



January - February 2024

Creation and Covenant



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2024: Meeting God in Scripture



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Blessed and a Blessing

As I began work on this first BA of 2024, I realized that it is my fiftieth issue since I became editor in July 2015. What a blessing it is to serve you! Thank you for all your support. I will need it as we launch an ambitious project of going through the whole Bible, section by section, this year. The goal is to meet God and His Son in Holy Scripture.

Blessing is the word that's on my mind as we begin with "Creation and Covenant" and the five Books of Moses, or the Torah. Blessing is central to both creation and covenant. Bless is what the Creator did when He finished creating. Imbued with divine power for life, He blessed His creatures and Sabbath (Genesis 1:22–2:3).

Of course, that blessing was tarnished and diminished when sin entered the world. But with the coming of the covenants, we see God's passionate plan to restore His blessing in creation. We find it in covenants with Noah (9:1), Israel (Deuteronomy 1:11; 30:1, 16, 19), and especially Abraham. God's covenant promise to Abraham was not only to bless him but to make him a blessing (Genesis 12:1-3), a promise fulfilled in Christ and recalled by Paul:

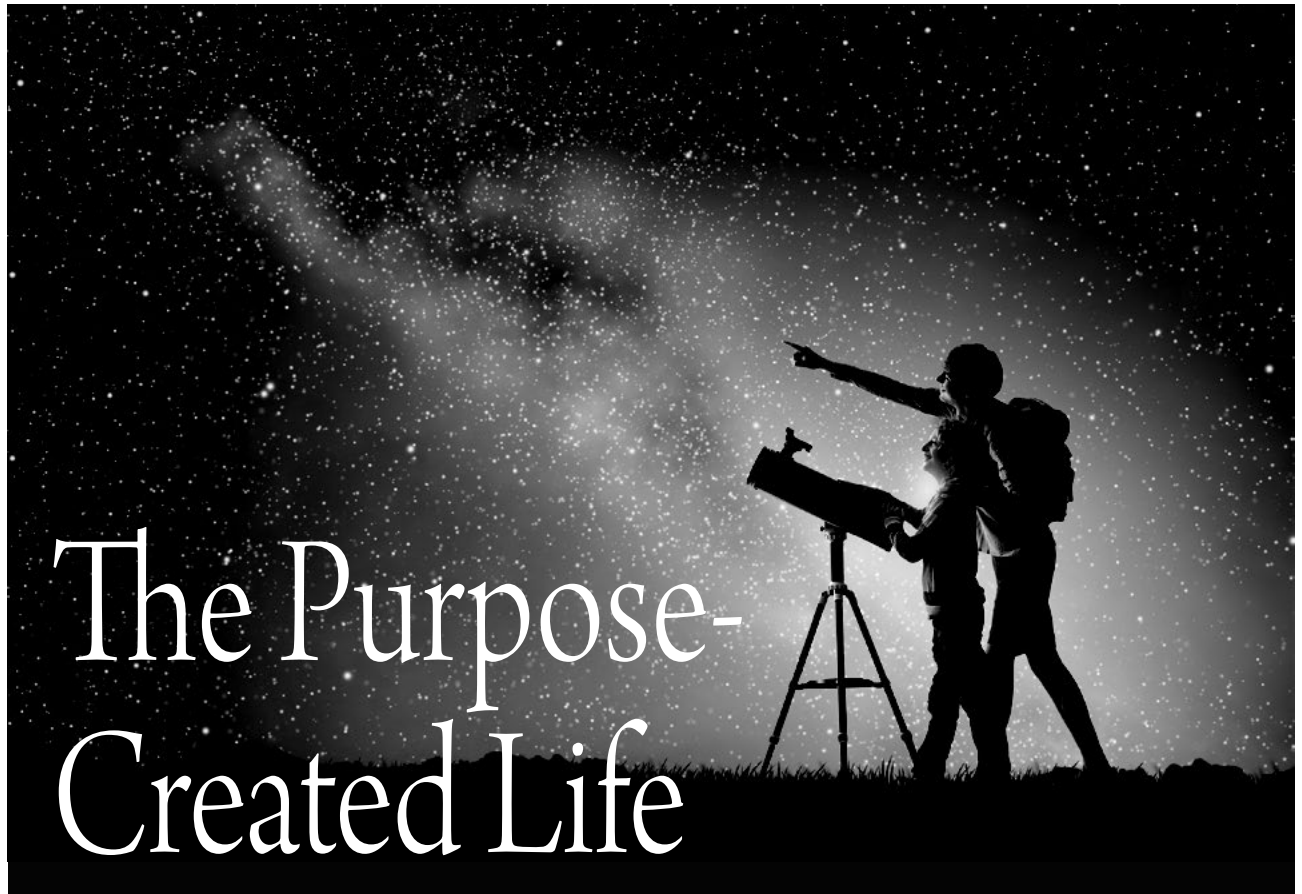
And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, "In you all the nations shall be blessed." So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham (Galatians 3:8, 9).

Here is the heart of God revealed for all to see: blessing. Here, a central theme of Torah, of Creator and Covenant-Maker, is fulfilled in the new covenant of Christ, thousands of years later: blessing. And here is our calling and destiny as believers — not just to be blessed but to be a blessing, the power for life for others. What a gift and responsibility! With that, I encourage you with another blessing from the Torah:

"The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make His face shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace" (Numbers 6:24-26).

— Jason Overman





The Purpose-Created Life

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Our origin, identity, calling,
and destiny in the Creator.

by Stephen R. Clark

It's inevitable. At some point in life, the question begins to nag. No one is immune. Most often it seems to hit us in our teens, that turbulent time when we're trying to sort out how this thing called life actually works. How to relate to those around us. How to fit in.

It all sifts down to one overarching question. In the dark, we look up at the expanse of heaven, dazzled by the sheer number of stars, and the question oozes out of our being.

"Why am I here?"

The question speaks to identity and purpose. Who am I? What is my purpose in this life? What is my role on this earth? More specifically for believers, how do I fit

into this thing called the body of Christ, the church?

The answer for each person is varied and complex. Personalities and aptitudes are diverse. We are similar to others, but also special. But the path for all toward answering the more complex questions is to start with the basics:

We are created by God in His image.

We are created to serve others.

We are created for good works.

We are created to honor God in everything we do.

In His image

The first few chapters of Genesis make it clear that we

all sprang from a single source: God. He thought us up and made us. We are not our own. Genesis 1:26-28 offers three insights:

God created people in His image, His likeness. In the simplest terms, to bear the likeness of God means to have a personality or personhood, to possess intellect and the ability to care and communicate, to be empathetic and intentional. While we are not God, we are like God in that we can have relationship with Him and others.

God created people as men and women. These are the two genders: male and female. Period. At creation, there was no ambiguity. God created a male and a female to propagate other males and females. Later, after the Fall, caused by Adam and Eve eating of the forbidden fruit, sin entered into creation. Gender confusion has arisen as a result of the effects of sin.

God created people to care for the earth. In the *New King James Version*, the words used are *subdue* and *have dominion* over the earth. This doesn't mean that we are to abuse the earth and wring everything we can from it. Rather, it means that we have a responsibility to care for the earth, to be good stewards of the resources we've been given. This extends to caring for the people who populate the earth. We are to express God's image in us through managing natural resources responsibly and caring for other people with love and respect.

Serving others

Jesus stated in Mark 10:45 that He did not come to earth

“to be served, but to serve.” We are to follow His example, as in John 13 where He washes the feet of the disciples, explaining, “Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you” (vv. 14, 15, NIV).

Paul declares in Galatians 5:13, “through love serve one another.” The main point of spiritual gifts is to use them to serve each other and build up the church (1 Corinthians 12:7; Ephesians 4:7-12; 1 Peter 4:10).

In Ephesians 4, Paul also explains that we need each part of our body to function together,

and the same holds true for the church. Through serving one another, we form a unified body that can serve God and the world. He explains this further in 1 Corinthians 12:4-31.

Good works

One of my favorite verses is Ephesians 2:10: “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ

Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” This verse tells us three important truths about who we are in Christ:

We are works of art, and God is the artist. This is a personal truth. God made each of us lovingly, carefully, and uniquely. We are shaped by His intention. You are not a random accident of the universe! A good exercise is to say the first part of this passage and insert your name. For example, “Stephen is God's workmanship!” Say it out loud.

We have God-ordained tasks to do that are good. God did not bring you and me into this world to float around aimlessly. We have places to go, people

“We are shaped by God's intention. You are not a random accident of the universe!”

to see, and things to do. When we accept Christ as our Savior, holy purpose is ignited inside of us. Driven by the Holy Spirit and fueled by the Word of God, we can discern how we are to live for Jesus. The fruit of the Spirit begins to manifest itself in and through us. The specific calling of God on our life grows clearer.

We are called to walk with

God. God crafted us, equipped us, purposed us, and wants relationship with us. He did not wind up the earth to run on its own. He didn't create us to walk through life unaccompanied. We are not works of art to be hung on a wall. We are creatures with meaning who are meant to walk out our purpose and calling hand-in-hand with God.

Honoring God in everything

The Westminster Shorter Catechism (1646-1647) famously begins, "Man's chief end is to

When we align our lives with the will of God, then all is well. Even the hard times are manageable because we are grounded in God.

Personal purpose

"But," you ask, "what about my specific, unique purpose?"

Some would refer to this as vocation — how you serve God in the world. Spiritual vocation encompasses every role you take on in life. Your spiritual gifts, your calling, all play a part in making up your vocation.

Frederick Buechner once said, ". . . the vocation for you is the one in which your deep gladness and the world's deep need meet." When we take on a responsibility that both fulfills a clear need and brings us satisfaction, we are moving toward living out God's intended purpose for us.

While some people just "know" what they are supposed to do in life and do it, it's a process of discovery for most of us. As we serve others in selfless obedience, we uncover those tasks, actions, roles, and passions we are especially good at, that we are designed for.

Jesus advised, "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Matthew 6:33). "All these things" include our purpose, our calling, our giftings. We discover who we truly are as we seek who He truly is in us.

This is echoed in Romans 8:28: "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose." As we move through life and grow in the Lord, nothing we do is wasted as we do it for God and to His glory. And all we do both builds up the body and better prepares us to joyfully pursue His specific calling on our lives. **BA**

“We are not works of art to be hung on a wall. We are creatures with meaning who are meant to walk out our purpose and calling hand-in-hand with God.”

glorify God, and to enjoy him for ever." In 1 Corinthians 10:31, Paul puts it like this: "Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."

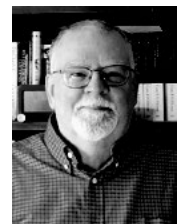
God created us for His glory. We are to serve others and Him to His glory. This is what we were made for.

And that's where the "enjoy him for ever" part comes in.

Specific purpose and calling generally become clearer over time. As we grow in the Lord and walk out our faith, the Spirit will nudge us steadily toward God's will. Certain aspects of service will be attractive to us, and as we serve, we will discover what we enjoy. This often points to what we are designed to more fully and intentionally pursue.

Writer and theologian

Stephen R. Clark
writes from Lansdale, PA.





Spotlight on Genesis

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“Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made” (2:3).

As the first book of Moses, its 50 chapters are exceeded by Psalms (150), Isaiah (66), and Jeremiah (52). Genesis summarizes history for more than two millennia after creation (chs. 1-11), then focuses on patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph less than two millennia before Christ (chs. 12-50).

Genesis means “origins,” or “beginnings.” The related words *history* or *genealogy* divide the book into sections (2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10, 27; 25:12, 19; 36:1, 9; 37:2).

Origins in Genesis

Universe, solar system, Earth (1:1, 14-19); light, atmosphere, hydrosphere (1:2-8); plant and animal life (1:9-13, 20-25); human race (1:26-31; 2:7); work, agriculture (2:15; 4:2, 3, 20; 8:22); rest: the Sabbath (2:1-3); marriage, home, family (2:18-25); sin, suffering, death (3:1— 4:15); salvation by grace (3:15, 21; 6:8; 14:6; 22:1-14); arts and

crafts, music and metallurgy (4:21, 22); religion (4:26; 5:22-24; 6:8, 22); human government (9:6; 10:1-32); various languages (11:1-9); nation of Israel (12:1-3).

Genesis pairs

Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Enoch and Methuselah, Mr. and Mrs. Noah, Shem and Japheth, Ham and Canaan, Abraham and Sarah, Hagar and Ishmael, Melchizedek and Lot, Moab and Ammon, Sodom and Gomorrah, Ishmael and Isaac, Laban and Rebekah, Jacob and Esau, Leah and Rachel, Levi and Judah, Joseph and Benjamin, Potiphar and Pharaoh, butler and baker, Ephraim and Manasseh. How many do you know?

Supernatural interventions

- Creation (chs. 1, 2)
- Catastrophe (chs. 6-8)
- Covenant: Adam (1:26-31; 2:15-17); Noah (9:1-17); Abraham (chs. 15, 17); Isaac (26:2-5); Jacob (28:10-22; 32:24-30; 35:9-15)

Sin, before Mount Sinai

disobeying God (ch. 3); anger, violence, murder (4:1ff; 6:11); refusal to worship God (6:1ff; 11:1ff); lust, multiple marriages, seduction, rape (6:2; 26:34, 35; 34:2; 39:7-12); dishonoring parents (26:34, 35); evil thoughts (6:5-13); lying, deception (12:10ff; 20:1ff; 27:1ff); coveting (13:10-13); stealing (31:30-32); bowing to idols (35:4).

One effect: shorter life spans, from Methuselah's 969 years (5:27) to Joseph's 110 (50:26).

Excerpted from *The Bible Adventure* by Calvin Burrell



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Rules and Revelation

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Seeing God in the Ten Commandments.

by R. Herbert

When we think of the revelation of God in the Old Testament, we tend to think of verses like Exodus 3:14, where God said to Moses “I AM WHO I AM.” Or Exodus 34:6, 7, where God describes Himself as “The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.”

Although we might not think of the Ten Commandments as an example of this kind of divine

self-revelation, far more about God appears in that section of Scripture (Exodus 20:1-17) than immediately meets the eye. This point was made by Andrew Wilson in a *Christianity Today* article (“The Ten Commitments Behind the Ten Commandments,” September 20, 2021). Wilson points out, in passing, that the Ten Commandments do not actually begin with a commandment, but with the identity and nature Of God:

[A] feature of the Ten Commandments that . . . frequently goes unnoticed, is the fact that there are ten theological affirmations — ten attributes of God, if you like — woven through them. If the text tells us who we should be, it also tells us who God is.

King of the covenant

Put another way, beneath the rules there is revelation. The Ten Commandments introduce God to us as much as they outline His law. The commandments do indeed begin, not with the rules but with the revelation “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery” (Exodus 20:2). It is only after this self-revelatory opening that we are told “You shall have no other gods before me” (v. 3).

In the same way, the second commandment (not to make or worship images of God, v. 4) is followed by a rationale that is longer than the commandment itself: “for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the

children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments” (vv. 5, 6).

Here there is clearly as much stress on the nature of God as on the command itself. In the same way, the comment added to the third commandment (to honor God’s name) stresses the justice of God’s nature, and the fourth commandment highlights both God’s creative nature and His concern for the well-being of those He has created.

Although the final commandments may not mention God directly, this is to be expected when we remember that the first half of the Decalogue centers on our relationship with God and the second half on our relationship with others. But the final commandments also show a great deal about God, even if indirectly. Commandments five through ten all tell us what God desires to see in our relationship with Him and with His created children.

Interestingly, our understanding of the Ten Commandments as providing revelation of God’s nature, as well as of His laws, is strengthened by other facts not mentioned by Wilson. Perhaps the most important is the historical context in which the commandments are set. While they are unique, their form as a social contract is not. The format in which the commandments were given is the same as that of many treaties and covenants in the ancient biblical world.



The Ten Commandments

GOD spoke all these words:
I am GOD, your God,
who brought you out of the land of Egypt,
out of a life of slavery.

No other gods, only me.

No carved gods of any size, shape, or form of anything whatever, whether of things that fly or walk or swim. Don’t bow down to them and don’t serve them because *I am GOD, your God, and I’m a most jealous God, punishing the children for any sins their parents pass on to them to the third, and yes, even to the fourth generation of those who hate me. But I’m unswervingly loyal to the thousands who love me and keep my commandments.*

No using the name of GOD, your God, in curses or silly banter; GOD won’t put up with the irreverent use of his name.

Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Work six days and do everything you need to do. But the seventh day is a Sabbath to GOD, your God. Don’t do any work—not you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your servant, nor your maid, nor your animals, not even the foreign guest visiting in your town. For in six days GOD made Heaven, Earth, and sea, and everything in them; he rested on the seventh day. Therefore GOD blessed the Sabbath day; he set it apart as a holy day.

Honor your father and mother so that you’ll live a long time in the land that GOD, your God, is giving you.

No murder.

No adultery.

No stealing.

No lies about your neighbor.

No lusting after your neighbor’s house — or wife or servant or maid or ox or donkey. Don’t set your heart on anything that is your neighbor’s (Exodus 20:1-17, *The Message*).

Loving Lawgiver

In the time of ancient Israel, relationships between kings and their people or other nations were often sealed by covenants that were formalized in a particular way. The dominant party — usually the king making the treaty or covenant — first identified himself, then often stressed what he had done to show his good intentions toward those with whom the agreement was being made. This was followed by a list of stipulations specifying what was expected on the part of the recipients of the covenant, often reflecting the identity and concerns of the covenant maker.

The king might also add a list of blessings directed toward the other party for keeping the covenant and curses for failing to keep it. The Ten Commandments clearly match this kind of covenant:

Identification of the one making the covenant: “I am the LORD your God” (v. 2).

Benefits provided by the covenant maker: “Who has brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the land of slavery” (v. 2).

Stipulations and responsibilities of those with whom the covenant is made: “You shall have no other gods before me” (vv. 3-17).

Blessings for keeping the covenant and curses for breaking it: see Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 28, etc.

So, God gave the Ten Commandments to ancient Israel using the accepted legal “boilerplate” of the time. When we understand this background to the commandments given at Sinai, we realize that rather than being simply a list of dos and don’ts, they were intended as guidelines for a relationship with the God whose identity and nature is revealed in the commandments themselves. Each commandment speaks to some aspect of God’s majesty, goodness, and the rightness of His ways. In short, the commandments not only show us what God desires but also what God himself is like. Each one shows us something of God’s heart and desire for those to whom He gives His laws.

But, of course, we need not limit this understanding to our reading of the Ten Commandments. The truth is, the more we look at any of God’s commands, the more we see of God himself. But it requires a different way of thinking about God’s laws. As believers, we already see them not as the world does, as restrictive rules, but as loving principles of guidance. Yet we can go further in our understanding of the Ten Commandments — and all of God’s laws — when we see them as laws given for our good and as expressions of the nature of the loving Lawgiver Himself. **BA**

R. Herbert (a pen name) holds a doctorate in biblical studies and ancient Near Eastern languages and archaeology. Scripture quotations are taken from the *New International Version*.



Themes of the Torah The Promised Land

Few themes are as pervasive in the Books of Moses as God’s covenant promise of the land to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and their children, Israel. With the terrifying rise of anti-Semitic and anti-Israel sentiment, it’s important to recall our Statement of Faith regarding the prophetic significance of the rebirth of national Israel and to reaffirm with the apostle Paul, “concerning the election [Israel is] beloved for the sake of the fathers. For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable” (Romans 11:28, 29, NKJV).

The Irrevocably Promised Land

Genesis (12:1-3; 13:14, 15; 15:18; 17:8; 28:4; 35:12; 48:4; 50:24)

Exodus (6:4-8; 12:25; 13:11; 20:12; 33:1)

Leviticus (14:34; 20:24; 23:10; 25:2; 26:42)

Numbers (11:12; 13:2; 14:16, 23, 30; 15:2; 27:12; 32:11, 22; 33:53; 34:2; 36:2)

Deuteronomy (1:8, 35; 2:29; 3:18; 4:1, 40; 5:16, 31; 6:3, 10, 18; 23; 7:13; 8:1; 9:5, 28; 10:11; 11:9, 21; 19:8; 26:15; 27:3; 28:11; 30:5, 20; 31:20)

Questions & Answers



What is a divine covenant?

Our God is a covenant God, and the Bible tells His covenant story. From Adam to Noah, Abraham to Moses, and David to Christ, the divine covenants provide the unifying framework of God's redemptive history. As a central theme of all Scripture, covenant reveals and orders the progressive purposes of God with His creatures: creation and curse, cross and new creation, and all points in between.

These divine covenants always come by divine initiative. They are not of us but of God's grace. That is why the Lord always calls them "My covenant" (Genesis 9:9; Exodus 19:5; Psalm 89:28; Isaiah 54:10; Romans 11:27; Hebrews 8:9). The emphasis is never on what we have done but on what God has done. In the divine covenant-making act, "I will" is the reminder of His faithful, sovereign will to act for us (Genesis 12:1-3; Exodus 6:5-8; Jeremiah 31:31-33).

To say that our God is a "covenant God" is to say He's a God of relationship. By the very act of creation, Adam and Eve were bound in relationship to God, imbued with a blessed identity and vocation for His purposes and glory. While the word covenant (*berit*) is not found in Genesis 1-3, the divine relationship it signifies certainly is. As God's creation, we are made for covenant relationship.

It is only after Adam and Eve fell from grace that the word *berit* appears explicitly in the Bible. First with Noah, after the whole earth had fallen into violence and corruption, "But I will establish My covenant with you" (Genesis 6:11, 18). We learn here that covenant is intimately linked with creation because this God-established relationship is the means by which God rescues creation

from sin and curse and restores life and blessing, God's original purposes. So it is in the context of redemption, after sin wrecked the world, that we associate God's covenant first and most.

The etymology of *berit* is uncertain. A variety of suggested origins include "to cut, to eat, to bind." We find these and other acts involved in covenant-making in the biblical narrative. While ancient Near East background studies are helpful, ultimately the concept of covenant is defined by its biblical context. In his admired book, *The Christ of the Covenants*, O. Palmer Robertson gives one of the best definitions: "a covenant is a bond in blood sovereignly administered." Thinner definitions, like "agreement," "arrangement," "promise," "pact," fail to capture the passionate intimacy and purpose of the divine covenants.

This sacred, sacrificial bond speaks to the depth of the everlasting relationship, much like marriage, promise, and oath bind the divine and human parties in mutual faith and love (Genesis 15:5, 6; Psalm 89:33, 34; Jeremiah 31:3). We understand that we are in a relationship with our transcendent Creator, but in covenant, He comes near. That God is a covenant God means He is immanent and intimate with His people. This is seen in the covenant formula scattered throughout the Bible: "I will be their God, and they will be My people" (Genesis 17:7; Exodus 6:7; Leviticus 26:12; Jeremiah 31:33; 2 Corinthians 6:16; Revelation 21:3). This is the goal of the divine covenants: reunion of Creator and creation. In the new covenant blood of Jesus Christ, this divine goal is fully and finally reached: "God with us" (Matthew 1:23; cf. 26:28; 28:20; Hebrews 13:20, 21).

Adapted from the forthcoming NAMC study Our Covenant God by Calvin Burrell, Jonathon Hicks, and Jason Overman.



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Bachelor Number One

The horrible, no good, very bad tree in the garden.

by Terry Murphy

You may already be familiar with the story. Two trees stood in the Garden of Eden: the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Fruit from the first tree would have allowed Adam and Eve the privilege of walking in the garden and with their Creator for eternity. But they just couldn't resist

sampling the second tree first.

What was so bad about eating from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil?

One clue might be in part of its name: knowledge. In Hebrew, this term isn't about being bookish — having an academic understanding of something. Its meaning is rooted in the same word used in Genesis 4:1 to describe Adam's relationship with Eve. He "knew" her intimately enough that their liaison produced fruit. Feeding on the Tree of Knowledge was sure to beget something — but maybe not the

crop Adam and Eve expected (see James 1:15).

"Thou shalt not"?

While the good this tree promised might not be a problem, there was another word in the tree's name that spelled trouble.

And.

The fruit of this tree tempted our forefathers with the idea they could feed on the good and still taste the forbidden.

Before we get all critical of Adam and Eve, let's remember we've inherited the same deadly

curiosity. We love experiencing good, but when God says, “Don’t touch,” we struggle to resist doing just that. Like children, we want to turn the thing over in our hands to discover why God considers it such a horrible, no good, very bad thing.

Paul describes the dilemma this way:

I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, “You shall not covet.” But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire. . . . And the commandment, which was to bring life, I found to bring death (Romans 7:7, 8, 10).

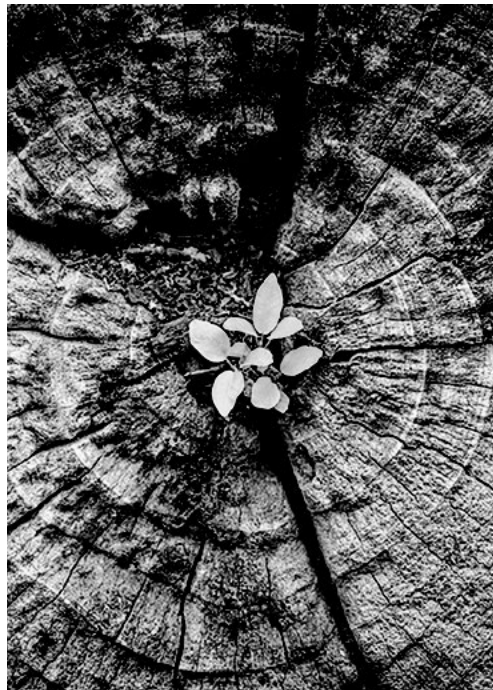
Like Adam and Eve, we reach out for a bite — just a little taste, mind you — only to discover our momentary interest has morphed into a long-term commitment with evil that we can’t get out of. We’ve somehow “married” a behavior we only meant to “date,” and found ourselves locked into doing the very thing we’ve grown to hate (Romans 7:19, 20).

Eden and reality TV

It’s as though the Garden of Eden were the cosmic set for a match-making reality TV show that continues today. The two trees are two bridegroom contestants looking for a wife. Messiah is Bachelor Number One, the Tree of Life otherwise known as “the Branch.” Bachelor Number Two is the anti-Messiah, or Antichrist — a tree waving some tantalizing options for tasting

both good and evil under the bachelorette’s nose.

We are the bride in the making, the target of the trees’ affections. And we, as our forefathers did before us, choose unwisely. We enter into an agreement with the wrong bridegroom — the wrong tree. As soon as we take the evil portion of his unclean fruit into us, we become unclean ourselves. And since no unclean thing can come into the presence of a holy God (Leviticus 22:3), we can no longer be up close and personal with the Creator of the garden.



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This could be the end of the story, except that Bachelor Number One won’t let the show finish. He still hungers to win the heart of the love He lost. Except she (or should I say, we) are in covenant with a husband we wish we’d rejected. We cannot legally marry another because “the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her

husband as long as he lives” (Romans 7:2).

Lover to the rescue

Bachelor Number One is not dissuaded from His quest by this technicality. He has found a loophole. Romans 7:2, 3 indicates death can break a marriage covenant: “But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man.”

Her husband will certainly die one day, but love-struck Bachelor Number One cannot wait that long. He chooses another option. Messiah — the Branch, the Tree of Life — is nailed to the cross and hangs on a tree. Registering His beloved’s death with the ink of His own blood, He cancels the covenant that kept her bound and sets her free to marry Him.

Breaking the covenant

The Tree of Life still reaches out today. If you let your heart be won by this heavenly Bridegroom, He will break your covenant with death as well. Put your hand in His and let Him walk you down the aisle. Let him lead you deep into His beautiful garden. **BA**

Terry Murphy
writes from Albany,
OR.



Our Gracious God

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by **Cindy Arora**

[Moses] said, "Please, show me Your glory." Then He said, "I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before you. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion" (Exodus 33:18, 19).

I once viewed this scripture in the restrictive sense, as if God were limiting His grace and compassion. In other words, only a few people are afforded His grace, but not all.

But the intent of the verse is exactly the opposite. The Lord was explaining His goodness and His mercy to Moses — saying, in effect, that His grace and compassion were beyond Moses' understanding.

The golden calf incident precipitated this conversation. Israel had broken her covenant with Almighty God by worshipping the calf. In Exodus 32:30, Moses told the people their sin was so great, he was not sure God would be willing to forgive them. You see, it was Moses who was doubting the limits of God's mercy. And he was causing the people of Israel to doubt as well.

God and Moses spoke face-to-face on Israel's behalf for the whole of Exodus 33. In that context God said, "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." God wanted

Moses to know that His mercy knows no bounds. His ways are higher than our ways; His thoughts are higher than our thoughts (Isaiah 55:6-9). While human mercy is limited, God's mercy is not (Hosea 6:1-6; Matthew 9:9-13). It is greater than we could ask or even imagine. Praise God!

The Jewish disciples of Jesus had trouble imagining that God's mercy extended to the unbelieving Gentiles. You can read the raucous dispute about it in Acts 11. Peter explained in detail how God gave the Gentiles the same gift He had given them. Then he said, "Who was I that I could withstand God?" (v. 17).

They were stunned into silence. In the disciples' minds, there were limits to God's mercy. But God will be gracious to whom He will be gracious, and He will show compassion to whom He will show compassion. And aren't you glad He does?

Time and again, God's goodness and mercy flow beyond the boundaries we put on them. Are there people in your life that you just cannot forgive? God's mercy is already there! That is our gracious and merciful God!

"For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all" (Romans 11:32). **BA**

Cindy Arora writes from Redmond, WA.



David Discovers

God as Creator



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by **Marcia Sanders**

"So, David, tell me what you know of the story of creation," Papa urged.

"Well . . ." David responded. "I know the Bible says that 'In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth,' but I'm not really sure if I believe that. I mean, how could that be true? You can't just create something out of nothing. Everyone knows that."

"That's an interesting observation," Papa mused. "So are you telling me you don't believe the Bible?"

"Oh, no!" David exclaimed. "Of course I believe the Bible. I'm just not sure about that one verse."

"Well, if that one verse isn't true, then the rest of the Bible isn't either," Papa replied. "That verse is the foundation for everything else that follows. Consider Hebrews 11:3: 'By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible.' And Colossians 1:16: 'For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible . . . all things have been created through Him and for Him.' Are those verses wrong?"

"Hmmm," David pondered. "I see what you mean. It takes faith to believe in something that my brain can't see or even understand. But what about things like time and space and matter? Did they exist before God created the earth?"

"Well, let's think about that. Remember the first verse you quoted to me? 'In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth?'"

"Yeah . . .," David answered. "What about it?"

"Well, that verse answers your question," Papa responded. "Think about the words. 'In the beginning.' Doesn't that imply time? If something has a beginning, there must be more that follows. So that's a passage of time, right?"

"Right. That makes sense."

"Then it says God created the heavens. Aren't they spread throughout space?"

"Yes!" David exclaimed. "I think I'm starting to understand. And the earth is made of matter, so that's the third one I was asking about."

"Great job, David." Papa smiled. "And think again to that verse in Hebrews I mentioned earlier. The earth was created when God spoke it into being – and it was made out of things that were not visible. We don't have to understand *how* God created the heavens and the earth; we just have to believe that He did."

David bounced up and down. "You know what, Papa? This makes me think of the story of Jeremiah. Remember? God tells Jeremiah that He knew him before he was born – in fact, even before He formed him in the womb (1:5). *And* God had already decided Jeremiah would be a prophet. Before the world came into existence, God knew it would exist, just as before Jeremiah existed, God knew he would not only exist but be a prophet. I wonder what purpose God has in mind for me." **BA**

Marcia Sanders writes from Fort Smith, AR, where she attends the Church of God (Seventh Day) with her husband, Randy. Scripture quotations are from the *New American Standard Bible*.



The God Who Would be Known

Naming the Almighty in the Books of Torah

From the beginning, God desired to reveal Himself to us. As we might expect, then, Genesis and Exodus stand out in Scripture for the abundance of names they ascribe to God. These disclose God's nature and identity, which will carry forward through the Bible. Here are just ten key names among many.

Elohim ("God," Genesis 1:1) is derived from *El*, a general term for deity meaning "mighty" or "strong." Used 35 times Genesis 1:1–2:3, Elohim is God's first name, or title, found in the Bible, emphasizing God as sovereign Creator.

El Roi ("The God who sees," Genesis 16:13) is the name Hagar gives God after He gives provision, and vision, in her time of distress. *El Roi* highlights God's all-seeing compassion and care for His creation. It encourages us that God sees us in our suffering and comes near in our need.

El Shaddai ("God Almighty," Genesis 17:1) declares God as omnipotent Creator and Covenant-Maker. The name is associated with His power and promise to bless His people within the covenant relationship (28:3; 35:11; 48:3; 49:25). In this covenant context with Abraham, God reveals Himself as God Almighty.

El Olam ("The everlasting God," Genesis 21:33) emphasizes God's eternal nature and unchanging character. Abraham's covenant story informs this name, too, as it highlights God's everlasting faithfulness to His promises. *El Olam* assures us of God's reliability. His Word and truth endure forever.

Jehovah Jireh ("the LORD will provide," Genesis 22:14) comes from an Abraham story too. It highlights God's provision for our deepest, eternal needs. The origin of this name comes from Abraham, after God provided a sacrificial substitute in place of Isaac, pointing to God's ultimate salvific provision of life from death.

Yahweh ("I AM WHO I AM," "the LORD," Exodus 3:14) is the personal name of God, and most common, appearing over 6,500 times in the Bible. Derived from the Hebrew verb *to be*, *Yahweh* reveals God as self-existent, eternal, personal Being. The name is used in Genesis, but its origin is divinely given to Moses at the burning bush. In the context of God's mission to deliver Israel and keep His promises to the fathers, Israel comes to know the LORD as personal and merciful (6:1-8; 34:6).

Jehovah Rapha ("the LORD who heals," Exodus 15:26) reveals God as our healer and restorer, physically and spiritually. The name is given after Israel's deliverance from Egypt and its diseases — if the people will be faithful to God's commandments. It is a reminder of our temporal vulnerability and God's eternal care.

Jehovah Nissi ("the LORD is my banner," Exodus 17:15) highlights God's desire to defend and protect His people. Moses used this name after a miraculous victory over the Amalekites. It reminds us that God still fights for us in our daily battles.

Jehovah Mekoddishkem ("the LORD who sanctifies you," Exodus 31:13) may be hard to pronounce, but it signifies God's important intent to set His people apart for holiness. This name is used in the context of His covenant with Israel, emphasizing the need for His people to be a distinct light to the world around them.

Jehovah Kanna ("the LORD is jealous," Exodus 34:14) reveals God's passionate love for His covenant bride. This name strongly emphasizes marital-like devotion to faithfulness within the covenant relationship. *Jehovah Kanna* teaches that God is fervent in His desire for our singular allegiance, love, and worship.

The Scarlet Thread of the Messiah

Anticipating Jesus in the Pentateuch

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In the biblical timeline, the story of redemption begins right after the creation story. The rebellion of God's image bearers in Genesis 3 leads to death, but in the face of that, the Creator reveals Himself as Savior. By prophecy, promise, and prefiguration, the Old Testament anticipates the gift of salvation to be finally realized in Jesus. So let's discover the beginnings of this "scarlet thread" in the five Books of Moses.

Genesis 3:15: "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel." Called the *Protoevangelium*, this promise gives a first glimpse of the gospel and of God's final triumph over evil. The prophesied Seed will be a recurring theme in Genesis and beyond, as God's providential care leads to Jesus (4:25; 21:12; 22:18; 26:4; 28:4; 2 Samuel 7:12; Galatians 3:16, 19, 29; Revelation 12:1-12).

Genesis 49:10: "The scepter [of royalty] shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until Shiloh [the Messiah, the Peaceful One] comes, and to Him shall be the obedience of the peoples" (AMP). This messianic prophecy reveals that the kingship of Christ will come through the lineage of the tribe of Judah (Psalm 60:7; Isaiah 11:1, 10; Micah 5:2; Matthew 1:2, 3; 2:6; Romans 15:12; Revelation 5:5).

Numbers 24:17: "I see Him, but not now; I behold Him, but not near; a Star shall come out of Jacob; a Scepter shall rise out of Israel, and batter the brow of Moab, and destroy all the sons of tumult." The Star to come is the light of the Messiah (Isaiah 60:3; Matthew 2:2; Revelation 22:16).

Deuteronomy 18:15: "The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear." This

prophecy was popular among the apostles as being fulfilled in Jesus Christ (John 1:21, 25, 45; Acts 3:22; 7:37).

In addition to its messianic prophecies, the Pentateuch is full of "types" prefiguring the saving work of Jesus Christ. Prefiguration notices the historical correspondence among biblical people, places, and events. Figural or typological reading also sees a surge of significance between the original archetype and its final fulfillment. Here are just a few examples in "the scarlet thread."

Prefiguring people

Melchizedek: king and high priest (Genesis 14:18; Hebrews 5:6, 10; 6:20; 7:1, 21)

Isaac: only son sacrificed by his father (Genesis 22:2; John 1:18; Romans 8:32)

Joseph: betrayed by envious brothers (Genesis 37:11, 20; Mark 12:7; 15:10)

Moses: lawgiver and covenant-maker (Exodus 24:1-8; Matthew 5; Luke 22:20)

Aaron: high priest of the tabernacle (Leviticus 21:10; Hebrews 3:1; 7:26-28)

Prefiguring places and events

Passover Lamb (Exodus 12; Luke 22:1-15; John 1:29, 36; 1 Corinthians 5:7)

Exodus from bondage (Exodus 6:6; 20:2; John 8:31-34; Romans 6:16-22)

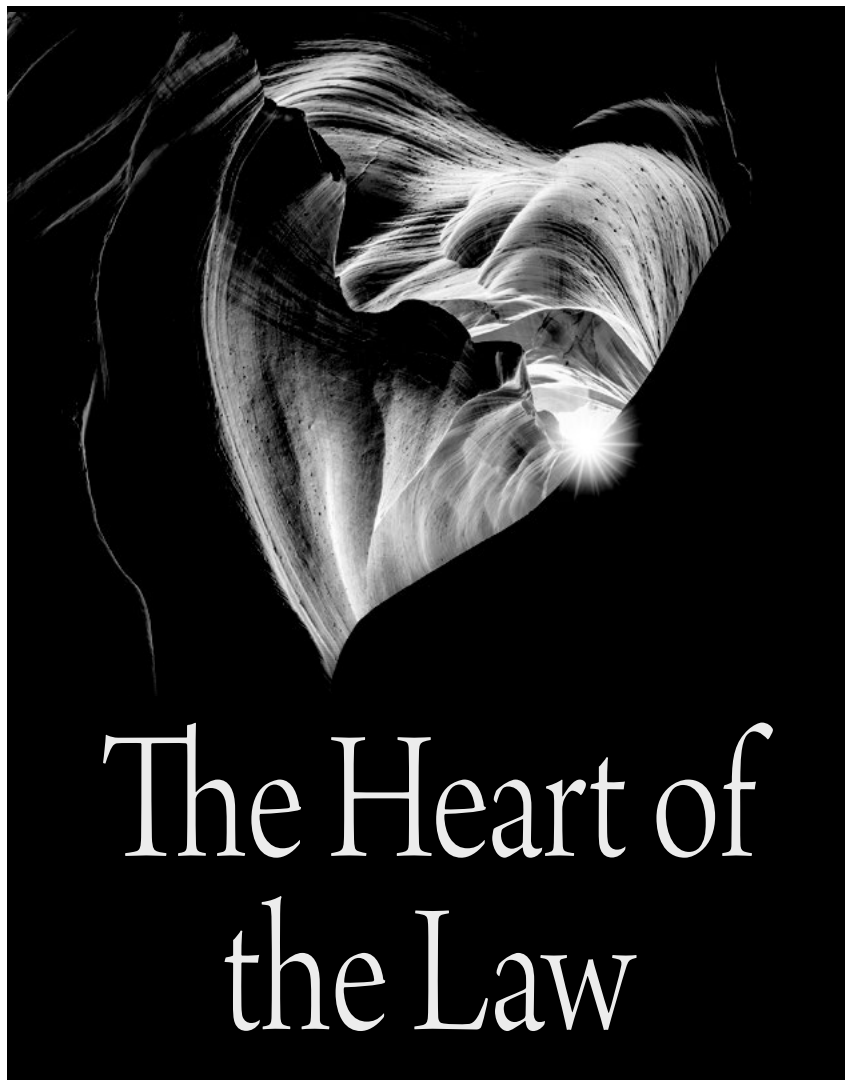
Red Sea and rock (Exodus 14; 17:6; 1 Corinthians 10:1-6)

Bread from heaven (Exodus 16; Deuteronomy 8:3; Luke 4:4; John 6:22-34)

Tabernacle sanctuary (Exodus 25:8, 9; John 1:14; 2:13-21; Hebrews 7-9)

Atoning sin offering (Leviticus 5, 16; Romans 5:6-11; 8:3; Hebrews 10:10-18)

— Jason Overman



The Heart of the Law

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A simple question that
demands a simple answer.

by Jason Overman

If you were asked what the heart of the law is, how would you answer? It might depend on what we mean by the *law*. It can be narrowly defined as the commands given at Sinai (Exodus 20) or the whole legal corpus spanning from there through Deuteronomy.

The law, or Torah, can also refer to the first five books of the Bible, also called the Pentateuch, a Greek word that means “five volumes.” In searching for the heart of the Torah, we might consider the major themes of each of the five Books of Moses. There are clues in their names.

Genesis is about *beginnings*, foundations of faith in God, Creator and Covenant-Maker. Genesis 15:6 is a key text: “And [Abraham] believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness” (see “Spotlight on Genesis,” p. 7).

Exodus is about *deliverance*. Israel learns that the Lord who redeems also commands. Exodus 20:2, 3 is a central text: “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt . . . You shall have no other gods before Me.”

Leviticus covers the Levites’ service in the sanctuary and the holiness required of God’s people. Leviticus 11:45 is a key text: “For I am the LORD who brings you up out of the land of Egypt . . . You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy.”

Numbers gives the *count*, and *account*, of Israel in her wanderings and temptations. Numbers 14:11 is a key text: “How long will these people reject Me? And how long will they not believe Me, with all the signs which I have performed among them?”

Second law

From these four books of Moses arise legitimate themes at the heart of the Torah: faith, deliverance, commandment, holiness, temptation. But what of the last book, Deuteronomy? This name comes from a Greek word meaning “the second law.” It is not another law, but, as capstone of the Pentateuch, it *restates* for the lay Israelite Sinai’s revelation in the context of covenant renewal before Israel enters Canaan.

Covenant is a key theme of Deuteronomy (appearing over

twenty-five times), but it goes all the way back to the fathers (7:12; 8:18; Genesis 15, 17). Moses pleads with the people to keep and not forget God's covenant with the nation (Deuteronomy 4:21, 31; 5:2). Two key texts stand out as the heart of Deuteronomy:

"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength" (6:4, 5).

"And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments of the LORD and His statutes which I command you today for your good?" (10:12, 13).

Since Torah (Hebrew: *instruction*) carries the full weight of law with all of its legal sanctions, it is sometimes denigrated to being a cold, legalistic code interested only in outward works. But verses like these challenge that view. God is the Lawgiver (James 4:12), but He's *not* a legalist. Deuteronomy reveals that the heart of the law and covenant is, well, *the heart!* It is mentioned nearly fifty times in Deuteronomy.

New hearts

In the two texts above we note the pairing of *heart* and *love* (see also 11:13; 13:3; 30:6). God desires that covenant relationship, and the obedience it entails, proceed from hearts in love with

Him. This overarching concern for authentic heart love animates Deuteronomy's message and the Torah as a whole.

This concern is seen when God instructs Israel to work on her heart: "circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be stiff-necked no longer" (10:16). Sadly, she will not. Moses predicts that Israel will break the covenant and go into captivity. Yet right here in Deuteronomy, a new covenant work is promised after the Exile. God will do what Israel would not:

"And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live" (30:6).

what the greatest commandment in the law was, He cites Deuteronomy 6:4 and Leviticus 19:18: love God and neighbor. Jesus adds, "On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 22:34-40). Heart-love sums it all up.

How would Paul answer the question? Well, he did too. He writes, "He who loves another has fulfilled the law. . . . For all the law is fulfilled in one word . . . love . . ." (Romans 13:8; Galatians 5:14). That's the heart of it. James agrees (2:8).

We've come full circle to our question with a decisive answer. The old and new covenants agree: *The heart of the law is a heart of love.* It only remains for us to examine our hearts, to live

“The old and new covenants agree: *The heart of the law is a heart of love.*”

It turns out that the heart of the law is a heart of love. Ultimately, the law couldn't fulfill what it commanded, but the new covenant does! God comes for our hearts — and writes His law upon them (Jeremiah 31:33; cf. Hebrews 8:10; 10:16).

Love is law

How would Jesus answer our question about the heart of the law? Well, He did. When asked

for God and one another as our hearts grow in love by the grace of God in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.

Let's give Deuteronomy the last word — a word for us too: "Oh, that they had such a heart in them that they would fear Me and always keep all My commandments, that it might be well with them and with their children forever!" (5:29). Amen! **BA**



More Than Bread Alone

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Parents and the biblical instruction of children.

by Dorothy Nimchuk

“O Ephraim, what shall I do to you? O Judah, what shall I do to you? For your faithfulness is like a morning cloud, and like the early dew it goes away” (Hosea 6:4).

This scripture is the anguished cry of a loving Father, spoken through the prophet. So much had happened leading up to Israel’s disobedience.

It was the eve of entering the Promised Land. Moses had taken this last opportunity to admonish the people to obey and warn them of consequences if they did

not. He reminded them of the hardships they had endured during the forty years that brought them to this point:

“So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD” (Deuteronomy 8:3).

Two chapters prior to this, Moses zeroed in on the greatest commandment: “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength” (6:4, 5). Survival for the Israelites was more than consuming physical bread. They were to keep God’s word in their hearts

and teach them diligently to their children (vv. 6, 7).

Teaching at home

In his book *Authentic Christianity*, Ray C. Stedman helps us better understand Moses’ words: “Nothing can happen through us unless it has first happened to us.”

This is so true of teaching children. As part of his series of commentary on Deuteronomy 6, Stedman advocates that all discipline, training, and guidance begin at home. Parents are responsible to “pass the torch” of spiritual development — their faith, not tucked away in a box for Sabbath but shared daily through object lessons.

Verses 8 and 9 go on to say, “You shall bind [God’s Word] as a sign on your hand, and [it] shall be as [a frontlet] between your eyes. You shall write [it] on the

doorposts of your house and on your gates.”

Phylacteries (Hebrew: *tefillin*) are miniature scrolls with encrypted scriptures attached to the back of the left hand and forehead as reminders of God’s laws. Jesus derided the scribes and Pharisees for enlarging their phylacteries, and enhancing the borders of their clothing — all in an effort to be seen and held in high esteem (Matthew 23:1-11). Parents should therefore take a lesson from the Pharisees and not fall into “Do what I say, not what I do.”

Stedman likens the scribes and Pharisees drawing attention to themselves to some professing Christians who prominently display Bibles in their homes yet seldom read them — another warning for parents. He considers phylacteries as figurative. Other sources agree they are figurative — mere Jewish tradition — and indicate that the law of God should be taken to heart instead.

Authority

Stedman considers obedience as the ground of authority and that Moses’ message granted authority to parents. He describes that as “authority . . . created by integrity, by consistent obedience to the truth.” Phylacteries on the hand had reference to works performed, and those on the forehead to guidance of one’s thought life. To quote Stedman: “. . . the prophet is saying that parents are expected to show loving, honest, open, forgiving, responsible lives, guided by the Scriptures, in the presence of their children.”

Deuteronomy 6:9 also says to

write God’s Word on the doorposts. He considers doorposts and gates to represent parents’ contact with the outside world, showing relationships with neighbors, relatives, and friends. These relationships will be visible proof to the children that their parents practice what they preach. Therefore, their children will respect them as authentic, and parents will have the authority they seek.

Stedman maintains that, down through generations, most of us have believed that we have authority and our children should be obedient simply because we are the parents. We find it dif-



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ficult to admit to wrong in our own lives and/or have failed in some area. However, in situations where parents have gotten it right, in love and conscience, being obedient to the Scriptures themselves, acknowledging failure and asking forgiveness when necessary, authority over their children will always exist and be accepted.

Stedman describes God’s authority as stemming from His holiness (integrity), not His power, and this should be the basis of

our own authority as well. Conversely, the Devil has authority to control and/or influence through hate, a false ground of authority that compels obedience through fear of reprisals.

Discipline

Discipline, according to Stedman, is a limiting and directing of life, creating a safe environment in which to live and move. Much like a river rushing through a narrow gorge, discipline channels a person’s life to increase its intensity, to better direct choices, and to receive more joy in living. Without boundaries, a false

freedom is created. Discipline can avoid bad outcomes and/or disasters.

Because of His great love for us, God disciplines by setting limits so we can enjoy a better quality of life (Galatians 5:13, 14). In like manner, parents should discipline their children.

In Stedman’s words, “. . . good discipline always originates out of love.” We see this passionate parental love in God’s expressions to Israel in Hosea:

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How We Win the Culture War

A strategic plan for
Christians in today's world.
by Mike Apodaca

Seems these days that whenever we tune into the news, there's a new battleground in the culture war. Whether it's abortion, book banning, critical race theory, LGBTQ rights, or transgenders, a fight is brewing somewhere. The left-leaning media is even using the label Christian Nationalists to describe (or defame) those who believe they are fighting on the side of God in this culture war.

I find the situation disturbing and feel that many believers in this fight are unwittingly doing damage to the cause of Christ in this world. We have been sidetracked, focused on fighting windmills rather than slaying the true dragons that ravage us.

Minds and hope

I understand the motivation behind Christians desiring everyone to live life the way it is

mapped out in the Bible, the way God intended it — the most positive and healthy way, the most human. I live, as best I can, and with God's help, this kind of life and find it abundantly fulfilling. I also wish this for all, especially those I care for deeply.

However, we must first remember how we came to have this special life.

In Peter's first letter, he spells it out. After speaking of our being born again, of having a salvation paid for by Jesus and an inheritance awaiting us in the heavens, he writes:

Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming. As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who

called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy" (1 Peter 1:13-16, NIV).

Peter begins this section with a phrase that literally translates "having girded the loins of your minds" (see also Ephesians 6:14). This is a one-time past experience where we tightened our minds for action.

In the ancient Middle East, men wore tunics that were difficult to run in. In order to run more easily, they would pull the back of the tunic up through their legs and tuck it into the front of their belt, forming something like pants. Peter is saying that, because we put aside our old lives, they are no longer an encumbrance to us.

We did this when we came to Christ. We experienced a paradigm shift that changed our minds, our perspectives, our desires, and readied us for action in Christ's kingdom.

We were converted.

We repented.

Peter goes on to say that we are to set our hope on the grace to be brought to us at the Second Coming — not the hope that we might change the existing culture into something of our (or God's) liking. We are not to put our hope in change through government. And we are never called to create heaven on earth.

Flee passions, be set apart

Then Peter tells us, as obedient children, to not be conformed (shaped) by the passions we had before, when we were ignorant of God's salvation plan. Many of us had something that preoccupied us before we came to Christ, something we invested

our lives in. We are to be aware of this and not allow this addiction to lesser things, these idolatries, to again have a hold on us.

Finally, Peter commands us to be holy, set apart for God.

Throughout the New Testament we get a picture of what it means to be holy. It means we live before God, that we are addicted to Him and His Word. We live a life of humility and high moral standards. We make choices that reflect our Christian values. This affects the

divorce rate is nearly the same as theirs. The Christian abortion rate mirrors that of society. The suicide rate is also similar. There are child abuse and molestation, adultery and addiction in the church as in the world.

Worst of all, some have reduced Christianity to a set of doctrines to ascribe to, rather than a new life to be lived. We have become fat doctors scolding everyone else, and telling them to lose weight.

Shame on us.

“We are not to put our hope in change through government. And we are never called to create heaven on earth.”

entire spectrum of our lives: our relationships, entertainment, purchases, and even the clothes we wear. We do all for God and His glory. This life of worship, love, and joy, of integrity and hard work, and of marriage stability, will set us apart in this world.

Imagine if the Christian divorce rate dropped to zero — especially because we were so happy in our beautiful, affirming marriages. The world would be aghast. They would be clamoring to discover our secret. We need to admit that the world doesn't listen to us because our

We have tree trunks in our eyes.

All because we have been using power and manipulation to bring about the kingdom.

Admiration and hostility

And what happens when we renew our focus and do live according to Christ and contrary to the culture around us, when we do live the life we are called to? The Bible gives us two reactions: admiration and hostility.

We are told that the Christians in the first century were held in

high regard, even by those who did not join them (Acts 2:47; 5:13). My non-Christian boss once asked me why I worked so hard for her, especially when all the other employees would relax and goof around when she wasn't there. I explained that I wasn't working for her; I was working for my God, whose eyes were always on me.

Her response? She started hiring Christians.

When another non-Christian boss asked me to lie for him, telling someone on the phone that he wasn't there, I refused.

“People cannot live like Christians who have not been born again and filled with the Spirit of God.”

He was furious with me. I told him, “If you know I won't lie for you, then you know I won't lie to you.” He respected me thereafter and actually promoted me.

The other response is persecution, which many in the churches Peter addresses were experiencing. Peter's recipients were being pressured to conform, to accommodate the culture around them. Depending on the degree that the culture requires complete devotion, the persecution can be intense, even fatal. Peter stresses

that our inheritance in Christ is worth any suffering (Paul makes the same argument in Romans 8:18). We are not to give in to pressure just to get along. We are not to mimic the culture.

Peter does not say, “Run for school board or Congress in an attempt to take over the government, so that we can legislate the culture in a way that fits our values and makes us more comfortable.” In fact, those who would choose this road negate the very essence of what they say they believe. People cannot live like Christians if they have

not been born again and filled with the Spirit of God. Legislating morality is tantamount to putting sheepskins on wolves.

Living for Christ

So what are we to do? How are we to fight and win the culture war?

We Christians are to live for Christ. It's as simple (and profoundly difficult) as that. We are to be in the world, but truly not of it. We are to be living examples of Christ's kingdom on

earth, re-presenting Jesus in our personal lives and in our loving relationships.

Should we vote? Of course! We should take every opportunity to make our voices heard. Should we serve others? Participate in community groups? Be involved in sports? Yes. We need to be engaged in society, working to help make people's lives better. Think of the engagement of Joseph working in Egypt or Daniel in Mesopotamia, Esther and Mordecai in Persia, or Paul in the Mediterranean world. It is in this discourse that people get to see the difference of our lives of joy and love. Maybe they will want what we have. We are not to live under a bushel.

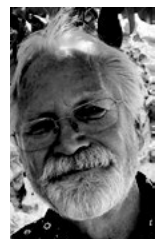
How do we change the culture? The culture will be truly changed when individual members of the society are changed by God on the inside — when they are born again and live for Christ. Then their lives will have a different trajectory, and a different Spirit will inhabit them. But this won't happen unless we are leading the way, making Jesus first in our lives.

As Peter explains (1 Peter 1:2), we have been called to live as a counter-culture, as a community of strangers who have a Christ-centered lifestyle different from that of the dominant culture.

When this happens, we will truly be the salt and light of the earth. **BA**

Mike Apodaca

writes from Hesperia, CA.





The Great I AM

The God who sees me cradles me —
the Way, the Truth, the Life, the Door . . .
the Teacher, Root to Vine to Branch,
the Author and the Editor.

Almighty Prince of Peace, the Lamb —
Redeemer, Abba, Father, Son . . .
the Morning Star, the Great Shepherd,
Immanuel — God With Us, One.

A Rose of Sharon and the Rock,
the Living Water, Servant, Lord . . .
the Gentle Whisper, merciful,
Eternal God in world accord.

Creator of the Living Bread,
the Advocate on eagle's wings.
Within one's ever Holy Spirit,
Eternal Love of Jesus sings!

Lucia Kiersch Haase

Bible-Based Riddles

Genesis - Deuteronomy

Who/What Am I?

I gave him a drink and his animals too.
He gave me jewels, a stranger no one knew.
On a camel I rode to a land far away,
Where I married, had children, and would always stay.

Simeon held prisoner by governor's demand.
Sown seed was watered using feet in this land.
Sarah's handmaid her nationality.
House of bondage, children of Israel did leave.

Noah built one for beast and fowl clean.
Abraham's faithfulness on one was seen.
Around its base sacrifice blood was poured.
Prophets of Baal jumped on, but their prayers ignored.

His name is based on his mother's praise.
Joseph's life from jealous brethren he saved.
Out of this tribe King David did come.
Jacob and Leah their fourth son.

Rainbow is a token of this between God and man.
God remembered when Israel groaned in Egypt land.
Joshua made with people agreeing the Lord to serve.
Israel broke with God, so wrath they did deserve.

Esau sought it with tears.
Twelve sons of Jacob hear.
Aaron and sons to Israel pronounce.
Its showers the Savior announce.

*Answers on page 30. Excerpted from 250 Old Testament Riddles
by David Keith Robinson. Used by permission.*

More Than Bread Alone

continued from page 21

"When Israel was a child, I loved him . . . I taught Ephraim to walk . . . How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? . . . O Israel, return to the LORD your God . . . I will heal their backsliding" (11:1, 3, 8; 14:1, 4).

Father's love

Because the love of the Father is so great unto us, He anointed His only Son to give "beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that [we] may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified" (Isaiah 61:3).

What greases our spiritual "wheels" and creates a joyful relationship with the Lord God more than His love poured out on us! His love, invested in us, encapsulates our lives, receiving a high return in adoration, obedience, and offerings of our time and resources, sharing love with the world, beginning with our families!

These are the truths we should share with our children whenever we have the opportunity. And we begin to share them by our own example. **BA**

Dorothy Nimchuk writes from Medicine Hat, Alberta, where she lives with her husband Nick.





2024 NAMC Meeting

All members of the NAMC are invited to the council meeting scheduled for October 28 - November 2, 2024, at the Embassy Suites by Hilton Grapevine DFW Airport North. This invitation extends to both credentialed and licensed ministers, as well as to local pastors and local leaders. Also, we offer a special invitation to elders, deacons, and pastors' wives.

The hotel is located at 2401 Bass Pro Drive in Grapevine, Texas (ten minutes from DFW Airport). The guest rate of \$159/night, plus tax, is for a guest room (king or two double beds). Group rate available three days pre/post, based on hotel availability.

The Embassy Suites offers a number of complimentary amenities: DFW Airport shuttle service (6:00 a.m. -10:30 p.m. daily), hot breakfast buffet, fitness club and pool access, self-parking for all attendees, and Wi-Fi in guest suites and meeting space.

The closing event on Saturday, November 2, will be a Super Sabbath. All General Conference members are welcome to attend.

More information, such as NAMC registration and room reservations, will be provided in future publications and on social media.



BAP in Nigeria

In mid-November, BA Editor Jason Overman traveled to Nigeria for the International Ministerial Congress. He sat in on a Sabbath school class at the Eagle Island CoG7 in Port Harcourt (*above*), which was reviewing Lesson 6 of the fourth quarter lessons. Jason also met with faithful BA readers (*below*). We appreciate our Nigerian brethren! More to come in the March-April issue.



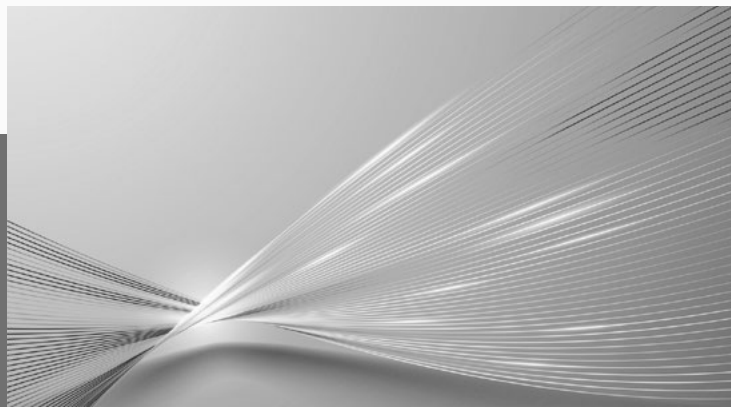
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Scripture's

by Whaid Rose

Genesis and Revelation are more than mere bookends to the Bible. Their correlation is fascinating!

One tells us how everything got started; the other, how everything will end. The garden with the forbidden tree corresponds to the city with the tree in its midst, whose leaves are for the healing of the nations.

The nations need healing because of sin's entry in Genesis, which is now reversed by sin's banishment in Revelation! This is celebrated at the marriage supper of the Lamb (19:9), which points all the way back to the wedding in the garden (Genesis 2:22, 23).

These observations help us better understand what the rest of the Bible is all about. Creative minds have strung together three words that succinctly capture what's in the Bible: *creation*, *conflict*, and *covenant*.

All three words emerge early in Genesis. In the first two chapters, God creates the world and everything in it. Then conflict arises in chapter 3 with the entry of sin into the world, followed by

the covenant God made to one day bruise Satan's head through the seed of the woman (v. 15).

This begins what is commonly called "the drama of redemption," God's relentless pursuit of lost humanity, leading to the cross of Christ and the yet-to-be-fulfilled promise of a renewed creation. Central to this drama are the covenants God makes and remakes throughout biblical history.

Adamic and Noahic covenants

First, there's the Adamic covenant, made in two parts — one before the Fall (sometimes referred to as the Edenic covenant) and the other afterward.

The former sets forth the terms and conditions of Adam's existence in the garden. Bearing God's image, he is to have dominion over everything God created and be fruitful, multiply, and replenish (fill up) the earth (1:26-30; 2:16, 17). The latter addresses Adam's existence outside the garden, including the consequences of sin and God's promise to one day bring redemption (3:16-19).

But sin's corrupting influence necessitates the great Flood.

After it, God establishes a covenant with Noah in which He renews the blessings of creation and promises the preservation of the earth (its times/seasons), issuing to Noah the same charge He gave to Adam (9:1-17).

Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Davidic covenants

But the sin problem persists after the Flood, so much so that by Genesis 11 there's outright rebellion against God at the tower of Babel. So God makes a covenant with a man named Abram (later renamed Abraham), through which all the nations of the earth will be blessed. Known as the Abrahamic covenant, it expands to the creation of a new nation and its possession of the land of Canaan (chapter 12).

It is in God's relationship with Abraham that the concept of covenant takes on added meaning. God uses animal sacrifice to vividly illustrate the certainty (immutability) of His commitment (chapter 15). From this illustration the term *cut a covenant* is derived, which the author of Hebrews describes as "an oath" (Hebrews 6:17).

The Abrahamic covenant passes down to Isaac and on to

Golden Threads

Jacob. God's promise to make a new nation out of Abraham's descendants is eventually fulfilled through Jacob's twelve sons, who become heads of the twelve tribes of Israel.

God keeps His promise to the nation, eventually bringing the Israelites out of Egypt and establishing a covenant with them at Sinai. Known as the Mosaic covenant, its elaborate details are provided in Exodus 19-24. Included is its central article, the Decalogue (or Ten Commandments), meant to govern and shape the new nation in anticipation of her entry into the Promised Land.

Throughout the long history of Joshua and Judges, the covenant ebbs and flows, seemingly lost at times, until it reemerges during David's reign as Israel's king. God makes a covenant with David, the culmination of the previous covenants, establishing Israel's kingdom with a city, temple, and a throne forever (2 Samuel 7).

It is in relation to this covenant that the Messianic promise comes into full view. Specific references are found throughout the Prophets and the Psalms, and are quoted in the New Testament. Psalm 89:3, 4, referenced in Acts 2:30, is a good example:

"I have made a covenant with My chosen, I have sworn to My servant David: 'Your seed I will establish forever, and build up your throne to all generations.'"

But the covenants found throughout Scripture are interrelated, and the Mosaic covenant binds the nation to an oath of faithfulness to God. This is a good place to point out that some covenants are unconditional, while some are clearly conditional — offering blessings for obedience, which Israel miserably fails to do.

New covenant

So God in mercy and love promises to make a new covenant with them. Moses alluded to this in his final address to the nation, speaking of a time when God would give His people "a heart to understand" (Deuteronomy 29:4, ESV).

The prophet Jeremiah puts it in specific terms:

"Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah — . . . But this *is* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says

the Lord: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people" (31:31, 33).

This is a promise to do for Israel what the Mosaic law could not do (Romans 3:20; Hebrews 9:9-15). In highlighting the benefits of the new covenant, Ezekiel lists, among other elements, a new heart, the indwelling Holy Spirit, and the capacity for true holiness (36:26, 27).

This will be realized through Jesus, the "Mediator of a better covenant" established on better promises (Hebrews 8:6). According to one author, this makes possible a new identity, a new disposition, and a new power for God's people.

So it was that during His Last Supper with the disciples, Jesus declared, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you" (Luke 22:20).

The next day, Jesus ratified that covenant with His own blood on the cross as the long-awaited sacrificial lamb. By His resurrection, ascension, and the birth of the church at Pentecost, a new power is released in the lives of ordinary men and women in a way that stuns onlookers, evoking skepticism.

In offering clarity, Peter points them back to the Old Testament prophecy concerning the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:14-21). In short, the supernatural events you're witnessing this day are the fulfillment of God's covenant promise to His people made thousands of years ago!

Creation and covenant

We serve a God who keeps His promises: "For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen," says Paul in 2 Corinthians 1:20. It therefore follows that the golden thread of God's covenant faithfulness runs from Genesis to Revelation, holding the Bible together.

Running close by is the creation thread, for in the drama of redemption, God's actions as Creator are closely linked to His actions as Covenant-Keeper.

So it comes as no surprise that these two elements are central as the worship of heaven begins in Revelation. In chapter 4, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders worship God as Creator of all things: "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being" (v. 11, NIV).

Then they worship the Lamb in chapter 5:

And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you

purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth" (vv. 9, 10, NIV).

This is a good place to underscore that Jesus is the mediator of the new covenant and that through Him God created the universe (Hebrews 1:1, 2). This is also a good place to note that God has not abandoned His creation. Despite the brokenness of our world, marked by social and political upheavals and the pain and trauma of war, God's promise of a renewed earth, which the meek will inherit, still stands (Psalm 37:11). He is the faithful God "who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations" (Deuteronomy 7:9).

So we joyfully heed the call to worship in the opening verse of the classic seventeenth century hymn:

Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation!

O my soul, praise him, for he is your health and salvation!

Come, all who hear; now to his temple draw near,

join me in glad adoration.

BA

Whaid Rose is dean of the Artios Center for Vibrant Leadership and pastors the Newton, NC CoG7. He and his wife, Marjolene, live in Denver, NC.



Don't miss our Online Extra for January-February!

"Women Warriors"

Take a dive into the accounts of four lesser-known women in the Bible and how they advanced God's kingdom

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Riddle answers (p. 26)

Rebekah (Genesis 24, 25)

Egypt (Genesis 16, 42; Exodus 20; Deuteronomy 11)

altar (Genesis 8, 22; Exodus 29; 1 Kings 18)

Judah (Genesis 29, 37; 1 Chronicles 2)

covenant (Genesis 9; Exodus 6; Joshua 24; Ezekiel 16)

blessing (Genesis 27, 49; Numbers 6; Ezekiel 34)



Our Sovereign God

A simple definition of the word *sovereignty* is “supreme authority.” A person who answers to no higher authority than himself is *sovereign*. Therefore, God is sovereign over anything and everything that exists. Nothing and no one has authority over Him. Everyone answers to God, but God answers to no one.

Something makes God’s sovereignty even more noteworthy. God possesses not only supreme authority but also absolute capability. He can do whatever He decides to do, and He does it effortlessly.

Think, for example, of God’s creation of everything that exists. Chapters 1 and 2 of Genesis tell us that God simply spoke the words “Let there be,” and whatever He desired there to be came into existence. “Then God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light” (1:3, NASB throughout).

Then God said, ‘Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night, and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years; and let them be for lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth’; and it was so (vv. 14, 15).

Because God possesses absolute authority and absolute capability, someone has said that His sovereignty may be expressed this way: “God has both the *right* and the *might* to do as He pleases.”

This is the consistent teaching of God’s Word. Through the prophet Isaiah, for example, God expressed His sovereignty like this: “Remember the former things long past, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and

from ancient times things which have not been done, saying, ‘My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure’” (46:9, 10).

King David prayed:

“Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, indeed everything that is in the heavens and the earth; Yours is the dominion, O LORD, and You exalt Yourself as head over all. Both riches and honor come from You, and You rule over all, and in Your hand is power and might; and it lies in Your hand to make great and to strengthen everyone” (1 Chronicles 29:11, 12).

Theologian R. C. Sproul (and many others) correctly concluded that if God is not sovereign, then God is not God. But our God is truly God. The God who has revealed Himself to us through His Holy Word is not in any way like the gods of human imagination. He is not one among many gods (Isaiah 46:9). He is not fickle and untrustworthy: “God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath, so that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us. This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast . . .” (Hebrews 6:17-19).

How can the author of Hebrews, and all of us who believe, be so certain of the hope God has given us? God is sovereign.

— Loren Stacy



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