamp” it into soft wax, the image that the ring left behind in the wax would be the *charakter* of the signet ring.
- (B) The word *hupostasis* (typically translated “substance”) is difficult to translate well. A *hupostasis* is a particular, individual being. Here, when Paul refers to “the *hupostasis*,” he means, in this context, the *hupostasis* of God himself. By the *hupostasis* of God himself, in this context, Paul means the particular, individual person that God himself is. Hence, Paul is saying that Jesus, the Son, is the image, the representation, the outline left in some medium of the very person that the transcendent God is.
- (1) Note, Paul does not say that Jesus, the Son, just is the *hupostasis* of God. Rather, he says that he is the stamp [*charakter*] of the *hupostasis* of God. In other words, Paul does not say that Jesus is God, he says that Jesus is the image of God.
5. **John 1:14–18** > Indeed, **the Logos became a human being and dwelt among us**, and we saw his glory, glory as of the unique one from the Father, full of grace and truth. John gave testimony concerning him and cried out, saying, “This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me has a higher status than I, for he was prior to me.’” So then, of his fullness we have all received, even grace on top of grace. For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ. **No one has seen God at any time; the unique Son, the one who is at the bosom of the Father, that one has translated him.** {my translation}
- a. John says directly and explicitly that the *Logos* (by which he means God himself, the mind who authors the narrative script for all of created reality) became a human being [literally, he became “flesh”]. But what does he mean? In what sense did the *Logos* become a human being? Did the transcendent author of all reality locate himself within a human life? Or, did the transcendent author of all reality create a human being who would live in the midst of us human beings and would represent the transcendent

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author of all reality to mankind? In view of all the other statements made in the New Testament, John likely means the latter, not the former.

(A) Would the former even be possible? How can the transcendent author of all reality exist inside of reality?

- b. John highlights an important ramification of God sending his unique Son, the Messiah, into history. God is invisible. No one has ever seen God. No one ever will see God. But, since the Son has entered into history, human beings now have a "translation" of God available to them. John does not say that the Son is the unseen God himself. He says that he is a translation of the unseen God. This is very much in keeping with what Paul says in *Colossians*. Paul does not say that Jesus is the invisible God. Rather, he says he is the image of the invisible God.

(A) John is saying that Jesus represents who God is by translating the individual personal identity of the transcendent creator into the medium of a human person. We human beings would have trouble apprehending and understanding the creator in his transcendence. God exists in a completely different ontological domain. He does not exist in our domain alongside of us. Jesus, on the other hand, does exist in our ontological domain alongside us. He is one of us. We can understand him, relate to him, and apprehend who he is. Hence, if Jesus "interprets" God to us, then he is God himself translated into a specific medium and, hence, into a specific language—one that we can understand and apprehend. But, if Jesus is a translation of the creator, then to know Jesus is to know the creator.

6. Note that all three of the above passages present the same view of Jesus. None of them say that Jesus is the transcendent creator. All of them say that Jesus is a representation of the transcendent creator. In their view, Jesus is a human being who represents the transcendent creator to mankind. He is the image of the invisible God, the "stamp" of God's very person, or the translation of the unseeable God into the medium (or language) of a human life.

7. **John 14: 6–12** > Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through me. If you knew me, you would know my Father also. From now on you know him and have seen him."

Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us."

Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and *yet* you have not come to know me, Philip? He who has seen me has seen the Father; how *can* you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am with the Father, and the Father is with me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own initiative, and the Father, abiding with me, does his works. Believe me that I am with the Father and the Father is with me; otherwise believe because of the works themselves. Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in me, the works that I do, he will do also. And greater works than these he will do, because I go to the Father."

- a. Jesus is telling his disciples explicitly that if they have seen and known him [Jesus], then they have seen and known the Father. There are two ways we could understand what Jesus is saying by this:

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(A) Jesus could be saying that the Father is actually existing ontologically inside of himself [Jesus]. In which case, then, to see and know Jesus is to see and know the Father, because the transcendent author of reality is literally located within Jesus himself. To make contact with Jesus is literally to make contact with God himself, the transcendent author of all reality.

(1) This is possibly how the typical Christian tends to understand what Jesus is saying here.

(B) Or, alternatively, Jesus could be saying that, because he (Jesus) is an accurate representation or portrayal of the Father, then, if one knows Jesus, he thereby knows the Father. Jesus has disclosed who the Father is by “translating” him into the form of a human life. Hence, if you know Jesus, then you know who God is.

(1) If I read a Russian novel that has been translated into English, it can rightly be said that I have read the novel. Because I do not read, write, or speak Russian, I have not read the original novel itself. But I have read how the novel was represented to me in English. Assuming that the representation of it (the translation) was “accurate,” by reading the English translation I have become acquainted with the novel itself.

(2) According to this second option for what Jesus meant by what he said, my comment about reading an English translation of a Russian novel results in my knowing the novel is the same sort of thing that Jesus is saying about himself. If you know Jesus (*the translation of the Father into a human life*), then you have come to be acquainted with the Father himself.

b. In the light of every other N.T. passage we have looked at, it seems incontrovertible that Jesus intended us to understand his words in the way they are taken by the second option articulated just above, not the first option. Because he is the translation of God into the medium of a human life, if you have seen and known him, you have seen and known the Father.

### C. Jesus serves as a proxy for the sovereign rule of God himself.

#### 1. Jesus is the “Son of God”

##### a. **2 Samuel 7:12–16** (discussed earlier)

(A) In this (the Davidic Covenant) God promises David that the relationship he will establish between himself and the individual on the throne of David is this: “I will be a Father to him and he will be a Son to me.”

(1) In the ancient world, at the time God makes this promise to David, there was a widespread concept that the human king who ruled over a people was the Son of the god of that people. [e.g., Pharaoh was the Son of Ammon Re (and earlier the Son of Horus).] The concept seemed to be this: the human king who ruled over the people represented the rule of their god over the people. The

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human king was a proxy for their god. He stood in for him and embodied the god’s rule over his people.

(2) Hence, God was saying to David that he intended to establish the throne of David to be a locus for his own authority. The Davidic king would now be a proxy for God himself. The authority of the Davidic king was a representation of the authority of God himself.

(a) When we get to Jesus—the **unique** [*monogenes*] Son of God—we no longer have a human proxy who is just nominally the representative of God. Now we have a human individual who is in reality a true representation of God. That is why Paul can call him the “image” of the invisible God. Jesus does not just nominally stand for God. He is the locus of all that God is. The Father’s purposes and agenda are Jesus’s purpose and agenda. The Father’s authority is granted to Jesus. The person that the Father is imaged and outlined in the person that Jesus is. And more...

b. **Psalm 2** (discussed earlier)

(A) This psalm links the honor of the Son with the honor of Yahweh. It would clearly seem to be the case that the Davidic king reigning in Israel is being viewed as a proxy for Yahweh himself.

c. **Many different assertions in the New Testament**

(A) *John 3:16* > “...that he gave his *monogenes* **Son**...” (John)

(B) *Matthew 16:16* > “...You are the Christ, the **Son** of the Living God.” (Peter)

(C) *Mathew 26:63* > “tell us whether you are the Christ, the **Son** of God.” (High Priest)

d. It is beyond the scope of these notes to demonstrate this claim here. But the following is a claim that could be demonstrated from the New Testament about the following titles used for Jesus: **the Son = the Son of God = the Son of Man = the son of David = the Messiah (Christ) = the King of Israel = various other titles that are used less frequently** {The One, the Righteous One, The Coming One}.

2. Jesus is the “Messiah”

a. **Psalm 2** (discussed earlier)

(A) The title *Messiah* is clearly given to the Davidic king reigning in Israel. It means exactly the same thing as “Son of God” with all of the same ramifications.

b. **Psalm 89** (discussed earlier)

(A) The title *Messiah* is clearly given to David himself. (*Psalm 89:20, 38*) It means exactly the same thing as “Son of God” with all the same ramifications.

c. **Innumerable passages in the New Testament**



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(A) Whenever one encounters the English word “Christ” in the Bible, it means “the Messiah.”

(1) The English word “Christ” is a transliteration of the Greek word *christos* which is a translation of the Hebrew word *mashiach* (transliterated into English as “Messiah”), which means “one who has been anointed.”

3. Jesus is King of the Jews.

a. **John 1:49** > Nathanael answered Him, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel.”

b. **John 6:15** > So Jesus, perceiving that they were intending to come and take him by force to make him king, withdrew again to the mountain by himself alone.

c. **John 18:33–19:22**

(A) The whole interchange between Jesus and Pilate and the whole “trial” before Pilate was focused on whether Jesus claimed to be a king—specifically, the king of the Jews. Jesus says that he is, and that it is for that very purpose that he has come into being, on the one hand. But, on the other hand, he assures Pilate that he is no rival to Caesar, since his kingdom is not a part of the world order within which Pilate and Caesar are operating. And by that he means that the time and place in history within which he will reign over a physical kingdom is not concurrent with the reign of Caesar.

4. Jesus is King over all creation.

a. **Psalm 8; Hebrews 2:1–9**

(A) The description of the Son’s authority here seems to be intended to describe the Son, the Messiah, as being given dominion and authority over everything that God has created, including nature.

(1) **Hebrews 2:10** > referring to Jesus, “...it was fitting for him, for [*dia*] whom are **all things**, and through [*dia*] him are **all things**, ... .” {NASV}

(a) referring to Jesus, “...it was fitting for him, the one because of [*dia*] whom all things exist and in view of [*dia*] whom him all things exist, ... .” {better translation}

[A] Note how, in this paragraph, Paul connects our point A. above (Jesus serves as the centerpiece of the entire narrative being authored by the transcendent author) with this point: Jesus has been granted authority over everything in created reality; he is King over all creation. In other words, not only was Jesus granted dominion over all things, but he was created in the first place to be the centerpiece of the narrative of what all things are a part.

b. **1 Corinthians 15:20–28**

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(A) Paul cites *Psalm 8* in this set of assertions here. He infers from the fact that “all things” will be put in subjection under the Messiah’s feet, that even death itself—the last enemy—will be made subject to the will of the Messiah and, as a consequence, abolished. Since death is an abstract reality and even that is included in the “all things” that are subject to the authority of the Messiah, one can reasonably conclude that—as Paul reads *Psalm 8*—there is nothing in all of created reality that is not placed under the authority of God’s Messiah by God.

c. **Mark 4:39** (and the parallel accounts)

(A) In this miracle here—where he commands the wind and the waves, Jesus demonstrates dramatically that he has authority even over nature itself.

**D. Jesus serves as the most important Prophet sent from God.**

1. **Hebrews 1:1**

a. Jesus is the one who has put the entire picture of God’s purposes together for us. The O.T. prophets only gave us “portions” of the picture. But Jesus has come along and filled out the entire picture.

2. **John 1:4–9**

a. Jesus was the true light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man.

(A) Light is a metaphor for that understanding that allows one to “see” reality for what it is.

(1) Light can figuratively denote the knowledge that leads one to have an understanding of reality; or it can figuratively denote the source of that knowledge (a teacher, prophet, etc.)

(a) We use “light” to denote the energy that makes vision possible; but we also use it to denote the source of such energy (a light bulb, lamp, etc.) This is analogous to how N.T. uses “light.” They use it to denote knowledge and understanding itself. Or, they use it to denote the source of that knowledge and understanding.

[A] To say that Jesus was the “true light” is to say that he was the true and authentic teacher sent by God to enlighten every man.

3. **John 3:16–19**

a. Jesus is the light which has come into the world. (See note just above.) Judgment will be based upon what an individual does with the light (knowledge and understanding) that Jesus brought into the world—whether he accepted it and embraced it, or rejected it.

4. **John 8:12, 9:5**

a. Jesus is the light of the world, the light of Life.

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b. See two previous notes.

(A) The "light of Life" is the knowledge about and understanding of how an individual attains to eternal Life. Hence, it is the knowledge and understanding that leads to and results in eternal Life.

5. **John 12:35–36a**

a. Jesus was the Light who came into history among human beings. So long as he was here among us human beings, teaching us, we had a source of knowledge and understanding (from God) that enlightened us as to the nature of God's reality and purposes, especially as to the way to attain Life.

(A) Once Jesus is no longer among us, teaching us, then the world sinks back into relative darkness. We no longer have an infallible teacher who can teach us the way.

6. **Deuteronomy 18:9-22** (especially, **Deuteronomy 18:18**); **Acts 3:22-23, 7:37**

a. There are two possible ways one might understand *Deuteronomy 18:9-22*.

(A) First possible understanding of this passage: Moses instructs Israel that they are not to seek to know the future by resorting to divination and other heathen practices. If and when God wants to reveal the future to them, he will send a prophet to inform them. Rather than diviners, they should look to a prophet (an individual like Moses) whom God will raise up to speak to the people of Israel and tell them what it is that God has instructed him to tell the people of Israel. Since he speaks for God, Israel must not disregard the words of such a prophet.

(1) In *Deuteronomy 18:16–20*, Moses explains that God communicating with Israel through prophets is perfectly in keeping with what they (the people of Israel) said they wanted and with what God himself concurred would be a good thing. Moses reports what Yahweh said to him after the people complained that they did not want to hear from God directly. Namely, Yahweh told Moses that the people were right in their desire not to hear from him directly. So, he will raise up a prophet to speak to the people instead of speaking to them directly. (In other words Yahweh declares that he is establishing the office of "prophet" to be the way he communicates with Israel.)

(B) Second possible understanding of this passage: Virtually the same as (A) above, but with a different take on *Deuteronomy 18:16–20*.

(1) In *Deuteronomy 18:16–20*, Moses explains that God communicating with Israel through prophets is perfectly in keeping with what they (the people of Israel) said they wanted and with what God himself concurred would be a good thing. Moses reports what Yahweh said to him after the people complained that they did not want to hear from God directly. Namely, Yahweh told Moses that the people were right in their desire not to hear from him directly. Yahweh then predicts that he will send to Israel a prophet (like Moses) and that God will judge individual Israelites in accord with whether they heed what that

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Prophet says. *It is not a prediction of the office of a "prophet," rather, it is the prediction of a specific individual prophet whom God intends to send.*

(a) Arguably, the Prophet that Moses had in mind was the one we know as Jesus the Messiah.

(C) To determine which of these ways is the right way to understand *Deuteronomy* 18:16–20, we must explore how the disciples understood *Deuteronomy* 18:16–20.

b. How are we to understand *Acts* 3:22-23?

(A) Here is a paraphrase of *Acts* 3:17–23 >

- (1) *Acts* 3:17–18 > You, my Jewish brothers, did not realize what you were doing—neither did your leaders who orchestrated Jesus’s death. But when you killed the Messiah, Jesus, you were simply fulfilling all the predictions that were made by God’s prophets to the effect that God’s Messiah was going to be killed.
- (2) *Acts* 3:19–21 > So, now, repent of your ignorant unbelief and return to a right relationship to God so that your sins might be forgiven and that, as a result, God might bring about the fulfillment of all that he has promised you: (i) peace from all your enemies when he brings the kingdom of God into being, and (ii) the return of Jesus into history to rule as king over that kingdom of God where God will bless Israel with everything that he has ever promised to them through his prophets
- (3) *Acts* 3:22–23 > Peter simply summarizes and paraphrases the essence of the statement Moses makes in *Deuteronomy* 18:18–19 > “The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your brethren; you shall give heed to everything he says to you. And it will be that every soul that does not heed that prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.”
- (4) *Acts* 3:24–26 > All of God’s prophets, from Samuel forward have spoken of the days when God would establish his kingdom and bless Israel with every blessing. You, my brother Jews, are the children of these prophets and of the covenant that God made with our fathers. He said to Abraham, “And in your seed, all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” So, God raised his servant Jesus from the dead first and foremost for you, sending him to bless you with the promised blessing of Abraham by turning you away from your wicked ways

(B) We saw above that *Acts* 3:22–23 must mean one of two things:

- (1) Moses announced the creation of the role of a prophet, and he warned Israel that the pronouncements of a prophet must be listened to and heeded. Hence, you must give heed to the announcement of the coming kingdom of God that has been predicted by all the prophets from Samuel forward.

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- (2) Moses predicted the coming of Jesus, a unique prophet who would be like Moses himself in some important respect, and he warned that he must be listened to and heeded. So, Jesus must not be ignored, you must listen to what he says.
- (C) Given the above structure to *Acts* 3:17–23, the first option just above makes more sense than the second option.
- (1) It would seem then that the purpose of *Acts* 3:22-23 is to highlight the imperative that is attached to heeding what a prophet of God says: “...God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brethren; *to him you shall give heed to everything he says to you.* And it will be that *every soul that does not heed that prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.*” [emphasis mine]
- (a) In this context, Peter is saying this: Since all the prophets predicted the death of the Messiah and everything surrounding the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and then the return of Jesus to establish the kingdom that all the prophets promised, then one is disregarding the prophets of God if he rejects the truth that God’s Messiah, Jesus, is going to return and establish his kingdom. Not to repent and put one’s hope in that coming kingdom is a fatal mistake.
- (D) It seems clear, then, that Peter takes *Deuteronomy* 18:16–20 to be a declaration that God has established the “office” of prophet as his way to communicate with Israel and that he expects Israel to treat it with the utmost respect. God will destroy anyone who does not give heed to what the prophets say. Hence, Peter seems to interpret *Deuteronomy* 18:16–20 along the lines described above in the first of the two possible ways to take *Deuteronomy* 18:9-22.
- c. How are we to understand *Acts* 7:37 ?
- (A) There is no good reason to think that Stephen’s understanding of *Deuteronomy* 18:18 is any different from Peter’s understanding of it in his *Acts* 3 teaching. Namely, as a promise of God’s creating the role of the prophet for Israel.
- d. CONCLUSION:
- (A) On the one hand, *Deuteronomy* 18:9-22 (especially. 18:18), *Acts* 3:22-23, and *Acts* 7:37 do not seem to warrant seeing Jesus as some particular “Prophet” predicted by Yahweh to Moses.
- (B) On the other hand, we do see evidence in the gospel accounts that Jesus does belong to the category of prophet. Jesus is a prophet to Israel; indeed, he is the most important prophet to Israel. And as a prophet, he must not be disregarded—just as Moses warns.

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(1) Jesus speaks that which God has given him to say. His words are God’s words. One dare not ignore him.

(C) See *John* 12:44–50, 14:10, among others.

(1) Jesus tells his disciples explicitly that what he says to them are things that have come from his Father. Jesus teaches and speaks what his Father gives him to teach and speak.

**E. Jesus serves as the basis of salvation.**

1. Jesus is our Advocate and/or our Intercessor.

a. *Hebrews* 4:14–10:25 (4:14–5:10; 6:19–20; 7:11–7:28, 8:1–10:25)

(A) Nowhere in Paul’s extended argument about how and why it makes sense that the Messiah had to die does Paul argue that he had to die to make “full payment” for our sins. Rather, his argument is that the Messiah was appointed to be *the TRUE high priest* who approaches God on our behalf to secure mercy for us. As the true high priest, it was his role to present to God a propitiatory offering as a part of his appeal for mercy. In order for his propitiatory offering to be acceptable and pleasing to God (and, hence, effectively propitiatory), he could not offer up animals, in accordance with the Mosaic Covenant. Instead, Jesus offered himself up to God. Jesus himself became the propitiatory offering that he offered up to God as an appeal to God for mercy.

(1) Throughout his extended argument, Paul’s emphasis is on Jesus’s role as our true high priest, not upon Jesus’s death. Jesus’s death was crucial. That is beyond question. But Jesus’s death by itself is not determinative. It is Jesus’s intercession that saves us, not Jesus’s death.

b. *1 John* 2:1–2 > “...I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an **Advocate** with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for *those of the whole world.*” {NASV}

(A) John uses “advocate” [*parakletos*] here in the sense of one who speaks for us as an intercessor. When it comes to my judgment, Jesus is the one who will appeal to God for mercy on my behalf. John uses the word “advocate” [*parakletos*] here as a synonym for intercessor.

(1) The Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth—in the Upper Room Discourse in the gospel of John—is the *parakletos* who represents God to mankind and speaks to mankind on behalf of God. Jesus, here in *1 John* is the *parakletos* who represents mankind to God and speaks to God on behalf of mankind (at least, on behalf of the elect).

(B) Note how John connects Jesus’s role as our “advocate” [*parakletos*] with his role as “the propitiation for our sins.” (See point 2. just below.)

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(C) Note John’s point: I encourage you not to sin, but to the extent that you find yourself sinning, remember that we have an Advocate.

(1) Note that the following is NOT John’s point: I encourage you not to sin, but to the extent that you find yourself sinning, remember that the penalty for our sin has been paid in full. John’s emphasis is placed on Jesus’s role as our advocate and intercessor. It is on the personal advocacy of Jesus, not on an abstract fact that we are no longer liable for our sins.

2. Jesus is the propitiatory offering offered up on our behalf, appealing to God for mercy.

- a. **1 John 2:1–2, 4:10** > • “My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He Himself is the **propitiation** for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for *those of the whole world*.” {2:1-2, NASV, emphasis mine}  
• “In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son *to be the propitiation* for our sins. {4:10, NASV, emphasis mine}

(A) Propitiation is NOT the payment of our debt to divine justice, a debt that results from our transgressions. Rather, it is the melting away of God’s wrath. To propitiate someone who is wrathful means to do something that is so pleasing and delightful to them that it eclipses their wrath. What greatly pleases the wrathful person becomes the the thing that governs how he responds to the one who made him angry rather than the thing that caused him to be wrathful. Hence, for Jesus to be the propitiation for our sins means that Jesus made himself so pleasing and delightful to God—because of his heroic obedience to God’s will—that, in the face of Jesus’s intercession, God focuses willingly on Jesus and his appeal for mercy rather than focusing on my wrath-provoking sin.

b. **John 10:11–18**

(A) In this parable, Jesus compares himself to a “good shepherd” who has a stake and interest in the flock (*vis à vis* a hired hand). The “good shepherd” is willing to lay down his life for the sake of the flock.

(1) Note 10:17. Jesus says that the Father loves him precisely because of his willingness to die (but with the expectation of his being raised back up again).

(a) And note 10:18. Jesus also makes it clear that he went to his death willingly, at his initiative.

c. **Romans 3:21–26**

• Now then, apart from the Covenant, a *dikaioisune* from God has been made manifest, attested to by the *Torah* and the Prophets—even a *dikaioisune* from God granted to all those who believe in view of their belief concerning Jesus, the *messiah*. 3:21–22a

• Now there is no distinction. Indeed, all have sinned and come short of the glory of God and are decreed *dikaiois* as a gift by his grace in view of the redemption price which was paid by the Messiah, Jesus—the very one whom God purposed **as a pro-**

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**propitiatory offering** with a view to our believing in his blood. This was for an indication of his righteousness in the face of the overlooking of our previously committed sins by the forbearance of God. It was toward an indication of his righteousness in the time here and now, to the end that he might be righteous even as he is the one who decrees the unrighteous person *dikaïos* on the basis of his belief in Jesus. 3:22b–26

(A) Here Paul draws an explicit connection between Jesus's death as a propitiatory offering and Jesus's death as an indication of God's righteousness

- (1) Jesus's death has propitiatory value because it comes about as a result of Jesus's heroic obedience and God-like love for those whom God has given to Jesus.
- (2) Jesus's death has value in indicating God's righteousness, because the meaning and significance of his death arises from its being a depiction of what each of us deserve because of our sinfulness. When God forgives or overlooks our sin, it is NOT because he is morally lax. It is because he is profoundly merciful. By depicting in Jesus what I actually deserve because of my sin, there can be no question but what God is righteous, not lax.
  - (a) **Romans 6:1–4a** > In this part of Paul's argument he provides an important clue as to what the meaning and significance of Jesus's death on the cross was. Jesus died so that we might know and understand exactly what God thinks of human sin. He hates it and believes that it deserves destruction. We see that fact depicted in Jesus's crucifixion. Indeed, that is the very meaning of Jesus's death. Jesus's death is meant to represent what God thinks of human sin and to represent what I deserve because of my sin. That is why it is absurd to think that I could "continue in sin so that grace might increase." Jesus's crucifixion makes clear that God has not tolerance for sin. If I have embraced the truth of what God thinks of human sin when I embraced the truth that the crucified Jesus is Lord and Messiah, then it is utterly unthinkable to consider "purposefully continuing in sin" just because God, as an act of grace, is willing to forgive and overlook my sin.

F. **Jesus serves as a touchstone, determining who will be granted mercy and who will be condemned.**

1. *John* 3:16–19

- a. The typical reading of *John* 3:16 is mistaken. John is not saying, "God loved the world so...ooo very much, that it even induced him to send his Son..." Rather, it should read like this: "God loved the world is just this particular way: he gave his *monogenes* Son in order that whoever believed in him might not perish, but have *aionic* Life."



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- (A) God’s love for the world is not his feelings of affection toward the world. God’s love for the world is his action in relation to the world: he sent his Son to make salvation from death possible.
- b. John is saying that the *monogenes* Son that God sent into history is the touchstone for who will be condemned to death and who will instead being granted Life. The one who believes in the *monogenes* Son, he is the one who will not perish, but will instead be granted eternal (*aionic*) Life.
2. *John 6:26–59*
- a. *John 6:29* is making exactly the same claim as *John 3:16*.
- (A) The work that one must do that will result in eternal (*aionic*) Life is the work of “believing in him whom he [God] has sent”—namely, believing in Jesus, the Son of God.
- (1) Note: Jesus says that it is the “Son of Man” who will give eternal (*aionic*) Life to a human individual.
- (2) Note: Jesus will give eternal (*aionic*) Life to an individual because the Father, God, has set his seal on that individual.
- b. Speaking metaphorically, in 6:31–35, Jesus proclaims that he is the true bread out of heaven—that is, he, not manna, is the source of real Life that comes from God.
- (A) Manna gave life to the people of Israel, but it was not eternal (*aionic*) Life. Jesus is the source of eternal (*aionic*) Life. He is the “bread” that gives true Life.
- c. Note (in 6:36–40) the direct correlation between those whom the Father has given to the Son (and has chosen for eternal Life) and those who believe in the Son.
- (A) And note that Jesus claims that it is he who will grant eternal (*aionic*) Life to those who believe in him on the last day. (See 6:40)
- d. In 6:53–58, Jesus connects attaining eternal (*aionic*) Life with eating Jesus flesh and drinking his blood (=believing in Jesus’s death on the cross as that which provides the basis for one’s salvation).
3. *John 12:47–48*
- a. The basis for judgment will be how one has responded to Jesus and his teaching. The one who embraces the truth about Jesus and the truth that he came into the world to proclaim, that one will be granted eternal (*aionic*) Life. The one who rejects Jesus and the truth that he came into the world to proclaim, that one will be condemned to death and destruction.
- (A) Note *John 5:24*
4. The fact that eternal (*aionic*) Life {the blessing of Abraham} is connected to Jesus, rather than to the Law is the “secret hidden from past ages and generations.” Eternal (*aionic*) Life is granted to those who believe in Jesus (and not to those who keep the Law of

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Moses). That was the earthshaking, revolutionary claim being made by Jesus repeatedly throughout his teaching.

**G. Jesus serves as the judge of mankind.**

1. *John* 5:16–30

a. In *John* 5:21–23, Jesus asserts that the authority to grant Life that inherently belongs to God (the Father) has been delegated to himself (the Son). Hence, the human being Jesus has been given authority by God to decide who will receive Life and who will not.

b. In *John* 5:25–29, Jesus explains that he will exercise the authority given to him when he returns at the last hour. Jesus will voice something (a command, an invitation, a whatever) and those who “hear” it will be granted eternal (*aionic*) Life.

(A) The Father has given it to the Son to “have [the authority to grant] Life in himself.” {See 5:26}

(B) God gave Jesus the “authority to execute judgment.” {See 5:27}

c. In *John* 5:28, Jesus reiterates that those in the graves who hear his voice (a command, an invitation, a whatever) will come forth and will be granted eternal (*aionic*) Life.

d. In *John* 5:30, Jesus emphasizes that—when he exercises the authority delegated to him to pass judgment—he will do only that which accords with God’s will. Jesus will not exercise his own discretion. He will seek to do only that which God has willed.

2. *2 Timothy* 4:1; *1 Peter* 4:5

a. *2 Timothy* 4:1 > “I solemnly charge you in the presence of ...Messiah Jesus, who is about to judge the living and the dead even at his appearing and his kingdom....” = I solemnly charge you in the presence of Messiah Jesus **who will soon judge the living and the dead** at that point in time when he appears once again within history to establish his kingdom.

(A) This means one of two things:

(1) Either, Jesus will decide (judge) who is to live (be granted eternal (*aionic*) Life) and who is to die.

(2) Or, Jesus will decide (judge) who is to live (be granted eternal (*aionic*) Life) when he returns, among those who are alive at that time as well as among those who are dead and in the grave at that time.

(a) This is more likely the intended meaning.

b. Note that *1 Peter* 4:5 likely sees Jesus as the one before whom evil men will be held accountable:

(A) *1 Peter* 4:5 > “they will give an account to the one who is being ready to judge the living and the dead...” = these individuals (these evil, sensuous individuals) will

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be held accountable to the one {Jesus?} who is prepared to judge the living and the dead...”

(a) This means one of two things:

[A] Either, this one {Jesus?} will decide (judge) who is to live (be granted eternal (*aionic*) Life) and who is to die.

[B] Or, this one {Jesus?} will decide (judge) who is to live (be granted eternal (*aionic*) Life) among those who are alive at the time of his judgment as well as among those who are dead and in the grave at the time of his judgment.

[1] This is more likely the intended meaning.

(B) Note that *1 Peter* 4:6 uses “dead” and “live” in a different sense. *1 Peter* 4:6 can be paraphrased like this: *It is for this reason that the good news has been proclaimed to those who stand condemned and destined for death (“the dead”)—namely, so that, while they stand condemned in their natural-born human condition in accord with their being human beings, they might stand to be granted eternal Life (“live”) due to the condition of their spirit in accord with the purpose of God.*

H. **Brief statements that articulate the worldview that underlies the above passages:**

1. **STATEMENT #37:** *God sent Jesus into created reality to serve as a proxy for himself, appointing him to rule as king in two important senses: (1) as king over Israel (and, therefore, the entire world) in the historical kingdom of God, the final age of history; and (2) as king over all of creation in the eternal kingdom of God, in the eternal age that follows the end of history.*
2. **STATEMENT #38:** *God sent Jesus into the world to finish revealing to mankind what God wanted mankind to understand about his purposes. In other words, Jesus was the last, and most important, prophet sent by God. The teaching of Jesus completes God’s revelation to mankind regarding the nature and implications of his purposes within created reality.*
3. **STATEMENT #39:** *God sent Jesus into the world to be the BASIS upon which he would grant mercy and eternal life to any to whom he had chosen to grant it.*
4. **STATEMENT #40:** *Jesus will function as the divinely appointed high priest who will intercede on behalf of those whom God had chosen for eternal life. At the time of the final judgment, Jesus will appeal to God to grant mercy to those he wants in his kingdom. He will ask God to give them the undeserved blessing of everlasting life in the kingdom of God.*
5. **STATEMENT #41:** *Jesus renders himself qualified to intercede on behalf of the children of God by demonstrating a heroic obedience to God’s will and a God-like love for others. He did so when—in obedience to God’s purposes—he willingly subjected himself to a tortured death on the cross in order that he might propitiate God’s wrath toward those whom God had destined for eternal life.*

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6. *STATEMENT #42: A person’s sins are forgiven (and that person is rescued from God’s wrath) when Jesus appeals to God to grant mercy to him. Jesus’s appeal is effective because he is the beloved Son with whom God is very pleased.*
  7. *STATEMENT #43: God intended Jesus’s torturous death on the cross to depict the wrath that is justly deserved by each and every sinful human being. It was not God’s wrath actually being directed against Jesus, who did not deserve God’s wrath. Rather, it was a depiction of the wrath that every human being deserves. That is the sense in which Jesus dies “for the sins of the world.”*
  8. *STATEMENT #44: God intended for Jesus’s death on the cross to confront each and every sinful human being with a question—namely, “See the wrath of God against sin that is being depicted here? Do you believe that you deserve such wrath to be directed against you?” How one answers that question was meant to function as a litmus test. The person who answers, “yes, I do justly deserve such wrath to be directed against me,” is the one who will receive mercy from God. The person who answers, “no, I do not deserve such wrath to be directed against me,” is the one who will not receive mercy from God.*
  9. *STATEMENT #45: God has delegated authority to the man Jesus to determine who will be condemned and who will receive eternal life. It is at the express command of Jesus that those whom God has chosen for eternal life will be transformed from mortal beings to immortal beings. God’s foreordained purpose to mercifully grant eternal life to those whom he created for that purpose will be mediated through the choice and action of the man Jesus himself. Jesus will function as the immediate and concrete judge of mankind.*