

We Believe in Jesus

LESSON
ONE

THE REDEEMER



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We Believe in Jesus

Lesson One

The Redeemer

INTRODUCTION

There's an old story about a little boy who built a toy boat. He carefully painted the hull and made small sails for it. When the boat was ready, he sailed it in a stream. It floated easily for a time, but then got swept away by the current. The boy searched for his lost boat, but never found it. Sometime later, he was surprised to see his little boat in the window of a shop. He rushed inside and said, "My boat is in the window!" The store clerk replied, "I'm sorry, son, but you'll have to pay for it." The boy worked for weeks to save enough money to buy back his boat. As he left the store with the boat in his hands, he told it, "Little boat, now you're mine again. I made you, I searched for you, and I bought you back."

In many ways, the relationship between Jesus and his people is similar to the relationship between this little boy and the boat. The Son of God created us, but we strayed into sin and were lost. But he never forgot us. He came to earth to seek and to save what was lost. And after he found us, he paid the ultimate price to redeem us — the price of his own death.

This is the first lesson in our series, *We Believe in Jesus*. In this series, we'll explore the area of theology known as Christology, the doctrine of Christ. Throughout these lessons, we'll examine many different truths about the person and work of Jesus Christ that his followers have affirmed for thousands of years. We've entitled this first lesson "The Redeemer" because we'll focus on how Jesus redeems sinners from sin, and ensures the final restoration of creation for our enjoyment and for the glory of his Father.

In this lesson on Jesus the Redeemer, we'll explore the person and work of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, during four different periods. First, we'll consider his existence and plan in eternity, before the creation of the world. Second, we'll survey his activity during the initial period of creation. Third, we'll speak about the era of redemption that began after humanity's fall into sin and stretches through the present age. And fourth, we'll examine the consummation of history that will take place when he returns. Let's begin with eternity.

ETERNITY

Most of the time when Christians think and talk about Jesus, we focus on the life he lived on earth, and on the work he's doing in heaven right now. Sometimes we even consider the Bible's teaching about what Jesus will do in the future when he returns. And these are all very important teachings. But the fact is that the Second Person of the Trinity, whom we know as Jesus Christ, is our eternal God. So, when we think about him from a theological perspective, it's often helpful to begin much further back in history, to

see that he has been planning and working on our redemption throughout all history — and even before history began.

Theologians are not entirely agreed on the nature of eternity prior to the creation of the universe. Some even suggest that time itself is an aspect of creation, so that it's impossible to speak of time before God's act of creation. So, in this lesson, we'll identify eternity as the existence of God prior to the creation of the universe. In eternity, only God existed. And he existed in Trinity as the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Our discussion of eternity will divide into three parts. First, we'll examine the biblical teaching about Christ's divinity or deity. Second, we'll look at his role within the Trinity. And third, we'll describe his eternal counsel. Let's begin with the divinity of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

DIVINITY

Now, the Bible doesn't come from eternity. It was written during time and history. And it doesn't clearly reveal Jesus as a distinct person of the Trinity until the New Testament. Even so, Scripture teaches that Jesus has been God from all eternity. So, the things that it reveals about his divinity in the New Testament were also true of him before the creation of the universe. And they will continue to be true about him forever. As we read in Hebrews 13:8:

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever (Hebrews 13:8).

Jesus' divinity is evident in the New Testament in many ways. First, Scripture contains several explicit statements that he is divine. Second, some New Testament passages apply the Old Testament to him in ways that demonstrate his divinity. And third, some passages ascribe divine attributes to him. We'll look at some examples of each of these types of proof for Jesus' divinity, beginning with explicit statements.

Explicit Statements

Several passages explicitly teach that Jesus is divine by directly referring to him as God. For example, in John 20:28, the apostle Thomas called Jesus "my God." In Titus 2:13, Paul called Jesus "our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ". In 2 Peter 1:1, Peter called Jesus "our God and Savior Jesus Christ." And in 1 John 5:20, John called Jesus "the true God and eternal life." But perhaps the best-known passage that explicitly attributes divinity to Jesus is John 1:1, where we read these words:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God (John 1:1).

This verse specifically says that the "Word was God," and that he has been God since the beginning, that is, before the universe was created. And later in this chapter, in verses 14-18, John clearly stated that the Word he was talking about was Christ. In this way, John

left no doubt that Jesus is God. He always has been and always will be fully divine, in every way.

Old Testament

Second, in addition to making explicit statements that Jesus is God, the New Testament also demonstrates Jesus' divinity in the way it handles several Old Testament references to God.

On a variety of occasions, New Testament writers identified Jesus as God by equating him with the Lord of the Old Testament. In the Old Testament, God revealed himself to his people by the name Yahweh, which is normally translated "Lord." And at several points in the New Testament, the writers referred to passages that were clearly about Yahweh, the Lord, and said that these passages were talking about Jesus.

For example, Mark 1:2-3 refers to Malachi 3:1, and Isaiah 40:3, which say that a prophet or messenger will go before the Lord. But then Mark said that these prophecies were fulfilled when John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus. In this way, Mark indicated that Jesus was the Lord, Yahweh, about whom Malachi and Isaiah had prophesied.

Paul drew a similar connection between Jesus and Yahweh in Philippians 2:11, where he mentioned the fundamental Christian proclamation that Jesus is Lord. And in John 1:1-3, John identified Jesus as the Word of God through whom God had created the universe in the beginning. This was a clear reference to Genesis 1:1, where Moses wrote "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." This reference to Jesus' participation in creation indicates that he is, in fact, God himself.

Divine Attributes

Third, besides using explicit statements and the Old Testament to assert that Jesus is God, New Testament authors also ascribed divine attributes to him — attributes that only God can possess. For instance, Hebrews 1:3 says:

The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word (Hebrews 1:3).

Here, the Son is equated to God and his glory in ways that imply the Son's divinity. Moreover, the Son wields God's infinite creative and sustaining power. No finite being can possess infinite power; only the infinite God can. And therefore, the Son must be God himself. And John 1:1-2 affirms Jesus divinity in a similar way when it says:

In the beginning was the Word ... He was with God in the beginning (John 1:1-2).

When John said that the Word existed “in the beginning,” he meant that the Son had existed from all eternity before anything was created, just as Genesis 1:1 teaches that God had existed from all eternity before creation. In other words, the Son is uncreated. He has existed with God the Father for all eternity. And since only God can possess the attribute of eternal existence, the Son must be God himself.

Now that we’ve seen that Christ possesses full divinity, we’re ready to turn to the relationships between the Son and the other persons of the Trinity.

TRINITY

The doctrine of the Trinity is vital to the Christian faith. On the one hand, the Trinity is one of those doctrines that teach us that God is far above all our abilities to understand him. It teaches us that God is both mysterious and wondrous, and so it inspires us to worship him. But on the other hand, this doctrine sets Christianity apart from all other religions. While some religions see God simply as one person, and others believe that there are many gods, the Scriptural doctrine of the Trinity teaches us that God is three in one sense, and one in another sense. And historically, this uniquely Christian doctrine has been at the very heart of our confession of Christ.

The term trinity doesn’t appear in the Bible, but it expresses the biblical concept that God has three persons, but only one essence. The term “person” refers to a distinct, self-aware personality. Scripture teaches that the three persons of God are the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. And the term “essence” refers to God’s fundamental nature or the substance of which he consists.

The Christian doctrine of the Trinity teaches that one God eternally exists in a unity of being as three persons, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. It took several centuries of wrestling with the Scriptures for Christians to arrive at this understanding of God. The primary impetus for the development of this doctrine was early Christian worship of the risen and exalted Christ; the Scriptures clearly teach that Jesus is divine. They expressed this by saying that the Son is of the same nature as the Father. How then did Christians reconcile worship of Christ with the oneness of God? The key was a distinction between person and nature. Eventually Christians were led by Scripture to affirm that God the Father and God the Son are one in being, yet distinct in person. To summarize, one God eternally exists in a unity of being as three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

— Dr. Keith Johnson

Theologians have commonly described the Trinity from two perspectives. On the one hand, they’ve spoken of the ontological relationships between the members of the Trinity. And on the other hand, they’ve also talked about the economic relationships.

We'll look briefly at both of these ideas, beginning with the ontological relationships within the Trinity.

Ontological

The word “ontological” means “relating to being.” So, when we consider the ontological relationships between the persons of the Trinity, we're concerned with how they're integrated with each other, and with the fact that they share a single divine essence or nature. Because all three of God's persons share the same divine essence, they all possess the same divine attributes, such as infinity, eternality, and immutability.

In Philippians 2:5-8, Paul talked about this aspect of the Trinity in this way:

Christ Jesus ... being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death — even death on a cross! (Philippians 2:5-8).

This passage says many things about Jesus. But we want to focus on the statement “being in very nature God.” In this phrase, Paul explicitly taught that the Son shares the divine nature or essence with God the Father. And other passages indicate that the same is true of the Holy Spirit, too. They are all the same divine being. As Jesus said in John 10:30:

I and the Father are one (John 10:30).

The unbelievers that heard Jesus make this astonishing statement understood that he was claiming to be God, and they tried to stone him for blasphemy.

Now that we have considered the Biblical teaching about the ontological Trinity, let's consider what the Scriptures teach about the economic relationships within the Trinity.

Economic

The word “economic” means “relating to household management.” So, when we speak of the economic relationships within the Trinity, we're interested in how the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit relate to and interact with each other as distinct persons. As we've seen, from an ontological perspective, the Son possesses the same divine essence as the Father and the Holy Spirit. But within their economic relationships, the Son submits to the will of the Father, and has authority over the Holy Spirit. As Jesus said in John 6:38:

I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me (John 6:38).

And as he said in John 8:28-29:

I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me. The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him (John 8:28-29).

Within the economy of the Trinity, the Son always defers to the Father's authority and will. And just as the Father has authority over the Son, both the Father and the Son have authority over the Holy Spirit. The Son spoke of his authority over the Holy Spirit in John 15:26, where he said this:

When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father ... he will testify about me (John 15:26).

Just as the Father has authority to send the Son, the Son has authority to send the Spirit.

Now, of course, there's never any conflict between the persons of the Trinity. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit always agree. They are of one mind. Even so, within the economy of their relationships, there is a clear order of rank, with the Father possessing the highest authority, and then the Son, and finally the Holy Spirit.

It's impossible for us fully to understand the nature of the Trinity and the relationships between the persons in the Trinity. We know by faith that what Scripture reveals is true. But we have to confess that many aspects of the Trinity are beyond our comprehension. Even so, we can take comfort and encouragement in the reality that all members of the Trinity work together to bring about our salvation. The Father forgives us on the basis of the Son's atonement. And the Father and the Son both send the Spirit into our lives to regenerate us and to renew our lives until the Son returns to complete our salvation.

We've explored Jesus' person and work in eternity by looking at his divinity and at the Trinity. So, now let's turn to his eternal counsel.

COUNSEL

The theological term eternal counsel, often called "eternal decree," refers to God's plans for the universe, which were set before his work of creation. God's eternal counsel is mentioned in places like Acts 2:23, Romans 8:28-30, and 1 Peter 1:2.

Different theological traditions have different beliefs about the nature and extent of God's plans. Some believe that God's eternal plan includes every detail of history. Others believe that God has fixed certain things and not others. But we all agree that what Christ accomplished is central to God's plan — that God ordained salvation in him, and that Christ won't fail. As we read in Ephesians 1:4, 11:

[God] chose us in [Christ] before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight... In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will (Ephesians 1:4, 11).

What God did in Christ wasn't an accident or a fix for an unforeseen problem; it was set by God's eternal decree. Now, as we think about God's eternal counsel regarding Christ, it's helpful to distinguish two aspects: foreknowledge and purpose. One passage where both these aspects of God's eternal counsel are evident is Isaiah 46:10. Listen to what God said there:

I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please (Isaiah 46:10).

Regarding his foreknowledge, God said that from the beginning, that is, before he created the world, he knew what was still to come. And regarding his purpose, he said, "My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please." Let's look at both these ideas in a little more detail.

On the one hand, we might define the term foreknowledge by saying that it refers to God's knowledge, prior to creation, of events that would occur in the course of history. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all-knowing. And their knowledge even extends into the future. In addition to seeing this idea in Isaiah 46:10, we also find it in places like Isaiah 42:9, and 45:11-13; and Acts 15:17, 18.

On the other hand, God's purpose for creating the universe can be described in many ways. In this lesson, we'll summarize it by saying that God created the universe in order to display and increase his glory through his kingdom in Christ. We see this purpose expressed throughout Scripture, including Psalm 145:1-21, 1 Timothy 1:17, Hebrews 1:1-13, 1 Peter 1:20-2:9, and Revelation 1:5-6.

In recent centuries, some theologians have found it helpful to describe God's eternal decree regarding his glorious kingdom as a covenant of redemption. Scripture indicates that before the creation of the world, the persons of the Godhead entered into a solemn arrangement to secure redemption, and to apply it to the fallen creation. In particular, the Son promised to become incarnate and die in order to redeem fallen humanity from the consequences of sin. And the Father promised to accept the Son's sacrifice in payment for the redemption of sinners. Some theologians also include the Holy Spirit's promise to apply salvation to redeemed sinners.

It was an agreement in which the Father plans the work of salvation on behalf of his people. He also determines that he will provide for the Son a body, a physical body in which the Son will come and be incarnate. And the Son agrees to come to this earth, lay down his life on the cross — a perfect life — lay that perfect life down on the cross and be a substitute for God's people. Also, part of that covenant of redemption is the sending forth of the Holy Spirit who takes the work of Christ and then applies it to God's people.

— Dr. Jeff Lowman

The covenant of redemption is important to our understanding because it explains and outlines the things Jesus has already done and continues to do in his incarnation. The promises involved in the covenant of redemption are mentioned in places like Psalm 110, and Ephesians 1:3-6. And they're assumed in places like 1 Peter 1:20, and Revelation 13:8. As just one example, listen to Jesus' words in John 6:38-40:

I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day (John 6:38-40).

Redemption is an issue that relates to an eternal purpose that was formed in God, before the creation of the world. We can't plumb the mysteries of all of this. Obviously, God is infinite and some things remain hidden from us and God has not revealed them, but we want to understand everything that God has revealed about this, and we have indications throughout Scripture that there was a covenant that was formed within the triune God that would be a manifestation of his glory in eternity. So beings other than God would be enjoying his glory, and it would be a never-ending increase of enjoyment. And it appears from Scripture that the way God did this is through a redemptive purpose, to take sinful human beings who were deserving of punishment and to redeem them. And so as far as we can tell from Scripture, before the foundation of the world, before the world was ever created, this covenant arrangement was made in which the Father would elect a people, the Son would come to die and redeem the people, the Holy Spirit would then draw that people removing the corruption of sin from them so that they would repent and embrace Christ.

— Dr. Thomas Nettles

God's eternal counsel should be an incredible source of comfort for all believers. Before God made the universe, he designed creation to display his glory, and to be a suitable place for humanity to live under his benevolent reign. And because of his foreknowledge, nothing surprises him. God wasn't shocked by humanity's fall into sin. And our salvation isn't his last-minute attempt to fix something that broke unexpectedly. On the contrary, everything happens according to his plan. And as amazing as it seems, this same God — the architect and creator of the universe — became incarnate as Jesus of Nazareth. He entered creation in order to restore it, and us, according to his eternal purposes.

Now that we've discussed the Son in eternity, let's turn our attention to the initial period of creation.

CREATION

For our purposes in this lesson, we'll define the initial period of creation as beginning with the creation week, and ending with humanity's fall into sin and expulsion from the Garden of Eden. These events are referred to frequently throughout the Bible. But the primary place where the Bible describes them is Genesis 1–3.

We'll explore the work of the Son during the period of creation by looking at two topics: first, the creation week when God first brought the universe into existence; and second, the fall of humanity into sin. Let's begin with the creation week.

CREATION WEEK

Now, when Christians talk about God creating the world, our minds normally go to the person of God the Father. But Scripture teaches that the Son was at the Father's side during creation, and that the Father created the world by or through him. These facts are taught in places like John 1:1-3 and Hebrews 1:2.

When we think about God the Son being the creator of the universe, the passage that comes to mind is in Colossians 1, which is a rich passage, and it reminds us that all things were made by him, all things were made for him, and in him all things hold together, and it gets to the real practical part. What that means is that we can be confident that the same one who fashioned and shaped this creation and who sustains it through some combination of natural law and his own divine will, that this one here at ground level knows what it is we're going through as part of that creation and as re-created by his spirit. So there is a blessing of connectedness with God's original purpose and God's provision today.

— Dr. James D. Smith III

For instance, listen to what Colossians 1:16 has to say about the Son's involvement in creation:

For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible ... all things were created by him and for him (Colossians 1:16).

In this passage, Paul explicitly said that creation was accomplished by the Son, or as some translations put it, "through" him.

At the beginning of creation the Son existed as the Logos, the true Word. So in Genesis 1, God said, "Let there be light." God said, "Let

the waters be gathered, and let the dry land appear.” Then, in the Gospel of John, John declared that, “The Word became flesh.” Therefore we understand the universe in the same way — from the Creator to the creation, from God to human beings. Why? Because we comprehend the world by God’s governing principle. And this principle is not imaginary. It is the truth, the Word, the Logos. Thus the whole universe can be understood as it is governed by the Logos of God.

— Dr. Stephen Chan, translation

You know, when we read the New Testament, we find so many surprising things, and we read the Old Testament in a whole new light. One of the things we discover, for instance, from the prologue to the Gospel of John, is that Christ is there from the beginning. Christ is in every verse of the Old Testament. But we go all the way back to creation and John tells us that it was Christ, the Word, the Logos of God, who was the creative agent through whom God made the worlds. And then you come to something like Colossians, and Paul tells us, not only did the Son create the world, he brought everything into being, we’re told in Genesis that God spoke — it was a verbal creation. It was a Word by which he spoke. We come to understand that Word is Christ.

— Dr. R. Albert Mohler, Jr.

Interestingly, the Bible’s narrative of creation doesn’t begin with a focus on what happened before the creation of the heavens and the earth. Instead, it spends its time talking about how God ordered and filled the universe in ways that pleased him — in ways that were in keeping with his eternal plans for the universe. Genesis 1:1 is the title for the creation account, telling us that God was the creator. Then Genesis 1:2 tells us about the very early condition of the world. As we read there:

The earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep (Genesis 1:2).

Before God ordered and filled the universe, it was formless, having no shape or order; and it was empty, with no creatures to inhabit it. In this condition, the world wasn’t fit to be God’s glorious kingdom. So, he spent six days filling and ordering his creation. And the way he did this revealed some of the basic dimensions of his eternal purpose for the world.

During the first three days of creation, God formed or gave shape to the world. Through the power of his word, he separated light from darkness, sky from sea, and dry land from water. And he created vegetation as food for the creatures he would later make.

During the second three days of creation, God filled the empty world, so that his kingdom would be properly ordered and governed. He created the sun, moon and stars to mark the seasons, and he assigned the sun to rule or govern the day, and the moon to govern the night. Then he created the fish and other creatures of the sea to inhabit the waters, and the birds to inhabit the air, and all the animals that live on the earth to fill the dry land. And then he created humanity both to fill the earth, and to rule over all the creatures of the water and the sky and the land. Listen to the account of humanity's creation in Genesis 1:27-28:

God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground" (Genesis 1:27-28).

The Scripture, especially the book of Genesis, of course, tells us that the original relationship of humanity to God is richly described in these terms: First of all, human beings are the absolute pinnacle of God's creation. At the end of the sixth day it says, "God said, 'Let us make man in our image.'" And in the image and likeness of God he made man, both male and female. So human beings have this pinnacle kind of relationship, the capstone of all that God wanted to do, to place his image, his likeness, into this creation. And therefore, the second chapter of Genesis describes that same reality in these terms: that God fashioned Adam from the dust of the ground and breathed into him the breath of life, God sharing his divine life with Adam. Therefore, the original relationship of humanity to God is probably best described in these terms: Human beings are meant to be friends of God, children of God, partners with God in creation, to serve God, but not just to serve God, most importantly, to know God and to love God.

— Dr. Steve Blakemore

By the end of the sixth day of the creation week, God had created the universe to be his special kingdom, and he had appointed humanity to govern the earth in ways that brought him glory. With this in mind, let's look again at Colossians 1:16, where Paul wrote these words about the Son's role in creation:

For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him (Colossians 1:16).

Notice that in this passage, Paul emphasized thrones, powers, rulers and authorities. In the Bible, creation isn't just about existence. It's also a matter of political power. The world exists in order to become God's special kingdom, under the authority of his special Son. We see the same connection in these words from Hebrews 1:2:

[God] has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe (Hebrews 1:2).

Here, the author of Hebrews connected the idea that God the Son was active in creation with the fact that he was the "heir of all things," that is, that he was the king that would inherit ownership and rule over the entire creation. In fact, this theme runs through the entire chapter.

The Bible consistently teaches that the purpose of creation is to serve as God's special kingdom. And the New Testament makes it clear that this kingdom is to be ruled by God's special Son, through whom and by whom creation was accomplished. We might even say that the Son's creative work was an expression of his kingship and authority. He has authority over creation because he created it. And therefore, every created thing is obligated to submit willingly and obediently to God the Son as its King.

One of the intriguing truths of the Christian faith is that our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ not only redeems us, but he had a vital role in the creation of the universe. Our Lord and Savior is the Redeemer, but he is also more fully the Creator and the Redeemer. This has a number of significant implications for us. One is that it reminds us just how great our Savior is, the Creator of all. It's a staggering thought, really, it is. It also makes sure that we will never be misled to think that the Son is somehow less than the Father, but a full participant in the creation of this mighty and amazing universe of ours. I think it also is a reminder that the heart of Jesus Christ extends not only to his church but to the entire created order and all creatures, and that the redemption that we anticipate fully at the end time through Christ will be a redemption of this groaning creation as well. It's a reminder, I think, finally that those who follow Jesus Christ should rightly have a heart that beats in sync with his and care about this world and its inhabitants just as much as the one who made it.

— Dr. Glen Scorgie

Now that we've considered the Son's work in creation from the perspective of the creation week, we're ready to turn to the fall of humanity into sin.

FALL OF HUMANITY

Humanity's fall into sin is a sad but well-known story. In Genesis 2, God had created our first parents, Adam and Eve, and placed them in the beautiful Garden of

Eden. Their job had been to tend the garden, and to produce enough descendants for the human race to be able to expand the garden to fill the entire world, so that the whole planet would be fit for God to inhabit. But in Genesis 3, Satan took the form of a serpent and tempted Eve to eat the forbidden fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. And once Eve had eaten it, she gave some to Adam, and he ate it too. This was the first act of disloyalty from humanity. Adam and Eve trusted the words of the serpent and acted in disbelief towards God's provision as well as his command.

So, in Genesis 3, God responded to this sin with the curse on Adam, Eve and the serpent. The judgments in this curse summarized the consequences for the disobedience of humanity, and delayed the fulfillment of God's purpose for creation.

But what was the role of God the Son in all this? We can summarize the Son's work by saying that he participated with the Father and Holy Spirit in cursing humanity when they sinned, and that he was the promised Redeemer that would eventually come to save humanity from these very same curses.

We'll examine the work of God the Son during the fall of humanity in three ways. First, we'll explore the personal consequences of the Fall. Second, we'll look at its universal consequences. And third, we'll briefly mention the hope that was given to humanity after the Fall. Let's begin with the Fall's personal consequences.

Personal Consequences

Well, according to Romans 5, some of the effects of man's fall into sin, it says that by one man, talking about Adam, sin entered into the world and death passed on to all men for that all sinned and the meaning is all sinned in him. He represented the whole human race. And when he sinned, then his guilt was transferred to the whole human race. And also, his corrupted nature was transferred. Think of it that when God created Adam, he put a little bottle of poison in him — this isn't right, but think of it that way — He said to Adam, if you ever go against my will, that little bottle is going to break. Well, Adam went against his will, and the little bottle broke, and it poisoned his mind — he didn't think right, poisoned his heart — he didn't love the right things, poisoned his will — he didn't choose the right things. Then when Adam had children, that corrupt nature was passed on to his children so the whole human race came into existence with this corrupted nature and rebellion against God.

— Dr. Frank Barker

Broken Fellowship. There are many ways to describe the personal consequences of humanity's fall into sin. But for our purposes in these lessons, we'll focus on four ideas, beginning with broken fellowship between God and human beings.

Humanity's fall into sin was basically rebellion against God — breaking of his moral commands which are a reflection of his

character. And that rebellion led to a tragic separation at every level — first and foremost, separation from God. We, as his creation, made in his image, intended to glorify him, don't do that. We invariably fall short of the glory of God, and when we rebel against him, he intentionally curses this creation and brings about a separation between God and his creation. So, humanity's experience of separation, being cut off from our ultimate source of security and significance and identity and being God's creation, and so, we're separated from God. We're even separated from one another because human beings are intended to be finding all of their joy, their identity, their satisfaction in God and when we don't do that we seek it in the things of the world. And people, then, rather than being objects of affection and love, become competition for the things of this world we're seeking for our identity, and so we're separated from other people.

— Dr. K. Erik Thoennes

God designed this world to be a place where he could dwell with his creatures. But Adam and Eve's sin alienated them from God; their fellowship with him was broken. Their disobedience created a sense of shame, and they lost their contentment and confidence in God's presence. So, instead of walking and talking with God in the garden, they hid from his presence. And this fellowship wasn't just broken from a human perspective; God also rejected their presence, and banished them from the Garden of Eden. As a result, one of humanity's greatest needs is to have this relationship restored.

Further, as a consequence of humanity's broken relationship with God, Adam and Eve's fellowship with each other was also broken. This is evident in the fact that they became ashamed by their nakedness, and covered themselves with fig leaves. And we also see it in God's curse on humanity in Genesis 3:16, where we are told that sin is the source of strife in marriage. So, humanity also needs redemption that can restore these human relationships.

Guilt. A second personal consequence of the Fall is that humanity bears the guilt of Adam's sin. Listen to Paul's description of this problem in Romans 5:18.

The result of one trespass was condemnation for all men (Romans 5:18).

Paul taught that Adam's one act of disobedience condemned all humanity. In other words, God reckons Adam's sin to the account of every fallen human being, so that we're all guilty of that first trespass. This happened because Adam was the covenant head of all humanity. He represented not only himself, but also his wife, and every other human being that would descend from them through natural human generation. As a result, we need redemption that frees us from this guilt, and from the eternal punishment it brings.

Depravity. The third personal consequence of the Fall we'll mention is depravity. The theological term "depravity" refers to sin's corruption of human nature. Different theological traditions understand the extent of depravity in different ways. But all evangelical Christians agree that it prevents us from gaining favor with God. Scripture speaks of the depravity of human nature in many places, including Romans 3:9-18.

For example, listen to these words from Romans 3:10-12:

There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one (Romans 3:10-12).

In these verses, Paul combined various references from the Old Testament in order to highlight Scripture's consistent teachings about human depravity.

In Romans 3, Paul taught that our behavior is depraved, so that no one is righteous and no one does good. Our intellect is also depraved, so that no one understands. And our will has been affected, too, so that no one seeks God. In fact, Paul went so far as to say that human nature has become worthless before our holy God. We aren't worthy of his blessing, and there is nothing we can do to redeem ourselves. We need someone else to rescue us.

You know, when the twentieth century began, there was so much optimism in the world, especially the Western world, that due to, because of, the advancement of science, because of the wide availability of education, because of all the discoveries — technological, progress, and so on — there was among philosophers and social scientists and even liberal theologians, there was this great aura of optimism that the twentieth century would be a century of peace in which there would be war no more. Twentieth century would be a century in which the human reason would rule, and reasonable beings will not go killing each other. So, in this enormous expectation, that we were arriving in a century in which there would be peace. You see, the problem in this kind of thing ... and that was the problem in Marxism, it had an optimistic anthropology that ended in social disasters because it didn't have the doctrine of sin. And so what happened? You had the First World War. You had the Bolshevik Revolution. You had later the Holocaust, Second World War, Hitler, Nazism, and we could go on. And so, as a result, to sum it up, in the twentieth century, some 112.8 million people had been killed in warfare. I'm talking just warfare. Civilians and soldiers, as far as recorded data permit us to calculate. That is four times as many as in the previous four centuries cumulatively. What does that tell us? That something is wrong. Not only social conditions, with all of the knowledge, advancement of science and providence of civilization, there is something fundamentally wrong with human nature. And this is what we are, Christians, calling "sin." Now that's not a very

popular word in the media, in the academy and so on, and yet as Reinhold Niebuhr said, the Christian doctrine of sin is the least popular of all doctrines, and yet the one for which we have the most overwhelming empirical evidence everywhere.

— Dr. Peter Kuzmič

Suffering, Pain and Death. The fourth personal consequence of the Fall was that all humanity began to experience suffering, pain and death.

Before humanity's fall into sin, life was perfect and fulfilling. Human beings didn't experience pain, or hardship, or sickness, or death. But after Adam and Eve sinned, God cursed them and all their natural descendants.

Well, as a result of the Fall, God judged men and women and indeed, the whole of creation. So, for example, work, which was something that Adam and Eve were engaged in prior to the Fall, became toil, and hence, human beings have a love-hate relationship with work. The relationship between the man and the woman, again, was corrupted and perverted. Childbirth is — again, another gift of God for the recreation of more images of God — became painful, and basically, the overall result was that the good things that God gave for Adam and Eve to enjoy continued to be enjoyed, but actually then were also twisted and perverted in some sense, and weren't enjoyed in all their fullness.

— Dr. Simon Vibert

God's curses on humanity are recorded in Genesis 3:16-19, where we read these words:

To the woman he said, "I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children..." To Adam he said ... "Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you ... By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground" (Genesis 3:16-19).

These curses didn't just cause humanity pain and suffering; they also hindered them from fulfilling the tasks God had assigned to them. Humanity began to experience hardship in their tasks of multiplying and filling the earth, in working the ground and taking care of it, and in ruling over the earth and spreading God's kingdom.

Even worse, all humanity would begin to experience death. And these curses extended throughout all human generations. So, if we are ever to fulfill God's purposes for humanity, we need a Redeemer that can rescue us from these hindrances and restore us to a blessed, joyful existence.

The results of humanity's fall are that the human race has turned its own way. Sin is disobedience of God's commandments, and human beings are not perfect. They can no longer reach God's standard. Thus, after the Fall, we are separated from God, and the entire human race was and is faced with the reality of death. With no exceptions, no one is righteous in God's eyes. Although human beings are still images of God, they are corrupted. Without redemption in Christ, no one can naturally seek after him. And we cannot live up to God's standard of goodness.

— Dr. Stephen Chan, translation

Human beings need a Redeemer and indeed need God to be their Redeemer for this reason: the nature of sin against God. God is not some impersonal force that launched the universe into existence. God is personal being — the doctrine of the Trinity, God is Father, Son, Holy Spirit. God is intimately, profoundly personal. And therefore, our sin is against God personally. Our sin is like a betrayal of our Creator more than it is like anything else, as I understand what the Scripture is trying to tell us. And therefore, since our sin is like a betrayal, there's nothing we can do to fix it. Betrayal is the sort of thing that only the betrayed party can ever do anything about. And so only if God provides us redemption, only if God takes the brokenness of the relationship and fixes it, can we be redeemed. But we also need a Redeemer because of what sin has done to the human condition. It has trapped us. As we turn away from God and turn in on ourselves, it has trapped us in a kind of gravitational pull that apart from God's graciousness to allow us to escape and be able once again to have our hearts and lives turn toward God, apart from that we could not escape from our own sins. And so only a Redeemer who can first of all make things right with God can save us, and also only a Redeemer who can reach into our sinful situation and undo the power of sin can save us.

— Dr. Steve Blakemore

Having seen the personal consequences that result from humanity's fall into sin, we're ready to turn to its universal consequences.

Universal Consequences

Humanity was so central to God's kingdom purposes that our rebellion brought a curse on the entire universe. Since that time, human society has continued to live for its own glory rather than God's. We've treated each other with injustice and inequity. And

we've constantly rebelled against God's will, so that his kingdom on earth has failed to display his perfect glory as its benevolent King and Creator. The natural world has been affected too. Decay and death have corrupted and diminished the earth and all its creatures. Every aspect of creation needs salvation and redemption.

In this lesson, we'll focus on two universal consequences of the Fall, beginning with the fact that it delayed the coming of God's kingdom.

Delay of God's Kingdom. As we read in Genesis 2:8, when God created the world, the Garden of Eden was the only part that was a paradise. The rest of the world was undeveloped and wild. According to Genesis 1:28, it was humanity's job to subdue the earth, that is, to cultivate it and establish human societies throughout it, so that the entire world would resemble God's special garden. We were also supposed to rule over it as God's servant kings, ensuring that his glorious heavenly rule was properly extended throughout his earthly creation. When this work was done, it was God's plan to inhabit the world as his special earthly kingdom.

But humanity's fall into sin delayed the proper cultivation of the world and our rule over it. And therefore it also delayed the coming of God's kingdom. Our attempts to cultivate and rule were tainted by sin, and so the world we made wasn't fit for God to inhabit. Without a doubt, human beings have successfully filled the earth. But the societies we've built are far from the perfect world we were commanded to make. Wars, crime, strife, hatred and false religion are rampant, and even in the church we often find people who lack faith and commitment to God. And as a result of all this sin in the world, God's kingdom still hasn't come in all its fullness. Peter addressed this problem in 2 Peter 3:11-12 when he wrote:

You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming (2 Peter 3:11-12).

In one sense, God can bring his kingdom to earth whenever he pleases, since he has the power to purge the world of sin whenever he wants. But God's plan is to do this through the Redeemer, Jesus Christ. And in this passage, Peter taught that by fighting against the corruption in the world, we can actually begin to move creation toward its original goal, and speed the day that God comes to dwell on the earth.

The second universal consequence of the Fall we'll mention is that all creation is now subject to futility.

Subjection to Futility. When pain and suffering entered human experience, the peace and productivity of the rest of creation was also disrupted. The ground was cursed, so that it began to produce thorns and thistles, and the entire creation was troubled with chaos and corruption.

In Romans 8:20-22, Paul described this curse by saying that the creation was subjected to frustration, that it's in bondage to decay, and that it's groaning as in the pains of childbirth. In other words, creation no longer produces the good things it was intended to produce, and it's no longer even capable of becoming the perfect world that God intended.

A casual glance at the world around us confirms how true this is. Hurricanes ravage our coastlines. Earthquakes destroy cities and villages. Floods sometimes wash away whole villages. Insects, animals and disease destroy crops. Sickness and injury cause suffering and death for millions. The effects of the Fall are everywhere. And the only way for the world to be made right is for God to redeem creation from this curse.

The consequences for creation and humanity when Adam and Eve sinned are wide reaching because of what humanity was created to be. In Genesis we're told man was created, male and female, to have dominion over the earth. And so, as a mediator between God and the creation, what humanity does has ramifications for the whole creation. So, this is shown in the way that Adam is created from the dirt, so there's this connection that the destiny of the created reality is bound up with what kind of actions humans make. When Adam and Eve sin then we see weeds and the world is now hostile to life and creation. And so, instead of driving creation or leading creation in God's order and in relationship to God, you have the opposite happening of misleading creation under human rule, human misrule, to destruction and leading away from God. Paul returns to this in Romans 8 when he says, the sufferings going on in the world – that can be natural disasters, that can be sickness that we have – these things are all related to creation being subjected to futility, having been put into our hands and we then basically forfeited it under a whole sinful regime. But in personifying creation there he says, "Creation is waiting with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God." That's because, just as creation was in a sense doomed because of what humanity did, creation can be saved, all of creation through humanity functioning properly under God, which we haven't seen yet, but we do see when the second Adam returns and Christ takes up the job that humanity was created to do and he orders creation as it ought to be under God's rule and its proper dominion in that way. And we see that anticipated in Isaiah 11, where he is restoring peace in the animal kingdom and between humans and animals and so we're looking for a glorious ordering of creation as things are supposed to be. And it's all based on humanity having this mediation role under God to the creation of bringing God's will to bear as his image bearers.

— Dr. John McKinley

Now that we've considered the personal consequences and universal consequences of the fall of humanity into sin, we're ready to turn to the hope that the Son gives us after the Fall.

Hope for Humanity

God didn't take long to reveal his plan for humanity's redemption. In fact, the first glimmer of hope for humanity came in the fact that God cursed them. In Genesis 2:17, God had threatened to kill humanity if they ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. But when Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, they didn't immediately die. Instead, God showed a measure of mercy by delaying their deaths. And he showed even more mercy by allowing humanity to continue to serve him in the meantime. Rather than removing them from his plans for creation, he continued to keep humanity at the center of his work.

And then God did something even more merciful: he promised to send a Redeemer that would crush the plans of the Devil and restore God's people to faithfulness. The first mention of this Redeemer is often called the "first gospel," and it's found in God's curse against the serpent after Adam and Eve had sinned.

Listen to this curse in Genesis 3:15:

I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel (Genesis 3:15).

In the Fall, Adam and Eve aligned themselves with the rebellious serpent rather than with God. But even then, God didn't abandon his people. In this curse on the serpent, God promised that eventually the offspring of the woman would rescue humanity by defeating the serpent.

Revelation 12:9 and 20:2 teach that the serpent was actually the Devil. So, Evangelical theologians have consistently understood that this first gospel was more than the promise of retribution against a simple animal. Instead, God's promise to send a Redeemer to crush the serpent's head was a promise to rescue humanity from the consequences of their sin – to turn them away from their allegiance to the devil, and to restore their fellowship with him as faithful citizens of his kingdom.

These early gospel images continue in Genesis 3:21, where God provided Adam and Eve with garments of skin to cover their nakedness and shame. Not only did this demonstrate God's continued love and provision for humanity, but it anticipated a day when a fuller sacrifice would be made to redeem the people of God and to cover their sin. And as the New Testament makes clear, this sacrifice would be the Son of God himself.

Now that we've considered the Son in eternity, and his work in creation, we're ready to turn to our third major topic: the Son's work in redemption.

REDEMPTION

Adam and Eve's fall into sin had terrible consequences for humanity and the rest of creation. But God is even greater than our sin. Immediately after our first parents cast the human race into ruin, God revealed his plans to rescue us. From the very beginning,

the Father appointed his Son as the Redeemer that would bring salvation to sinners and restore the entire created world.

We've identified the historical period of redemption as the entire age that began immediately after the Fall in Genesis 3, and that will continue until the consummation of the heavens and the earth when Jesus returns. The Son's work during this period of redemption is characterized especially by the forgiveness and salvation of sinners. The Son began to save sinners immediately after the Fall, when Adam and Eve received mercy from God on the basis of the future redemption that one of Eve's sons would bring. And he has continued to save sinners in every age — as many as have repented of their sins, and turned to him in faith.

We'll consider the Son's role during the period of redemption by exploring three main ideas: first, the Son's motive for redeeming sinners; second, the Father's promise to the Son that ensured the redemption of sinners; and third, the work the Son performed in order to accomplish this redemption. Let's begin with the Son's motive for redeeming sinners.

MOTIVE

The Son's motive for redeeming sinners was complex, and can be described in a variety of ways. He was motivated by his desire to bring glory to the Trinity. He was motivated by a desire for the creation to fulfill its purpose. He was motivated by his desire for justice and mercy. But one of the most well-known words Scripture uses to describe the Son's motive in redemption is "love" — love for God, love for creation and love for human beings. And this love wasn't limited to the Son; all three persons of the Trinity shared it.

God is motivated to redeem us because God is love. Scriptures are clear about that — 1 John, "God is love." John 3:16 used to be one of the most well-known Bible verses in the world, "For God so loved the world." So what motivates him to save and redeem? It's his love. His desire and his design for his creation, especially his human creation, to know him, to live in relationship with him, to be fulfilled in him and thereby providing a platform in which people could know him, and he can be glorified as the loving altogether good God that he is. So the love of God for us is what motivates him to redeem us.

— Dr. Steve Blakemore

We'll explore God's love as the motive behind the Son's role in redemption by looking at three ideas, beginning with the love between the three persons of the Trinity.

Trinity

There is no doubt that God chose to redeem humanity because he loved us. But one of the details we sometimes forget is that God's redeeming love for human beings is

an aspect of the Father's love for the Son. Listen to the way Paul described the Father's decision to save us in Ephesians 1:4-6:

For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will — to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves (Ephesians 1:4-6).

Three times in this short passage Paul mentioned that God chose to redeem us in him, through Jesus Christ, and in the One he loves. And one of his points was that God's love for us results from the Father's love for the Son. Their inter-Trinitarian love is the ultimate motive for our redemption. We find similar teachings in Romans 8:39 and 1 Timothy 1:14.

The New Testament frequently calls attention to the fact that the Father's love for the Son is critical to our redemption. The Father made it evident at Jesus' baptism and transfiguration, as we see in Matthew 3:17, and 17:5; and 2 Peter 1:17. Jesus referred to it when he described his authority to redeem and to judge in John 3:35 and 5:20-23. And Paul described redemption itself as citizenship in the kingdom of the Son the Father loves, in Colossians 1:13-14.

And this love isn't directionless. It includes a desire for the members of the Trinity to be honored and obeyed, for God's glory to be magnified and exhibited, for his purposes to be fulfilled, for his kingship over all creation to be acknowledged and praised. And because humanity is central to God's purposes for creation, our redemption is a natural result of the love within the Trinity.

It's important to realize that God doesn't redeem us because he couldn't live without us, or he doesn't redeem us because he was just lonely without redeemed humanity. God is independent. He has no unmet needs. He doesn't need us or the rest of creation for anything. So we know God doesn't create out of need. He doesn't redeem out of need. He redeems and he creates and he does everything, ultimately though, to glorify himself, to display his character, so all of creation, from the heavens that declare his glory to human beings made in his image who are intended to reflect his glory, he's about showing his character, displaying his holiness, and his worth and beauty. Everything he does is for that ultimate end. But, why does he redeem? He redeems so that he can display his glory through redeemed creation.

— Dr. K. Erik Thoennes

Creation

Second, God's love for creation also motivated the Son's role in redemption. That the Son's role in redemption was motivated by God's love for creation is evident in a

variety of ways. We see it in his care as creator for everything he has made and especially in his love for human beings who are created in his image.

Probably the best known example of this is John 3:16-18, where we read these words:

God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son (John 3:16-18).

We should point out that John often used the word world in different ways. In various places, he used it to refer to the universe, the earth, all humanity, many people, people that oppose God, and human systems of values and practice. But in this case, he seems to have meant either the creation itself, or all humanity within that creation.

The basic idea in John 3:16-18 is that God's love motivated him to save the world. He still wanted the world to be his glorious kingdom, populated and ruled by his servants and images, the human race. So, he planned to send his Son to redeem a believing remnant of humanity. By saving believers, God would create a new humanity. And then he would renew the heavens and the earth as his glorious kingdom, and as the home for his newly redeemed humanity. This idea is also taught in places like Romans 8:20-22; 2 Peter 3:13; and Revelation 21:1-4.

Believers

Third, God's love for believers also motivated the Son's role in redemption. In many parts of Scripture, God is said to have a special love for believers. He wants to be in close fellowship with us, and to bless us. And he wants us to love him in return, and to enjoy our relationship with him forever. In fact, God's love for believers is so special that the Bible actually says God knew and loved us before we were even born. We see this in Romans 8:29-39; Ephesians 1:4-12; and 1 Peter 1:2. And Scripture also makes it clear that God's love for believers was an important part of the Father's motive in sending the Son to accomplish redemption, as well as in the Son's desire to do the Father's will. This is especially clear in John's writings, as in John 16:27; and 1 John 3:16, and 4:10-19.

It's not an exaggeration to say that everything God does is motivated at least in part by his love for his people. And God's love is most perfectly and completely displayed in his Son. We all go through struggles in life, and sometimes we even doubt that God loves us. But God doesn't love us any less when we struggle or doubt. The reality is that he knows all our sin and our struggles, and he loves us anyway. Even before we had faith in him, or ever wanted to escape our sin, God loved us so much that he appointed his Son to redeem us. And that was a huge price to pay — Jesus had to suffer and die under the weight of our sin. But he did it for love. And now in his

resurrection, Jesus has become the living testimony to God's redeeming love for his people.

Now that we've explored God's motive for redemption, let's turn to the divine promises that made redemption certain.

PROMISES

God's promises are immutable. They can never change, and he will never break them. Whatever God promises, he will certainly fulfill. Now this is important to our understanding of the Son's role in redemption because redemption is rooted in promises between the Father and the Son.

As we saw earlier in this lesson, the persons of the Trinity entered into an arrangement that some have called the "covenant of redemption," in which they promised to redeem fallen humanity. And what we're about to see is that this covenant of redemption resulted in another covenant being made to secure redemption after the fall into sin. Theologians often call this subsequent covenant the "covenant of grace." This solemn arrangement was made between the Father on the one hand, and the Son and redeemed humanity on the other hand. And it governs the entire period of redemption, beginning immediately after humanity's fall into sin, and coming to its ultimate fulfillment when Jesus returns in glory.

In this covenant, God the Father promised to fulfill his kingdom plans for creation and humanity through the Son, particularly through the Son's incarnation as Jesus Christ. And the Son promised to become incarnate as a human being descended from God's chosen line of Davidic kings, and to fulfill all the terms set forth in the prior covenant of redemption. He would die an atoning death for fallen humanity, and all those who turned to him in repentance and faith would be redeemed from the presence, corruption and guilt of sin. And in conjunction with these promises, both the Father and the Son agreed to send the Holy Spirit to apply the benefits of salvation to those the Son would save.

Theologians typically divide the covenant of grace into six administrations, according to a number of covenant ceremonies God performed throughout history to confirm the covenant of grace with his people. These administrations are normally identified with the human being that led God's people during the time the covenant ceremony was performed.

It begins in Genesis 3 immediately after the Fall with Adam as head of God's covenant people. This is commonly known as the "Adamic administration" of the covenant, or simply the "Adamic covenant." Under this administration, redemption was first offered to humanity in Genesis 3:15, which we earlier identified as the "first gospel."

Next was the covenant of renewal that took place with Noah in Genesis 6–9. In the Noahic administration of the covenant, God promised to maintain the creation in a stable manner so that humanity would be preserved until the Son's redeeming work was complete.

Following this, God made a covenant with Abraham, which is described in Genesis 15, 17, and reaffirmed in Genesis 22. This covenant assigned special privileges and obligations to Abraham's family, and promised that one of his descendants would be the redeemer. And according to Galatians 3, this special descendant was Jesus.

Listen to what Paul wrote in Galatians 3:16:

The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say "and to seeds," meaning many people, but "and to your seed," meaning one person, who is Christ (Galatians 3:16).

Paul observed that the promises of the Abrahamic administration of the covenant were made not just to Abraham, but also to Christ. The Son of God was the promised Redeemer who would bring all God's covenant blessings to his faithful people — especially the blessing of redemption from sin.

Next came the covenant with Israel in the days of Moses, which is described in places like Exodus 19–24, and the book of Deuteronomy. In the Mosaic administration of the covenant or “Mosaic covenant,” God instituted a sacrificial system that illustrated the sacrifice the Son would eventually make when he became incarnate as Jesus of Nazareth. These Mosaic sacrifices were visible confirmations of the promises the Father and Son had made before creation. And through these sacrifices, God's faithful people received foretastes of the redemption the Son would eventually accomplish.

During this time, Israel was established as a royal priesthood and a holy nation. And through their obedience to God's covenant, they were to build the earthly kingdom that the Son would eventually rule.

The fifth administration of the covenant, and the last administration in the Old Testament period, was the one under David, often called the “Davidic covenant.” The Davidic administration of the covenant of grace is mentioned in places like 2 Samuel 7, and Psalms 89, 132. At this time, God promised that the redeemer would descend from David, that he would usher in God's kingdom on earth, and that through his righteous rule he would bring redemption to everyone that had faith in him.

Finally, the sixth administration began in the days of Jesus and will continue until he returns. The Bible normally calls this administration the “new covenant,” as we see in places like Luke 22:20, and Hebrews 9:15 and 12:24. Under this administration of the covenant of grace, all the work of redemption was and is actually being accomplished. Jesus performed his promised role of dying as a sacrifice for sin. The Father accepted his sacrifice. And the Holy Spirit is applying redemption to all those who have faith in Jesus as their Redeemer.

The basis for salvation has always been through the Son. Where you are chronologically in redemptive history relative to the actual period of Jesus's ministry determines whether that focus or that glance is retrospective, as it is for us in the new covenant looking back on promises that have been fulfilled and accomplished in the ministry of Jesus. Or whether for those in the old covenant would be looking forward with not as much specificity as we have in our understanding now, but in accord with the promises of God that do terminate, that are fulfilled in the person of Jesus. So, yes, the basis of our salvation is always Jesus.

— Dr. Rob Lister

There are some people who wonder if there were different ways that people were saved in the Old Testament prior to the coming of Christ. And there have been answers that have been given like some were saved perhaps through government, or some were saved through the law, or some were saved through some other means, through the rule and being a part of the people of Israel. Some might have been saved through circumcision. But the whole teaching of the Bible is that all these things were simply preparatory for the single event that actually would save us. Even as detailed as the sacrificial system was, and as important as it was, the prophets themselves tell the people to stop offering sacrifices if they don't have hearts that are turned to God. And then the book of Hebrews makes it entirely clear that the blood of bulls and goats could never take away sin. There was only one sacrifice that could. And that was because of the uniqueness of the person of Christ. He was God and man in one person. The singularity of this person was the only being who ever could redeem us to God.

— Dr. Thomas Nettles

Now that we've looked at the divine motive and promises regarding redemption, we're ready to examine the work the Son did to accomplish redemption, particularly through his incarnation as Jesus of Nazareth.

WORK

We'll consider four aspects of Jesus' redeeming work: his inauguration of the kingdom of God; his obedience to the Father; his resurrection; and his ascension. Let's look first at his inauguration of the kingdom of God.

Inauguration of Kingdom

Throughout the Old Testament, God's people longed for the day when God would bring his kingdom to earth in a dramatic way, completely destroying their enemies, and establishing them in everlasting lives of blessing. This was the day when humanity's original mandate would finally be fulfilled. God would completely restore his creation, and his will would be done on earth just as perfectly as it is already done in heaven.

When the Old Testament prophets talked about this restoration of Israel, humanity and creation, they often called it the day of the Lord or the last days. They also identified the messiah or Christ as the key figure that would lead God's kingdom in the last days. And according to the New Testament, Jesus, the Son of God, is the long-awaited Messiah who came to establish God's kingdom on earth.

Jesus taught that he had brought the kingdom of God to earth in his day. For example, in Matthew 12:28, he said, “The kingdom of God has come upon you,” meaning that it was already there. And in Luke 16:16, he again taught that people were already entering the kingdom of God, when he said, “Everyone is forcing his way into it.”

Sadly, many people in Jesus’ day rejected the idea that the kingdom of God had already come, because they expected it to be an undeniable earthly reality that would be acknowledged by all — an obvious and physical overthrow of the entire world order. But Jesus taught that the kingdom had come in a different sort of way.

Listen to what he said in Luke 17:20-21:

The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, “Here it is,” or “There it is,” because the kingdom of God is within you (Luke 17:20-21).

To be sure, Jesus hasn’t brought in the kingdom of God in all its fullness. He has only begun that work. So, we’re still waiting for him to finish what he started — to complete or consummate the kingdom of God. But it’s a slow process. As Jesus taught in his parables in Matthew 13, Mark 4 and Luke 13, the kingdom of God is like seed that grows over time, or yeast or leaven that causes bread to rise over time. In line with these parables, we might say that the kingdom has been planted, but that the day of harvest won’t happen until Jesus returns in the future.

The New Testament teaches that Jesus, the incarnate Son of God, inaugurated God’s kingdom on earth. And it confidently teaches that when he returns in glory, this evil age will end entirely, and the new heavens and new earth will bring complete restoration to God’s people. And this should give us great hope and confidence. In a fallen world, it sometimes seems like evil is winning, and that we suffer for nothing. But God won’t delay justice forever. A day is coming when he will render final judgment against his enemies. He will fully purge sin, suffering and death from the world. And he’ll reward all his faithful people with an everlasting inheritance in his kingdom. Jesus proved himself by many miracles and teachings, and even granted us his Holy Spirit as a down payment on our kingdom blessings. So, we can be certain that he’ll return to consummate his kingdom and to give us our full inheritance.

Now that we’ve seen how Jesus inaugurated the kingdom of God, let’s take a look at his work of obedience to the Father.

Obedience

Earlier in our lesson, we considered the personal consequences of humanity’s fall into sin. We saw that the guilt of Adam’s first sin was passed on to all humanity, since Adam represented humanity as our covenant head. We also suffered broken fellowship with God, and depravity that prevents us from earning salvation for ourselves.

Well, in an important sense, Jesus’ role as our redeemer included succeeding where Adam failed. Jesus lived a life of perfect obedience to the Father, culminating in his death on the cross. And by his obedience, he won the blessings that Adam had lost. And now he shares those blessings with all his faithful people. Paul spoke extensively of

these parallels between Jesus and Adam in Romans 5:12-19. And in 1 Corinthians 15:45, Paul even called him the “last Adam.”

Theologians often speak of two aspects of the obedience that Jesus rendered throughout his life. On the one hand, his passive obedience was his submission to a life of humiliation and suffering, culminating in his crucifixion. His death on the cross satisfied God’s just requirement that sin be punished by death. In his passive obedience, Jesus was our substitute. He allowed our guilt to be imputed to him, that is, reckoned to his account. And once he was thereby counted guilty in God’s eyes, he died in our place. This single act paid the penalty for all our sins, so that God’s judgment and wrath no longer threaten us. It obtained the forgiveness of our sins, and freed us from the penalty of the law.

As Paul wrote in Romans 5:18-19:

Just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous (Romans 5:18-19).

Here, Paul explicitly compared Adam and Jesus. And his point was that because Jesus represents us in the same way that Adam once represented us, Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross frees us from God’s just condemnation, and causes him to see us as righteous.

The second type of obedience Jesus rendered was active obedience. This was his life of obedience to everything the Father commanded. In his incarnation, Jesus perfectly kept God’s law. He never sinned, and he always did what God commanded. And in the same way that our guilt was imputed to Jesus on the cross, his righteous obedience is imputed back to us. Theologians often call this “forensic righteousness,” meaning that we are declared to be righteous even though we haven’t yet been completely freed from the indwelling presence of sin. God looks at us as if we were his incarnate Son Jesus — as if we had lived his perfect life, and performed all his good works ourselves. As a result, our fellowship with God is restored. And though depravity still prevents us from earning salvation ourselves, God rewards us with the blessings of salvation on the basis of Jesus’ merit.

For us to be redeemed out of our sinful, fallen state as “children of wrath,” as the Bible says, we need God to solve our problem. We’re helpless, hopeless, unable to solve our own problem of sin. But God, in his grace, solves our problem. And the way he does that is by sending his Son to represent us. God the Son becomes a man and lives a perfect life of obedience, dies a perfect death on the cross, and then walks out of a tomb, defeating death for us. And the only way we then can be redeemed is to be part of this new creation, this first fruits of resurrected redeemed life that Jesus represents. And the way we become part of that is by trusting him, putting our faith in Christ, the new man, the new Adam, who represents this new kind of humanity that has been redeemed from our fallen condition. So, it’s faith in

Christ, the God-man who represents us in his redeeming work, that we find redemption.

— Dr. K. Erik Thoennes

Now that we've considered Jesus' work in terms of the kingdom of God and obedience, let's turn to his resurrection from the dead.

Resurrection

Jesus' bodily resurrection was critical to his work of redemption. By rising from the dead, Jesus conquered death itself, and secured the everlasting physical life of everyone that has faith in him.

Listen to how Paul described Jesus' resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15:20-21:

But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man (1 Corinthians 15:20-21).

Adam's sin brought death. But when Jesus rose from the dead, he guaranteed that all who believe in him will also be resurrected. And when he returns, we'll live forever in glorified bodies that are like the one our Redeemer already has.

With this understanding of Jesus' resurrection in mind, let's turn to a fourth aspect of his work of redemption: his ascension into heaven.

Ascension

After his resurrection, Jesus appeared to his disciples over a period of forty days, and taught them about the kingdom of God. And at the end of this time, he was taken bodily into heaven. This event is recorded in Luke 24:50, 51 and Acts 1:3-11.

The ascension was important to Jesus' work of redemption for at least two reasons. On the one hand, he ascended into heaven in order to be enthroned as king. He now rules as the Father's servant king over all creation, and especially over his people, the church. These details are mentioned in places like 1 Corinthians 15:23-25; Hebrews 12:2; and 1 Peter 3:22.

On the other hand, the ascension was also important because it allowed Jesus to complete his sacrifice in the heavenly temple, and to remain in the Father's presence mediating and interceding for his people. In his role as mediator, Jesus reminds the Father of the sacrifice he rendered on the cross, so that the Father will continue to forgive and to bless his faithful people. We read about this in places like Hebrews 7:25-26, and 9:11-28.

Now, in one sense, the Son has always been our mediator because of the covenant of redemption he made with the Father before creation. But the Son became our mediator in a special way after he ascended into heaven.

Listen to how Paul described Jesus' role as our mediator in 1 Timothy 2:5-6:

There is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men (1 Timothy 2:5-6).

Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God, died as a sacrifice for sinners. And now he ministers before the Father's throne, ensuring that the ransom he paid on the cross is applied to our lives on a continual basis. As we read in Hebrews 7:25:

He is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them (Hebrews 7:25).

There is salvation in no one else, but in the name of the Son Jesus. First of all, none of the religious leaders reached the perfect status of Jesus Christ, and none of them is eternal. Furthermore, it is more important that Jesus Christ is the only qualified mediator between God and man. The religions and philosophies of this world can give us good principles of life. But only Jesus Christ is the one who comes from God and back to God. Only he is able to reconcile us to God, and to take our sin on our behalf. Thus, he is the mediator between God and man, not merely in a moral or philosophical sense, but in his person. In biblical terms, Jesus is the only God-man, the Redeemer for human beings and no one can reach this perfect status by personal efforts and moral behaviors.

— Dr. Stephen Chan, translation

We all go through trials and struggles in life. We all wonder at times if God even hears our prayers. But despite our doubts, the Bible assures us that Jesus died to pay the price that redeems us from sin. He was raised to ensure our eternal life. And he ascended to his throne in heaven in order to rule his kingdom for our benefit, and to make continual intercession for us. This doesn't mean life is always easy — it's not. But it does mean that our redeemer always listens to us, sympathizes with us, and loves us, and that we are secure in the salvation he brings.

Now that we've considered Jesus in eternity, and his work in creation and redemption, we're ready to address our final major topic: our Redeemer's work in the future consummation of the heavens and the earth.

CONSUMMATION

The consummation of the heavens and the earth consists of the events immediately surrounding Jesus' future return, and the final stage of our salvation that will continue from that time into the endless future. It includes the destruction of all God's enemies, the ultimate blessing of his people, and the complete renewal of creation itself, where God's redeemed people will dwell forever. In short, it's when the world will finally be God's glorious earthly kingdom.

We'll examine what the Bible says about the consummation of the heavens and the earth in three steps. First, we'll describe Jesus' return. Second, we'll look at the corresponding events that will consummate the heavens and the earth. And third, we'll describe the everlasting results of the consummation. Let's begin with Jesus' return.

JESUS' RETURN

Jesus' first appearance on earth was one of great humility. He was largely unknown in most parts of the world. And even in the places he lived, secular historians said little about him. But his second coming will be very different. As Jesus said in Matthew 24:30:

They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory (Matthew 24:30).

And as Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 4:16:

The Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God (1 Thessalonians 4:16).

These and other passages of Scripture indicate at least four details about the manner of Jesus' return. First, it will be a personal and physical return. Our Lord Jesus Christ will return to this same world where we now live. And Acts 1:11 adds the detail that he will return in the same way he ascended into heaven, probably meaning that he will descend from the clouds.

Second, his return will be public and visible. Everyone will see him, and he will be announced by the global trumpet call of God and the voice of the archangel.

Third, Jesus' second coming will be triumphant. He will return as a powerful conqueror. And according to passages like Matthew 16:27, 24:31, and 25:31, he will be attended by an army of angels.

And fourth, the Scriptures also reveal that Jesus' return will be sudden; it won't come when we expect it. In fact, according to Matthew 24:36, the date of the second coming is known only by the Father. So, believers should never trust those who claim either to be Christ, or to know when he is returning.

With this understanding of Jesus' return in mind, let's look at the events he will initiate at the consummation.

EVENTS

At least three crucial events will take place when Jesus' returns: the general resurrection, the last judgment, and the renewal of creation. We'll look at each of these events, beginning with the general resurrection.

General Resurrection

At Christ's return, everyone that has ever died will be resurrected. Both the wicked and the righteous will be given new bodies that will endure forever. This is clearly taught in John 5:28-29, where Jesus spoke these words:

A time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear [the Son's] voice and come out — those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned (John 5:28-29).

We find similar ideas in places like Revelation 20:13, where we are told that the resurrection will even include those whose bodies have been lost. No one will be left out; all humanity will be resurrected in order to be judged.

Regarding the resurrected bodies of believers, Scripture teaches that they will be free from the corruption and presence of sin. Sin will no longer indwell our bodies, and we will have perfect health forever. As Paul taught in Philippians 3:20-21:

The Lord Jesus Christ ... will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body (Philippians 3:20-21).

In our final state, our bodies will be glorious, just like the glorious body Jesus possesses right now, the one he received when he rose from the dead.

The bodies of unbelievers will also last forever, but they won't be redeemed from sin. Instead, their bodies will continue to be plagued by the effects of God's curse against sin. And in fact, the curse will actually increase when they are judged. Scripture speaks of the bodily resurrection of unbelievers in places like John 5:28-29, and Acts 24:15; and it mentions their bodily condemnation in Matthew 5:29-30, and 10:28.

The second major event that will take place when Jesus returns is the last judgment.

Last Judgment

Immediately after the general resurrection, Jesus will exercise his authority and power as king by destroying all his enemies and blessing all his faithful people at the last judgment. Every human being will be included in the last judgment; no one will escape it. This is clear from passages like Ecclesiastes 12:14; Matthew 12:36-37; 2 Corinthians 5:10; and Revelation 20:12-13. And these same passages indicate that just as every

human being will be judged, every aspect of each person's life will be counted as evidence in the trial. Every thought, word and deed will be evaluated.

Because humanity is fallen and sinful, every human being that stands before God on his or her own merit will be condemned in this judgment, and punished with eternal damnation in hell. But the good news is that those who have been forgiven by grace, through faith, in Christ will be acquitted, and rewarded with an eternal inheritance.

John 3:18 puts the matter this way:

Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son (John 3:18).

This same idea is repeated in places like John 5:24; 1 Corinthians 11:32; and 2 Thessalonians 2:12.

The Son's role as judge in his redemptive work I think is a way to balance out the tendency that we have to overemphasize the love of God, by our definition. God's nature at base is holy, and holiness has two major aspects: his righteous standards and his merciful love. So the aspect of the Son's coming to give himself out of love on the cross is, of course, central to what we mean by redemption. But in that redemption, we also have to confront the fact that he is holy and righteous, and his standards have never changed. From the garden until today, they're the same. All of us have sinned. And so the justice of the judge has to be a major part of our concept of the cross and the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. Without that, I think we diminish the concept of sin. We don't understand the need for a fundamental repentance and the need for a savior from that sin. It becomes simply a loving deity who comes and sort of lifts me up from my problems. That justice and righteousness of the Lord Jesus is fundamental to a full concept of his work on the cross, and his continued work in the believer's life even after a person's been saved. We're going to meet Jesus as the judge at the end of human history as well. So all of our lives come under this holiness of love and holy righteousness that his judgeship, in all of its mercy, are representative to us.

— Dr. Bill Ury

Lastly, the third major event that will take place when Jesus returns is the renewal of creation.

Renewal of Creation

Just as Jesus will judge humanity and purge the unbelievers from it, he will also purge and renew the creation itself. 2 Peter 3:10-13 describes the renewal of creation in this way:

The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare... That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness (2 Peter 3:10-13).

Humanity's redemption will have an impact on the rest of creation because, as Romans 8:22 says, "We know that the whole creation groans as in the pains of childbirth right up until the present time. We ourselves who have the first fruits of the Spirit also groan inwardly as we await our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies." Creation was subjected to frustration as a consequence of Adam's sin. This frustration manifests itself in disorder and chaos and death. This thing that creation is now experiencing, Paul says, is like the labor of a woman giving birth to a child, which implies that there is something yet to come — out of this will be born something — and the entire creation will be redeemed and restored. And it awaits the fulfillment of that reality now as we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, await our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. And just as the believer is restored in his state of glorification and free from death and sin and decay, in the same way, creation will be liberated from its bondage at the same time as a new heaven and new earth comes to be without any death or decay or disorder that we see now around us.

— Rev. Jim Maples

According to Revelation 22:3, this renewal of heaven and earth will completely remove the presence and curse of sin. All the effects of humanity's fall will be eradicated, so that God's people will live without sin, suffering, sickness or death. Revelation 21:4 even tells us that God will wipe every tear from our eyes. All creation will be restored to God's original plan, and his people will receive the blessing of unending life in his everlasting kingdom. And the New Jerusalem described in Revelation 21, 22 will be the capital of that kingdom.

Revelation 22:2 describes one part of that New Jerusalem in this way:

On each side of the river stood the tree of life ... And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations (Revelation 22:2).

Genesis 2–3 record that the tree of life used to be planted in the Garden of Eden. In particular, Genesis 3:22-24 states that when God banished Adam and Eve from the garden, he did it partly to prevent them from eating its fruit. But when Christ returns,

after the final judgment, the fruit of the tree of life will be available to humanity again, bringing us everlasting peace and health under the glorious kingship of God.

There's a connection established between mankind as God's image-bearing creature and under-ruler over the creation, at the creation. So, Adam and Eve are established as rulers over creation underneath God's authority, and there's a connection between them and the realm that they rule. When Adam and Eve fall into sin, the effects then are therefore not just for Adam, but also for the creation. Similarly, at humanity's final redemption, just as the creation was plunged into bondage to decay, as Romans 8 says, with Adam and Eve's sin in the beginning, it will also be liberated from those same effects of sin as humanity experiences their final liberation as well. So there's a connection between the image-bearing under-ruler, and the realm that they rule. That effect is tied together both in terms of sin, the experience of human sin, and the fall of creation into that same experience as well, and the liberation of humans from their sin finally in a way that the creation will be liberated from that bondage also.

— Dr. Rob Lister

Now that we've looked at the manner and events of Christ's return, let's explore its results.

RESULTS

At the beginning of this lesson, we summarized God's purpose for creation by saying that God created the universe in order to display and increase his glory through his kingdom in Christ. And the results of Jesus' return will be the final accomplishment of this purpose. Jesus is returning to bring God's kingdom to earth in all its fullness, complete with faithful people whom God loves, and who love, serve and worship God in return.

God's ultimate goal in the redemption of humanity is to restore a people for himself. That restoration is going to be even more complete and even greater than the fellowship that Adam and Eve had in the Garden of Eden. After the fall of humanity, God gives them the *proto-euangelion*, the first promise of the gospel, and speaks of a Redeemer who will come of the seed of the woman who will crush the head of the serpent. And the rest of Scripture is the unfolding of the process of that restoration. The nation of Israel is a portion of that restoration and a picture of that restoration. The church then, being worldwide, is even a greater picture of that restoration. And then finally, in the second coming of Christ you have the restoration of the new heavens

and the new earth in which God fellowships directly with humanity, all those who have come to know Christ through faith, and they enjoy this perfect state in which no longer can Satan attack, and no longer will sin be present, and they will perfectly glorify God throughout eternity.

— Dr. Jeff Lowman

The results of Jesus' consummation of the heavens and earth can be summarized in many ways, but in this lesson we'll divide them into two parts. First, we'll consider the glory of God that results from the consummation. And second, we'll focus on the joy of redemption that human beings experience. Let's look first at the glory of God.

Glory of God

I think that the triune God, because of the working for our redemption, in eternity will receive glory. God has done this for his glory, to manifest not only his justice and his righteousness, and the immutability, and perfect holiness of his law, but to show that he is wise and he can maintain all of those attributes about himself, and yet be merciful and be forgiving and justify sinners. The prophet asked, "Who is a pardoning God like thee, and who has grace like this?" So it is for the glory of God. It is for the salvation of sinners, but the ultimate result of this and the intended result of it is that God's glory might be manifest in ever increasing measures throughout all eternity.

— Dr. Thomas Nettles

When Christ returns, his reign as king over God's kingdom will reach its highest, most honored state. And the goal of bringing glory to God will be met when all humanity acknowledges Jesus' rule and bows to his authority. As Paul wrote in Philippians 2:9-11:

God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:9-11).

God's benevolence will bring him glory because, in his love and kindness, he'll pardon repentant sinners and bless us beyond imagination. And in response, we'll praise him and proclaim his goodness. As Paul said in Ephesians 2:6-7:

God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show

the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:6-7).

When Jesus returns, our loyalty will be rewarded, and all God's faithful people will inherit the new heavens and earth, where Revelation 21:1-5 teaches we'll enjoy God's presence in a way that is even better than his presence was with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

Prior to the Fall, obviously, human beings enjoyed a free, uncluttered relationship with God. But there is a sense in which after humanity fell, God put into place a redemption that it looks forward to a relationship with God that is fuller and even greater than was even enjoyed prior to the Fall. So Adam was called a friend of God, but the privilege of every believer is to be called a son, and many have pointed to the fact that there is a greater degree of intimacy in relationship implied in that term, and the sense in which we don't go back to the garden again. We actually move to the New Jerusalem and there seems to be a progression all the way through biblical theology to whatever that great place, the New Jerusalem, the new heavens and new earth, which is not a return to where we were before.

— Dr. Simon Vibert

Regarding the question of whether or not we're better off because the Fall actually happened, I think first it's important to acknowledge that the fall of man, the rejection of God, is a tragic thing. It's a grievous thing; it's high treason against the High King of heaven. And so, we don't want to minimize at all the great tragedy of the Fall. But as we see God's sovereign plan work itself out, we see that at the end of it all we end up with a far better result than we had if we had just stayed in the garden as Adam and Eve were in their state of innocence. Because what we end up with in redemption, is not just the state of innocence, but we're brought into the very fellowship of the Trinity itself, that by our redemption in Christ, and our faith in Christ, we are invited in to the Trinitarian fellowship that Father, Son and Spirit had for all of eternity, and we become partakers of the divine nature, coheirs with Christ. And so most certainly, when we evaluate our state in Christ, it is far superior to what we would have just had if we were in the garden like Adam and Eve. So there is a wonderful, sovereign blessing that comes about, that happens because of the Fall. It's not that it's not grievous, but it most certainly, because of God's sovereign goodness and power, produces something far greater than we would have had otherwise.

— Dr. K. Erik Thoennes

Of course, there's also another side to Jesus' return that will bring God glory, and that should serve as a great warning to all humanity. In addition to blessing his people, the Lord will curse those who have rejected him as Redeemer and King. Their punishment will bring him glory because it will preserve the honor of his holiness, demonstrate his justice, and free his people from the oppression and pain of the presence of sin. And according to passages like Revelation 19:1-2, God's righteous people will rejoice at the judgment of the wicked. But until then, Christians don't normally rejoice at these ideas. Instead, we commit ourselves to proclaiming the gospel of forgiveness and salvation in Christ, so that as many as possible might avoid this terrible fate.

Now that we've examined the glory of God that results from the consummation, let's take a look at what the Bible teaches about the joy of redemption believers will experience.

Joy of Redemption

The Bible mentions at least three sources of constant joy that believers will find in their redemption. And perhaps the greatest of these is the fact that we will have full communion with God.

After their sin in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve hid from each other and from God. And when God cursed them, they were cast out of his special presence. But in the consummation, Jesus will restore human nature, so that we'll be permitted into God's special presence in a physical way, so that we can see his glory with our own eyes. This is plainly taught in places like John 17:24; 1 John 3:2; and Revelation 21:3.

Listen to how the fourth century bishop Augustine of Hippo summarized this blessing in his work *The City of God*, book 22, chapter 30:

God Himself, who is the Author of virtue, shall there be its reward; for, as there is nothing greater or better, he has promised himself. What else was meant by his word through the prophet, "I will be your God, and you shall be my people," than, "I shall be their satisfaction, I shall be all that men honorably desire — life, and health, and nourishment, and plenty, and glory, and honor, and peace, and all good things"? This, too, is the right interpretation of the saying of the apostle, "That God may be all in all." He shall be the end of our desires who shall be seen without end, loved without cloy, praised without weariness. This outgoing of affection, this employment, shall certainly be, like eternal life itself, common to all.

A second joy of redemption believers will experience is perfect communion with each other.

In addition to destroying our relationship with God, Adam's sin ruined human relationships. But Revelation 22:2 claims that when we are fully redeemed, the nations will be healed. Wars will cease, injustice will end, and relationships will be fully restored.

The entire world will become a peaceful, friendly, familial community of people who love and serve each other.

Finally, the third joy of redemption we'll mention is the fact that we'll reign with Christ over the new heavens and earth.

Paul mentioned this in 2 Timothy 2:12, where he wrote:

If we endure, we will also reign with him (2 Timothy 2:12).

Our reign with Christ is also taught in Revelation 2:26-27, 3:21, and 22:5.

Adam and Eve were created in God's image and placed in the Garden of Eden to reign over this creation under the lordship of God. But the curse and corruption of Adam's sin prevented humanity from doing this in a way that would accomplish God's ultimate purpose. But Jesus, because of his sacrifice and obedience, has now begun to do what Adam couldn't. He now stands as our covenant head, and he reigns over the entire creation. And in the consummation of the world, redeemed humanity will finally rule creation in a way that glorifies God and perfectly benefits all creation.

Christians can respond to our future hope, full redemption, in a spirit of hope. Hope is the confident anticipation of a positive future. And the remarkable, practical nature of hope is that it makes us buoyant, it makes us persevering, it makes us resilient, and it gives us in the present a kind of anticipative joy in the confidence that what is promised will become a reality. It buoys us up further by the sense of assured inevitability of the outcome for which we labor now, in which, in the natural might be a little shaky or uncertain from our limited perspective.

— Dr. Glen Scorgie

CONCLUSION

In this lesson on Jesus the Redeemer, we've considered the person and work of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, during four different periods: eternity, before the creation of the universe; the initial period of creation, the long era of redemption, and the future age of consummation.

Jesus Christ is undoubtedly the most interesting, complex and significant person that has ever lived. And he is still alive today. He is the King of all creation, who reigns from his throne in heaven. We can never hope to understand and appreciate him in all of his complexity. But hopefully the overview provided in this lesson can prepare us to think about Jesus in ways that honor him and benefit his people.

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We Believe in Jesus

LESSON
ONE

The Redeemer
Faculty Forum



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We Believe in Jesus

Lesson One: The Redeemer

Faculty Forum

With

Dr. Steve Blakemore
Dr. Stephen Chan
Dr. William Edgar
Dr. Matt Friedeman
Dr. Dennis Johnson
Dr. Riad Kassis
Dr. Robert Lister
Dr. Jeffrey Lowman

Rev. Jim Maples
Dr. John McKinley
Dr. R. Albert Mohler, Jr.
Dr. Thomas Nettles
Dr. J. I. Packer
Dr. Jonathan Pennington
Mr. Emad Sami
Dr. Thomas Schreiner

Dr. K. Erik Thoennes
Dr. Derek Thomas
Dr. Steven Tsoukalas
Dr. William Ury
Dr. Simon Vibert
Dr. Willie Wells

Question 1:

How did humanity come to need redemption?

The concept of redemption implies that something bad has taken place, but that its negative consequences can be reversed or corrected. So, when the Bible talks about Jesus as our Redeemer, it's natural to wonder about humanity's original condition. What was humanity like in the beginning? And how did humanity come to need redemption?

Dr. Thomas Nettles

The redemptive purpose of God arises out of a necessity for redemption. And that indicates that there was a relationship that God had with man — had with that being that was made in his image — that was unbroken at the beginning. Our redemption is being bought out of a slave market of sin. God did not create humanity in sin. He did not create humanity with a need for redemption in the beginning — even though mysteriously in God's covenant this was his plan. But he arranged it in such a way that all the creation is under his control; he uses it for his own glory. And yet, there is operating within creation those, like, cause and effect relationships within the material order itself that do operate and genuinely can be discerned, and yet they're under the hand of God. And even in the more complex moral relationships, the beings who actually enact these moral relationships are responsible for them. So we are responsible for our actions. We are responsible for our sin, and yet, God nevertheless is, sort of, by his own determination, in the background making sure that these things go as he sees fit.

So the reason for the need of redemption is that the ones in whom we were all created, Adam and Eve, had a relationship with God that was filled with fellowship, filled with joy. There was only one positive command they had that would test their growing love for him and their continued determination to follow what he said no matter what else was brought to their mind. And that was not to eat of a particular tree

in this beautiful place where he had placed them, where all of their needs were met otherwise. But because of the subtlety of Satan, he tempted them. He caused them to question God. He asked them to question, “Has God said...?” and then led them to seek something that they were, perhaps were, convinced was good, but not in the way God had told them. And so they disobeyed God. That disobedience to God in such a situation was of infinite culpability. And this brought, not only Adam and Eve, but all of those in whose stead they were acting into a state of condemnation. And as a result of this state of condemnation, a part of the punitive measures that God took was to also increase our corruption, that we might know that we could not please God on our own. So the redemption is necessary, absolutely necessary, because of our fallen state.

Question 2:

Why did Adam’s sin have such terrible consequences for humanity and creation?

When God created the world, he wanted humanity to care for and rule over the earth. He wanted Adam and Eve to multiply, and to spread across the globe, transforming it into a paradise. But because of Adam’s sin, humanity and creation were cursed, so that human beings and the creation itself became incapable of cultivating and sustaining the earthly paradise God desired. Why did Adam’s sin have such terrible consequences for humanity and creation?

Dr. Derek Thomas

Well, when God created Adam and Eve, he did so in such a way that they were to be representative for the entire human race. In retrospect, from Romans 5, Paul gives a theological twist on that, that as in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive. The point that he is alluding to, among others, is that Adam was a representative for the human race. So all of us, all of humanity — in the words of a Puritan — hangs on Adam’s belt. He put it in a more seventeenth century way than that, but that’s basically what he entailed. And therefore, the curse, the judgment that came, not just upon Adam but upon creation itself, so that labor became more difficult — the sweat of one’s brow and productivity, thorns and thistles and so on, the metaphors that are used in the book of Genesis, plus man’s own personal fall, Adam’s fall and consequently humanity’s fall — making it impossible for man to save himself. His will fell, his affections fell, his mind and thinking fell. The way he postulates a worldview fell with it. So there were consequences for the entirety of mankind and for the entirety of mankind’s faculties as a result of that first transgression.

Dr. Jeffrey Lowman

Humanity’s fall into sin was in response, of course, to Adam’s rebellion against God. He was tempted, Adam rebelled, and as the result of that, as God said, they died spiritually. Now when they died spiritually, it separated them from God, and of course, God is the source of all life. In that separation they no longer could have intimate fellowship with God. That resulted, in their own lives, of separating from

themselves. And what we see in Genesis 3 is Adam hiding from God, there is a sense of guilt and shame, and so there is a separation from himself. There is also in that passage a separation from one another that comes from Adam's sin, which is a separation between Adam and Eve in which he blames Eve for his actions. And you also see in God's curse in Genesis 3 a separation from the world in which Adam is separated from the environment, which he is in and his labor becomes difficult. Now all of that culminates in the fact that Adam is spiritually dead. It doesn't mean that he's not active spiritually, but it means that all he does spiritually is still in rebellion against God. He has no motive for God's glory. The other is that he is depraved in his lust. He seeks to do his own pleasure. We also know that he is under the influence of Satan, and ultimately he is under the judgment of God for eternity. And so the consequences when Adam partook of the fruit — he had no idea of the ramifications of what he was doing — and so the consequences are numerous, manifold. Only Christ can redeem us from those consequences.

Dr. R. Albert Mohler, Jr.

Many Christians thinking about sin, actually are only thinking about sins. They think about the individual acts and things we do that they know are wrong, sins of omission, things that we should do, we don't do, or sins of commission, the bad things we do we know we ought not to do, but sin in the Scripture, first of all, starts with something that is infinite. And the reality is that what we have in Genesis 3 is not just Adam and Eve each committing a sin. It is humanity in Adam and Eve, particularly in Adam, falling into sin. It is giving ourselves over to sin. You know, the background of this is the holiness of God. The holiness of God is infinite. The righteousness and justice of God are infinite. So, sin is an assault upon his infinite glory, his infinite holy, his infinite righteousness, and so it brings very devastating consequences. You cannot insult the infinite glory of God without dramatic consequences. You cannot rob God of his glory — as Paul describes the Fall and human sinfulness and depravity in Romans 1 — without grave consequences. The Lord himself warned Adam that there would be consequences to his sin. And what happened in the Fall, in Adam's sin, is that in Adam, we not only sinned, but we bear the consequences of that sin.

The consequences for Adam and Eve were immediate. The moment they ate of that fruit, they started to die. Mortality entered into them, and so all of a sudden the word "death" now enters into the human scene, and it's directly attributable to sin. But it's not just death. It's violence. It's catastrophe. It's the existence of carnivores and viruses. It's the problem of mosquitoes and murder. All that we see around us bears testimony to the effects, the devastating effects of human sin and God's judgment upon that sin. It's cosmic. There are hurricanes and tornadoes and earthquakes. There are lightning flashes and all kinds of things that take place in the created order that are testimony to, as Paul writes in Romans 8, creation groaning.

You know, what we see in Genesis 3 is a very straightforward and honest presentation of the consequences of sin. But, you know, there are Christians who read Genesis 3 and think that's all there is. But you come to read the totality of Scripture.

You come, for instance, to the last chapters of the book of Revelation, and you come to understand that the wrath of God poured out upon sin is going to make Genesis 3 look like just an introduction. This is what makes our salvation so important, so precious to us, is that our salvation is not just “being saved,” it’s being saved from something. It’s being saved from the wrath to come, from the just consequences of our sin. And not only do we need to be redeemed, but as the book of Revelation makes clear, so does creation itself. That’s why it speaks of a new heaven and a new earth. The consequences of sin are not just the fact that it rains on the just and the unjust and we have death in our bodies and a need for salvation. It’s that every part of this created order is now waiting for a consummation, a judgment and a perfection that only Christ can bring.

Question 3:

What are some of the effects of humanity’s fall into sin?

When humanity first sinned against God, the consequences were disastrous. We can’t possibly understand the full extent of the damage, but it touches the lives and beings of every person that descends from Adam and Eve by natural generation. What are some of the effects of humanity’s fall into sin?

Dr. Willie Wells

Well, there are a gamut of them, but the main thing is that the fellowship that we have with the Lord God himself has been broken, has been interrupted, because of the Fall. And when we think about the things that were lost — the innocence of man was deterred; therefore, because of the lack of fellowship, or the broken fellowship, man was in a deprived way. He didn’t have opportunity to enjoy the peace that God had initiated for us; thereby, his whole peace and happiness, the wholeness of man, was interrupted by that. And then, as a result of the Fall of man, humanity now, even now, we’re in a spiral moment as a result of that. But then the encouraging moment that we have that we always keep in mind is that the first Adam did fall, but then there was a second Adam. His name is Jesus Christ, and as a result of him, he is the nucleus, he is the one that brings man and God together again. So even though the Fall was catastrophic, but thank God, because of Jesus Christ, his Son, then we have a remittance, and we can be reposed or restored.

Dr. John McKinley

The consequences of humanity’s fall into sin extend in a first place to destruction of relationships and capacities that humanity was built with. So, in relationship with God there is loss of that, there is separation, and that leads to the unraveling of everything else the human is supposed to do and the connections that humans are supposed to have to each other and to the environment. So within ourselves, human beings now are trying to bear this burden of being the center for their lives. Instead of God being the center, because of our fall into sin, we’re now trying to relate everything to life as ourselves at the center, and that is too much for us. It crushes us and leads to all kinds of identity issues and pride in the first place, and these illusions that we can be in the

place of God. In relationship to each other, we are constantly trying to use each other, and competition and hostility still living with ourselves in the first place, instead of God in the first place, and so you have a destruction of relationships. Right away, with Adam and Eve, it shows, and as the human race unravels you have people murdering each other very quickly. In relationship to the created world, you've got chaos in creation where you now have storms and animals destroying each other. Everything is now hostile to life because humanity is supposed to order creation under God's rule, to live in ways that is for wellbeing. But now, having misled creation, cut off from God, everything is kind of off the tracks, and now things are destroying and self-destruction is just working itself out through all the extension of creation.

Mr. Emad Sami (translation)

Man lost the privilege of the relationship he had with God. This relationship between man and God has been severed. Man became a slave to his own desires, his instincts, and his weaknesses. So, he stayed condemned and convicted in judgment. Man's status today is that he is waiting for the judgment day and for punishment. These consequences have been placed on man's life as a result of his fall into sin.

Question 4:

Why do we need a Redeemer?

In order to save humanity from the consequences of our fall into sin, Jesus humbled himself, suffered, died, was buried and rose again. But was all that really necessary? Some religious traditions believe that if we work hard enough and follow all the rules, we can earn our way to God, meaning that we don't need salvation from someone else. Why do we need a Redeemer?

Dr. Jeffrey Lowman

When we think about redemption in the Scripture, what we look at are really the Old Testament context and the New Testament context. In the Old Testament, you had the kinsman redeemer who buys back an individual who usually is sold into slavery, and so the element of purchase is present. In the New Testament we see the concept of the slave market and Christ going into the slave market and purchasing a people for God through his shed blood. And so, to understand what redemption is, it's truly the buying back of an individual through a purchase price that's paid. And so the only way that humanity can receive that redemption is through someone paying that purchase price, and that's where the work of Christ comes in as the perfect man. And as God, he comes and provides a substitute, a sacrifice for our sins, giving us the ability to come to him by faith, and for the purchase price to be paid to the Father, speaking to God's justice, speaking to God's righteousness, and also very clearly demonstrating God's love, that his love sent his Son to purchase our sins.

Dr. Thomas Nettles

The Fall that we've already been talking about, brought man into a condition, not only of condemnation so that we need forgiveness of sins, but this condemnation is something that comes to us as a result of a single act of disobedience, as Paul said in Romans 5. Therefore, no matter what we do, if, say, if we were to obey the law from this time forward in our lives, we could never achieve a righteousness because we already are sinners. We've already broken God's law. There is no way that we can come back to the standard of righteousness. The one that does the laws shall live by them. But we already are lawbreakers. And so from the fact that the law has been broken and we are under condemnation, we need a Redeemer. There is an absolute righteousness that is needed, and so one must come who can fulfill God's requirement of an absolute righteousness. But also, even if we could, say, achieve some degree of righteousness by our present obedience, there's still the necessity of someone paying for the sins of our past. There's someone that must pay for the law breaking that we have already done. God will not violate his law, and he said that if we break the law, that we will die, that we are under a curse. Everyone that continues not in all things written in the book of the Law to do them are under a curse. So we are cursed, even if we obeyed all of God's law right now. So someone must pay for the curse, but we cannot pay it ourselves in such a way to gain forgiveness. It would simply be a just punishment that must continue forever. So, for someone to pay — in order for forgiveness actually to come — there must be a uniquely qualified redeemer to do this.

And a third thing that is involved in this is that there must be such an authority and such a glory in the redeemer, that God is fully satisfied with the honor that is shown him by the obedience of this person. And Anselm, who was a theologian in the Middle Ages, talks about this particular aspect of the atonement, that Christ, who was God himself, could not gain anything by himself by his obedience because he already had equal honor with God and therefore, his obedience must be given to others. And God is infinitely satisfied with this obedience because the person obeying also has the kind of honor that God requires. So this honor that is given to God is another part of the redemption. And the granting of the Holy Spirit — he is the one who can grant the Holy Spirit so that indwelling corruption we have also is gradually removed in the process of sanctification. So for all of these reasons and perhaps more, we stand in need of someone outside of us to be our redeemer. We're helpless and hopeless without that kind of help.

Dr. R. Albert Mohler, Jr.

No human being can atone for his own sins much less the sins of the world. No one can resolve the problem of sin. No human being can even come close to attempting. As a matter of fact, as the apostle Paul helps us to understand, the more we try to solve our problem, the deeper we find ourselves in our problem. We try to dig ourselves out of a hole only to dig ourselves deeper and deeper and deeper. The only one who can save us is the one whom the Father himself would send, whose perfect life would fulfill all, would indeed fulfill his righteousness. He would die in our place. He would do what we could not do. If I died a thousand deaths, it would not

atone for my own sin, but this one death of the only begotten Son of God could atone for the deaths of every sinner who would come to Christ by faith. Without Jesus Christ there is no atonement for sin. Only Jesus could die for our sins. But that was not where the story ended, or we would still be, as Paul says, of all people, most to be pitied, still dead in our trespasses and sins. Jesus not only died for our sins, he was raised by the power of God. He is the first-fruit of the resurrection that is promised now to us as well. Only Jesus could save. Only Jesus does save.

Question 5:

What motivated God to redeem fallen humanity?

Redemption is necessary because humanity's first parents — Adam and Eve — rebelled against God, and plunged the entire human race into corruption, condemnation and death. But God didn't leave them this way. Instead, he established a plan for their redemption — a plan that will ultimately redeem humanity and creation itself. But what motivated God to redeem fallen humanity?

Rev. Jim Maples

When we ask what motivated God to redeem fallen humanity, we must answer: nothing other than his goodness. The free and immutable counsel of his will motivated God to redeem fallen mankind. As Paul said in Ephesians “according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with ... his will.” We can say that God's plan to redeem fallen humanity was eternal even. Ephesians 3:11, Paul says, “...according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus.” And thus God's motivation to redeem fallen humanity does not depend upon any other thing or any other condition than his goodness alone.

Dr. K. Erik Thoennes

Asking what motivated God to redeem fallen humanity is a good question. But I think it's important to realize that a lot of times we're not exactly sure what motivates God. God does everything out of his sovereign freedom. He redeems and he creates and he does everything ultimately, though, to glorify himself, to display his character, so all of creation, from the heavens that declare his glory to human beings made in his image who are intended to reflect his glory, he's about showing his character, displaying his holiness and his worth and beauty. Everything he does is for that ultimate end. But, why does he redeem? He redeems so that he can display his glory through redeemed creation. You know, it's amazing these pictures we get of the worship in heaven where we gather around the throne as redeemed humanity worshipping the Lamb who was slain. God shows his glory in redeeming us. In the person of Christ, he comes and displays his holy character; he displays his holiness, his majesty, his grace, his compassion, his wrath. All these attributes converge in the person and work of Christ, especially in the cross. And we see this display of God's glory in human history. And it's that backdrop that is what we worship in response to. God glorifies himself in redeeming us and enabling us to reflect his image to the

world. So, God's redeeming work is ultimately to display his glory, like everything else he does.

Question 6:

Were people saved in different ways at different times throughout history?

Human beings need redemption because we're sinful. And we need a redeemer because we can't save ourselves. This is why Jesus came to earth. But what about people that lived before Jesus' incarnation — were they able to be saved? Has redemption always followed the same rules? Or were people saved in different ways at different times throughout history?

Dr. Riad Kassis

Many would think that in the Old Testament people were saved by obedience, by work, by doing, and many would think that in the New Testament this has been changed, that people are saved by grace, by faith. But I think that this is a misunderstanding of how God showed his mercy and his salvation to mankind. My understanding is that it is God's grace in both the Old Testament and the New Testament that saved people. So, in the Old Testament people were saved by faith. And the New Testament people were also saved by God's grace. It is God's grace, which is the foundation for God's forgiveness, for God's everlasting-life, and for God's blessings. Everything depends on God's grace.

Dr. Stephen Chan (translation)

In the teachings of the Bible, different methods are used from time to time in order to impart the lesson of salvation. In Old Testament times, God used the Law to reveal his grace, and in the New Testament he accomplishes this through the Son. All God's works are consistent. He used the Israelite's laws as a type so that we could understand his will. Of course, the Law and all of the Old Testament rituals themselves don't have redemptive power, even though they're all true teachings. Still, they gave the Israelites the ability to understand God's will for their day. In the time of the New Testament, God directly revealed himself in the Son, coming to earth to complete the work of salvation. And the New Testament is completely consistent with the Old; the basic principles of God's grace didn't change. To put it simply, Christ, as God's righteous Son, had to fulfill God's holy demands on our behalf, so that we could return to God and be reconciled to him. Additionally, as the Son of God, Christ was substituted for our sins, freeing us from sin's curse. So, salvation always has two parts: fulfilling God's requirements, and rescuing humanity. Christ is the only Savior who can fulfill these two aspects.

Dr. Simon Vibert

Well, there is a sense in which redemption through the Son did not happen until Christ came in the incarnation and supremely died as a sin-bearing sacrifice on the cross, but there is a sense in which throughout all of Israel's history, supremely

through the sacrificial system, there was an anticipation that there would one day be a sacrifice that would take away sins in a way that the sacrifice of animals could never do. So, there were patterns and types that could be understood with greater clarity once Christ had come, but obviously they looked forward to the day when the one sacrifice would be made for sin once and for all.

Dr. Dennis Johnson

Some people have read some parts of the New Testament as teaching that Old Testament people were saved in one way and New Testament people were saved in another way. Sometimes they are taught, or come to believe, that Old Testament people were saved by doing their best at keeping the commands of God that were given to Moses at Mount Sinai, whereas New Testament people are saved by trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ. That's really a serious mistake. It's a serious error. It's true that if Adam had not have sinned in the Garden, Adam and Eve could have been declared right with God. They wouldn't have needed salvation, per se, because there was nothing to be rescued from, but they would have been declared right with God forever on the basis of their own obedience. But once sin entered the picture in Genesis 3, it's utterly impossible for any fallen, sinful descendant of Adam, and that's all of us, the Lord Jesus is the exception — not fallen and not sinful — but for all of us, it's utterly impossible for us to ever commend ourselves into the presence of God on the basis of our obedience. So our best efforts at obedience, that is taught so clearly all the way through the Old Testament Scriptures, and it's taught so clearly in the New Testament as well.

Yes, it is true that God disciplined Israel at times for their disobedience. In fact, even expelling them from the Land of Promise because they had not adequately kept the covenant. But remember also that embedded in the covenant with Moses was the provision for the atonement of sins. The sacrificial system, right at the heart of everything which of course goes way, way further back than that. The apostle Paul also speaks very directly to this in Galatians where he's encountering some who are teaching Galatian Gentile Christians that having believed in Jesus, they now need to reassure their hearts that they are full-fledged, first-class members of the covenant people by keeping all the commands of the Law. And Paul points specifically to the fact that the covenant made with Abraham was given long before the Law given to Moses for Israel on Mount Sinai 430 years earlier. Paul says, you know even with human arrangements like this, a legal arrangement like this, that new conditions cannot be added later on. And God made a covenant with Abraham that he would declare Abraham and his children right, as Abraham believed God. And it was credited to Abraham through righteousness. That's the way of rescue for sinful people now, to look away from ourselves, to look away from our obedience or efforts of obedience and to look to Christ the one who perfectly obeyed. Moses in no way added any condition to that when God gave the law through Moses.

Interestingly in Romans, in the tenth chapter, Paul will quote Moses as announcing that principle that those that keep the Law could be right with the Law if there were such a person. He's already said elsewhere that that's impossible, but then he

immediately goes on also to quote from the books of Moses saying, the righteousness of faith says to us, we don't need to rely on our own achievement to go up to heaven to bring Christ down, to go into hades to bring Christ up. God has already sent Christ up to heaven to be our Redeemer. God has already brought Christ up from the dead. And the way of salvation, Moses teaches us, is the way of confessing with our mouth "Jesus is Lord" and believing in our hearts that God has raised him from the dead: one way of salvation. From the Garden of Eden, after the Fall, to the consummation of all things, it's resting and trusting in Jesus Christ, in him alone.

Dr. Steven Tsoukalas

People were saved by redemption through the Son at all times in all places. A key verse — Isn't this interesting? — We remember the "I am" statement of Jesus in John 8:58, "Before Abraham was, I am." But two verses before that, he states to the Jews, "Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day. He saw it and was glad." And I thought to myself, in what sense did Abraham see the day of Christ and rejoice as seeing his day, implied there: of Messiah? Well, in Genesis 12, we all know Abraham is called by God. And what happens? He sets up an altar of sacrifice to the Lord. Now let's put those two together. All through Genesis, after Genesis 12, we have "Abraham set up an altar," "And Abraham set up an altar of sacrifice." Well, to whom was he looking? In the words of our Master, our Lord, "Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day. He saw it and was glad." Abraham was saved by looking to the coming Messiah through the sacrificial system that he set up by God's leading. And just as in the New Testament we have the outreach, the out-breaking of Jesus' ministry into the others, aside from the fold of the Jews, out-breaking into other nations. But we also have that in the Old Testament. The story of Ruth is a classic example of someone, how someone outside the fold can be included in the redemption of Yahweh in the Old Testament. So, my answer to: Has redemption always followed the same rules through the Son? Yes, through all times and all cultures. Before the incarnation of Christ, it was looking to the Messiah through the sacrificial system. And other people, other nations, were welcome through the example of Ruth, for example, to come in and say, "My God will be your God."

Question 7:

Why is Jesus the only one that can redeem humanity?

Many people are offended by the Christian claim that Jesus is the only redeemer provided to humanity. But does the Bible really teach that Jesus is the exclusive path to restored fellowship with God? What makes Jesus so unique that only he can save us? Why is Jesus the only one that can redeem humanity?

Dr. J. I. Packer

Salvation begins with the forgiveness of our sins. Jesus is the one who represented us before the Father as guilty sinners and died for our sins. And the way of salvation now is that we acknowledge him as the one who died for us, as the Lord who is risen,

and as the Christ who is here for us to trust, and enroll with him as his disciples. The pattern of personal salvation includes acknowledging him in that way and enrolling as his disciples. And otherwise, there's no link as yet between us and him, and so what's he's done for us doesn't yet apply to us. Union with Christ, by faith from the human side and through the Holy Spirit from the divine side is of the very essence of coming into the reality of salvation. So Paul, in Romans first five chapters, celebrates Christ for us dying on the cross for our justification and then in chapter 6 through 8, not changing the subject in his own mind but simply filling out the pattern that he started, he talks to us about Christ in us, and ourselves in Christ. And pulls the threads together in chapter 8, beginning with the great statement, "there's no condemnation now to them who are in Christ Jesus" — those who have entered into union with him in this way. And if we are going to preach the gospel, in the way that Paul did, we must hold together Christ for us and Christ in us, and make much of the thought of our union with him through faith and the Holy Spirit, just as we make much of his death for us on the cross, well, nearly two thousand years ago.

Dr. John McKinley

There are not other redeemers besides God the Son. We know that clearly because 1 Timothy 2:5 says that there is only one God and one mediator between God and humanity. Theologically it's consistent to say that only Jesus, God the Son, can be the mediator, the Redeemer, because there are at least two things that he's got to do to be able to accomplish salvation. And doing that requires that he be God and man to do it. One is that we've got to have our sin forgiven. The only way that sin can be forgiven is if somebody, who can suffer the punishment of God's eternal wrath of hell, has got to stand in as a human being and suffer that punishment. God can't suffer punishment without becoming incarnate. We can't get some animal to do it for us. It's got to be a human being suffering the punishment for the human crime. But then he's also got to be somebody divine because it's not just suffering the punishment, but it's being able to end the eternal wrath of God. As finite creatures, we cannot ever exhaust the punishment for our sin against an infinite eternal God. We'd never get to the end of it. That's why hell goes on forever and ever. But when you bring Jesus as a divine person into the punishing situation, he's suffering the punishment as a man, but it's the immense infinite eternal worth of who he is as a person that is able to exhaust and end, in a final way, the punishment against us for our sin, the punishment that we deserve. So those two things are necessary to fulfill if salvation is going to occur, and only a divine incarnation of God the Son is going to do that job.

Dr. Thomas Schreiner

One of the questions that Christians often ask is, "What role did Jesus Christ play in our redemption?" And here the epistle of Hebrews and the Gospel of John are very helpful to us. In order for us to be redeemed we know from the Old Testament that humanity needs to be restored. Humanity needs to have its sins forgiven, so to speak. How could this forgiveness take place? This forgiveness cannot not take place from someone who is not a human being himself. We read in the Old Testament that we have Old Testament sacrifices that were animal sacrifices. But the author of Hebrews makes it clear that animal sacrifices cannot atone for sins. They are unwilling victims,

they do not consciously know what they are accomplishing what they are doing for human beings. So we needed a person who was fully human, who shared in our humanity fully, who was sinless, who had never violated God's will. We needed a person who was willing to sacrifice himself for us on the cross. But also I want to say that at the same time he needed to be fully divine. A human being alone could not atone for our sins, one single human being, but a person united with divinity — such a person is of infinite worth and therefore he can offer a sacrifice that is of infinite effectiveness. And therefore we can gain from him forgiveness of sins if we put our trust and faith in him and if we repent of our sins.

Question 8:

How do human beings receive redemption from Jesus?

Fallen human beings are incapable of purchasing their own redemption. We need someone else to save us. And Scripture insists that that someone else is Jesus. But, how does the process work? What do we have to do? How do human beings receive redemption from Jesus?

Dr. Steve Blakemore

We can receive redemption in only one way, and that is by trusting in what God has done. If you think about it, what is it that's lost in the Fall? It is a relationship of profound trust in God and reliance upon God. Adam and Eve refused to trust in God's word about the tree. They refused to rely upon the wisdom of God, and therefore, their loss of trust and reliance, what we might call faith, is that which devastates the human condition. We can't fix that. We can't fix the betrayal against God that we have acted out. We cannot undo the affront that our sin is to God. Only God can change that. We can't set ourselves free from the power of sin. Only God can do it for us. So how do we receive redemption? We receive redemption by understanding, we can't do anything to save ourselves, to fix ourselves, and we throw ourselves completely upon the goodness, and the mercy, and the sovereign power of God to reach into our lives and redeem us by his grace.

Dr. Stephen Chan (translation)

Human beings receive God's salvation by grace through faith. The Bible tells us that there is no other way than the way of faith. And this faith consists of reliance on, acceptance of, and response to God. It's not a human decision. It flows completely from grace and responds to that grace. Everything is from God. He takes the initiative, and humanity responds. And in that process, grace continually supports us, leading us to God's great salvation.

Question 9:

What are some of the benefits of our redemption?

Once Jesus has redeemed us, we begin new lives in restored fellowship with God. The blessings we receive as part of redemption are numerous, expansive and valuable beyond measure. Some of them we enjoy now; others we'll receive when we die; and still others we'll get when Jesus returns and consummates the new heavens and new earth. So, what are some of these blessings? What are some of the benefits of our redemption?

Dr. Dennis Johnson

When sin entered the world through Adam our relationship with God was disrupted. We see that in Adam trying to hide, Adam and Eve trying to hide from God, God covering their nakedness, of course, God expelling them from the Garden of Eden after he's confronted them over their sin. The relationship is broken. We are now guilty before the righteous justice of God. We need restoration. We need reconciliation. We need forgiveness. But even more than that, we need to be accounted right in God's sight, not just to be put back to zero, but to be accounted righteous in God's sight. Jesus has done that for us in terms of a relationship. He obeyed where Adam failed to obey. He kept God's covenant command from start to finish, inside and out. And therefore, we are declared right in God's sight because Jesus' righteousness is credited to us. And the climax of his obedience is his suffering death for us. And that suffering of death for us cleanses our conscience, cleanses our record of guilt. Those are the two sides we often think of when we talk about that big word "justification." That God has cleared our record of guilt because of Jesus' death for us, and that God has credited our record with Jesus' righteousness because of his obedience for us.

And along with that external, that forensic, legal restoration of our relationship comes right on its heels, and right with it, that wonderful theme of adoption, that we are declared to be children of God. Again, because we are united to God's eternal Son, we are now adopted sons and daughters of a living God and brothers and sisters of Jesus the eternal Son. That would be enough, but there's more. The Holy Spirit in applying to us what Jesus has done for us also applies that work of union with Christ subjectively. Paul talks about this in Romans 6, when he talks about our dying to sin and being raised to righteousness. But that's a dimension that Paul says, now, that's going to make for a new way of living, for a new freedom from the tyranny and the dominion of sin in our lives. Not that we'll never sin again, but we no longer need to be dominated by sin as though it were our lord. It's no longer our lord; we've died. And we've been raised with Christ and so the Spirit begins his lifelong, patient, quiet, relentless work of conforming us more and more to the image of Christ. That's what we call sanctification. What a wonderful benefit that is of the gospel, of the fact that we are united to Christ by faith. And sanctification is leading to the day that we speak of as glorification. When we will be made like Christ, when we see him at his return and are made like him in every respect. No more sin. No more guilt. No more

suffering or sorrow or pain. And it all flows to us because we are united to Christ by the work of the Spirit drawing us to trust in Jesus and what he's done for us.

Dr. Thomas Schreiner

When we look at the world today, we see that people are longing for meaning, for significance, for purpose. And there's so much confusion in our culture. What is life all about? What is the reason for living? Why am I here? And so people try all sorts of things to find meaning and significance — whether they pursue their job or sexuality or drugs. I mean, there are all kinds of venues and paths where people are trying to find happiness and joy. But the gospel tells us our fundamental need as human beings is to be in a right relationship with our Creator, with the one who made us. And the gospel tells us the truth about ourselves. It's a very difficult truth to accept. And that truth is that we are alienated from him. The truth is that I, Tom Schreiner, am wicked. I'm an evil person. And that's a very hard thing to bear. We all know what it's like to be in a conversation with someone and they point out one of our sins. We resist it; we're defensive. And the gospel tells us that our Creator is saying that to us. The one who made us is saying that you are evil; you have displeased me. And it takes a great work of the Holy Spirit to admit that and to stand before God naked, as it were, and to say, "I have displeased you, I have rebelled against you, I am a wicked person."

But the gospel doesn't end there does it? The gospel says that God sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to atone for our sins, to absorb the wrath of God. God out of his love sent his Son so that our sins could be forgiven, so that if we put our trust in him we can be forgiven of our sins. And when we come to that experience, when we turn to Jesus Christ for such forgiveness, there is an incredible sense of peace, a sense of rightness with the world because it truly is a rightness with the world. We suddenly realize this is what we are created for. We are created to be in right relationship with God. We recognize at that moment when we confess our sins and we're forgiven of our sins, this is the truth about me, I'm flawed; I'm fallible. I was just reading the story yesterday of a very famous person, and one of his children was criticizing him for his sins. And it struck me again, isn't this the story of us all? We are flawed, sinful people, but when we confess our sins we're honest with ourselves. We turn to Christ for forgiveness, and we experience peace with God. As Paul says in Romans 5, we're a new creation now. And obviously there are struggles in our lives as Christians. We still have trials and difficulties. But I think we still have that sense of abiding peace. The love of God has been shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit and we sense now that nothing can be separate us now from God's love because we've been forgiven of our sins. We have a new status as God's children. We have a new destiny. We're filled with hope. We're filled with joy and we're given strength to make it through these pilgrim days.

Question 10:
What is the ultimate goal of redemption?

Given that redemption provides us with so many blessings and benefits, and that God doesn't give all of them to us at the same time, it's worth asking what redemption will look like in the future. When we've finally and fully received every benefit of redemption, what will we be like? What is the ultimate goal of redemption?

Dr. William Ury

If the Redeemer, Jesus Christ, has a goal for us I think it would be to restore the image lost at the Fall. Redemption is to save me from my sins, but it's also to produce in me a Christ-likeness that was, in a sense, the picture that God had for all humanity before the Fall. So at the other end of our lives — we've got the Fall, we have sin, the Lord's work upon the cross, his resurrection, the Holy Spirit's work in our lives — at the end — in Greek the word is *telos* — the goal at the end of human history, his ultimate purpose is to have reproduced in us by his sacrificial work in our lives and for us, and the Spirit's work in our lives, a re-formation of all that was lost. That love that became self-love is restored to a self-giving love. The unholiness, the unrighteousness, the brokenness of sin, is replaced by a fullness and a wholeness. So the restoration of the image — I'm thinking of Colossians 3 where Paul says that we are renewed in the likeness and image, or the image of our Savior. That concept to me is a picture of what the Lord is wanting to do. And I think the book of Revelation shows that as the nations are gathered, as people come to that final, climactic judgment and the fulfillment of the new heaven and new earth, you've got a concept of holiness and love and of persons remade in the image of the God who created them.

Dr. Stephen Chan (translation)

The ultimate goal of salvation is for humanity to be reconciled to God, to return humanity to its original place of honor and righteousness. While salvation includes the forgiveness of sins and the restoration of humanity's relationship with God, what's more important is that we can receive an even greater glory and be restored to our original position in creation. In this way humanity and God have an absolutely perfect and good union and fellowship. So, speaking from this point of view, Christianity is not like typical religions. Our ultimate goal is not to resolve our difficulties, but to return to God, to be reunited with him, and to achieve the original perfect place that humanity once had.

Dr. Steve Blakemore

Christ does not come simply to pay a debt that we owe to God, so that God can write our debt off of the books. No, Christ comes to bring us back to the Father. Christ comes to unite the divine life that is lost in the fall of Adam, back to our humanity. Only if Christ is the one who can bring God and man together can we really say that we have been saved. Not just forgiven of our sins, but saved, made again what God

intended us to be all along, those who bear his image, those who live in the fullness of his presence, and those whose lives are united to him in love and faith and obedience.

Question 11:

Would we have been better off if humanity had never fallen into sin?

The benefits Jesus provides as our Redeemer are so wonderful that some theologians believe they surpass the blessings humanity had before our fall into sin. Are they right? Was it worth suffering the effects of sin in order to receive redemption? Or would we have been better off if humanity had never fallen into sin?

Rev. Jim Maples

Would we have been better off if man had never fallen into sin? We have to answer in some way, yes, because man would not be subject to the depravity that now marks his very nature, man would not have lost communion with God, man would not have been subject to guilt and shame as the result of his sin, and man would not have been subject to physical as well as the spiritual death that he inherited as the result of his sin. Man passed from a state of *posse non mori*, possible not to die, to a state of *non posse non mori*, not possible not to die, as the result of his sin. But when we consider the states of man, I think that we need to look at Augustine and his four states that he said that man passes through from pre-Fall to glorification. Augustine said that man before the Fall existed in a state of *posse non peccare*, it was possible for man not to sin. After the Fall he passes into a state of *non posse non peccare*, not possible not to sin. It may be bad grammar but good theology. And at redemption, man passes into a state of *posse peccare posse non peccare*, it is possible to sin, possible not to sin. He is a new creation but, as Paul says, as that old man who does all the things that we do not want to do and doesn't do all the things that we desire to do. But at glorification, man passes into yet another state where it is *non posse peccare*, not possible to sin. So in that sense, you can say that man after redemption, after glorification is even in a better state than he was pre-Fall because is it not possible for him to sin in his glorified state. I think though, when we come to these "what if..." questions, I think we should always look at these and say that God is holy, just and good, and that whatever he brings to pass is good. As Romans 8:28 says it is "for the good of those who have been called to his purpose." So we have to say in the final analysis that whatever our state is now, it is good because a good and gracious and loving God decreed that it be so.

Dr. Stephen Chan (translation)

Humanity's state is better than before, because before the Fall, we were in a neutral state, able to sin, able not to sin. After the Fall, we became unable to stop sinning; everything we do is tainted by sin. But now that humanity has been redeemed, our original abilities have been restored, as in Eden, so that we are again able not to sin. We also have God's special grace. The Holy Spirit comes to be with us, so that we become sensitive to sin, and have a passionate hope for spiritual things. And we have

the true word of the Bible as our guide. When our redemption is complete, we will reach the perfect position of no longer being bound by sin. At that time, we will be completely sanctified, completely holy. We will still be created beings, but we will completely obey God and worship him. That is a glorified state, far better than that of Adam and Eve.

Question 12:

How and why will humanity's redemption impact the rest of creation?

When we think about redemption, we often reflect on how Jesus saves sinners. And we look forward to our final salvation when we will be with Christ for eternity. But we sometimes forget that humanity isn't the only part of creation that benefits from our redemption. How and why will humanity's redemption impact the rest of creation?

Dr. Robert Lister

Very quickly in the development of the narrative of the book of Genesis we find that after the creation comes the Fall, and so what God has designed now begins to be corrupted by his creature's sin, and there are detrimental effects brought about by the rebellion of the creature that bring corrupting effects to what God has made. And so what does that look like? How does that affect God's original design? And yet, very quickly in the aftermath of the Fall, God also announces a plan of redemption that certainly has different administrations within it, but it begins as soon as God's pronouncing the curse on the man, woman and serpent, he's announcing a plan of redemption as well. So, God is going to redeem and restore what has been corrupted by sin. On the other side of the fulfillment of God's redemptive aims is the new heavens and the new earth and the restoration of things to what they were originally supposed to be.

Dr. Stephen Chan (translation)

Humanity's redemption has a strong impact on the world as it exists now and as it will exist in the future. Because humanity is the only part of creation that bears the image of God, we can say from one point of view that humanity is in the world, but we can also say that the world is in humanity. When humanity fell, the world also fell. And when God restores humanity from the Fall the world will also be delivered. We are the world in miniature. We are also the world's kings. God gave us the whole world, commanding us to manage the earth. Thus, humanity isn't just one of many creatures, but we are the crown of creation. In this way, humanity's redemption is the key aspect of the destiny of the entire world.

Dr. Dennis Johnson

We are reminded that at the very beginning of creation it was all very good. God the Creator pronounced his pleasure on everything that he had made. It was very good. No sin, no suffering in any way to stain the joy and the delight of Adam and Eve in the fellowship of their Creator. Of course we know what happens in Genesis 3.

They're tempted. They succumb to the temptation. They rebel. Paradise is lost, as John Milton said. But God's intention is to bring us to paradise, to bring us to a place, really a sanctuary, a temple, a garden temple in which we enjoy fellowship with our Creator again.

Dr. Jonathan Pennington

The Scriptures are very clear that God cares for and values the physical creation he's made, both the world and us as the apex of that creation. He has poured himself, in fact his own image and identity, into us as his creatures. He cares about us and he cares about the world he has made. The resurrection of Jesus is one of the witnesses to the reality that God cares about the physical state and its resurrected and renewed form. Our hope, and what the Scriptures teach, is that we, in our final home, will be in a new creation — a new heaven, and a new earth, the Scriptures call it, which is a physical embodied existence. The Scriptures teach in Romans 8 that the world itself is longing for its own redemption even as we ourselves are awaiting our own adoption as sons and daughters of God's kingdom. So, it is a great hope. It is something that has impacted me as a parent as I think about speaking about the gospel and the future hope with my children. There is a day, I tell them often, when disappointments of broken toys, the day after one's birthday, or especially for us, the day after Christmas when all the anticipation of getting new things has gone away, and when friends die of cancer, and other situations that occur, I remind myself and my children by offering them the hope that not only will we have the forgiveness of sins, but that all of those things are signs that this world is not as it should be, and that our hope, our sure hope, is that there is a day coming when God will renew all things. We can see this especially in the beautiful words that Jesus taught us, his disciples, to pray when he said, "Our Father, who is in heaven, let your name be sanctified, let your kingdom come and let your will be done on this earth even as it now is in heaven." That crucial, central, foundational Christian idea is that we are now living in a time of waiting for the heavenly realities to become earthly realities, that the way things are done in heaven when God is hallowed, when all things are right, and righteousness and glory and truth and love reigns. Our hope as Christians, our sure hope, is that those realities of heaven will become earthly realities, and this is what the Scriptures promise and hope as the new creation, our eternal home.

Question 13:

How does Jesus' role as judge relate to his redemptive work?

Jesus, the Son of God, is our Redeemer. But the Bible also tells us that Jesus has authority to judge the world, and that he'll exercise that authority in the final judgment. Is this a contradiction? Can Jesus be both redeemer and judge? How does Jesus' role as judge relate to his redemptive work?

Dr. K. Erik Thoennes

When Jesus came, he came to redeem the world. And he comes as a Savior; he comes as a servant; he comes as a preacher. One of the main ways he comes, though, is the

judge of all. He's the Creator, he's the sustainer, and he's the one who is the way, the truth, and the life. And as the truth he represents the truth of God, he represents the righteousness of God. And so Jesus comes determining who is righteous and who isn't. To be righteous we need to find the righteousness of Christ and make it our own by faith. But Jesus will return again, and he'll come to judge the world. And every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is indeed Lord of all. And he comes, sorting out the sheep from the goats, the ones who find righteousness in him and the ones who suffer because of their unrighteousness. Jesus doesn't just come as a suffering servant; he comes as a ruling, reigning judge of the world. We all have to answer to him. When he comes again, the Bible says that every mouth will be stopped. And that's because Jesus comes as the judge of the world, and the one who not only judges the world, but who's able to justify sinners because of his righteousness.

Dr. Stephen Chan (translation)

In regard to redemption, the Son's ultimate role is that of a judge that comes to the world at the end of the age. When he returns, Christ comes as the Lamb that was slain, entering the world in perfect righteousness and love. And when the task of restoration is complete, he, on the one hand, will save those that belong to him, because he is the one that bore the sins of the world. But he will also condemn the unrighteousness and sin of those that rejected him. The world was created through Christ and is upheld by him, so it is most fitting that Christ be the one to judge it.

Question 14:

How should we respond to the redemption we've received in Christ?

There are past, present and future aspects to our redemption. Each one of these aspects impacts our lives in significant ways, and each one deserves a response from us. So, how should we respond to the redemption we've received in Christ?

Dr. William Edgar

First, of course, the Protestant answer, biblical answer, is faith, and faith has a number of components. We need to understand what we're about to receive. We need to accept it as true, and we need to entrust ourselves to Jesus. So, that's our basic response. From that, of course, derives our entire Christian life. We order our lives in view of the sovereignty of Jesus in our calling, whether we be called as citizens or parents or in particular jobs. All of that comes under his lordship. So it's a very comprehensive response, but it begins with trusting him for salvation.

Dr. Matt Friedeman

Well, I think if the cross of Jesus Christ takes us to a holiness, and we can understand that holiness as we'll be holy forever, we will be like him. What does that mean now? It means we want to be like him now. When Jesus says, "Follow me," he says, come be like me. The Holy Spirit is sent on so that we can be holy. The Holy Bible is so that we can be holy as he is holy. So this is what I want to do. I want to say, Lord,

here's my money. Can you make my use of money holy? Here's my sexuality. Can you make my sexuality holy? I want to take stuff like my relationships, my anger. I want to take my irritation with the people at work, and I just want to give it to him and say, Lord, could you touch that? Sanctify it. Sanctify it entirely so I can be like you. I want to do that with all of my life. And inasmuch as we can love him with all, we've done a good thing. Remember, Jesus said love me with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind and all your strength. Now you either believe that that all is possible, or you don't. But I want to come from the understanding of Scripture that it is possible now.

Dr. Jeffrey Lowman

When we look at the epistles of the apostle Paul, what we see are writings that are literally filled with the sense that possibly even tomorrow the Lord Jesus Christ might return. And what this produced in Paul's life, and what it should produce in our lives, is a sense of a desire to constantly live our lives pleasing to God. Paul talks about this in 2 Corinthians 5 where he speaks about that he lives in both fear, knowing that he will stand before the judgment seat of Christ, but also that the love of Christ constrains him and calls him to live out his life before God in a very effective manner. And so there is an anticipation. There is also a sense of purification. 1 John 3 talks about the need to purify ourselves because we are children of God. That Christ will appear, and we will be like him, and anyone who sets his hope on this purifies himself. And so, both the anticipation, the purification, and the willingness of the believer to constantly be pulled, as it were, toward eternity. Our life is not here truly; it is hidden with Christ as Paul says in Colossians 3.

Since humanity's fall into sin, we've struggled with corruption and brokenness. But God hasn't abandoned us. Even before the creation of the world, he lovingly planned our redemption through his Son Jesus Christ. And through Jesus' redemptive work, we're now being freed from the consequences and corruption of our sin. And when he returns to complete our redemption, we'll live forever in perfect fellowship with God in the new heavens and new earth. Until then, we express our gratitude to him through praise, obedience, and love.

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We Believe in Jesus

Lesson Two

The Christ

INTRODUCTION

In most parts of the world today, people have at least two names. For example, they might have both a family name that identifies them as part of a particular group, and a given name that identifies them as individuals. So, when we teach children about Jesus Christ, they often assume that “Jesus” is his given name and that “Christ” is his family name. In fact, sometimes even adults have this misconception. But this shouldn’t be surprising. After all, even the Bible sometimes uses the word “Christ” as if it were Jesus’ name. But in reality, the word “Christ” is a title that identifies Jesus’ service and honor in God’s kingdom.

This is the second lesson in our series *We Believe in Jesus*. And we’ve entitled it “The Christ.” Our strategy in this lesson will be to focus on events and characteristics of Jesus’ life that help explain what it means for him to be the Christ.

The word “Christ” simply means anointed one. It translates the New Testament Greek word *Christos*, which itself translates the Old Testament Hebrew word *Mashiach* or Messiah.

Many people are surprised to know that the Bible doesn’t use the term “Christ” or “anointed one” exclusively for Jesus. It’s actually a fairly common term in the Old Testament, referring to people that were anointed with oil to mark them as God’s special servants. At certain stages in Old Testament history, all prophets, priests and kings could be called “anointed ones,” in a general sense.

For example, one of the most important meanings of the term “Messiah” or “Christ” in the Old Testament was its reference to the descendants of David that served as kings over Israel and Judah. We see this in places like 2 Chronicles 6:42; Psalm 89:38-39, as well as verse 51; and Psalm 132:10, 17.

But portions of the Old Testament also created the expectation that a very special Anointed One was going to come in the future. He would embody all these roles in unique ways, and would accomplish all of God’s saving purposes in the world. And this person came to be known among the Jews simply as the Messiah or the Christ. And of course, Christians around the world know that Jesus was this great Messiah, the final Anointed One, the Christ.

Our discussion of Jesus the Christ will divide into four parts. First, we’ll look at the theological significance of some events from the period of his birth and preparation for his role as Christ. Second, we’ll explore his public ministry as the Christ. Third, we will examine his passion and death. And fourth, we’ll investigate the events that comprise his exaltation as the Christ. Let’s begin with Jesus’ birth and preparation.

BIRTH AND PREPARATION

In this lesson, we'll describe Jesus' birth and preparation for his messianic service as the period stretching from the announcement of his coming birth to his victorious return from his temptations in the wilderness. We'll look in depth at several events from this time of his life, but first we'll quickly summarize the whole period.

Before Jesus was born, angels announced his birth to both his virgin mother Mary and her fiancé Joseph. The angel Gabriel foretold Jesus' birth to Mary in Luke 1:26-38. And an angel of the Lord delivered a similar message to her fiancé Joseph in Matthew 1:20-21. Joseph and Mary lived in the nation of Israel, which was part of the Roman Empire. And late in Mary's pregnancy, Augustus Caesar required Joseph and Mary to register for their taxes in the town of Bethlehem. We read about this in Luke 2:1-5.

According to Luke 2:6-20, Jesus was born during this stay in Bethlehem. His birth was announced by angelic hosts to nearby shepherds who came to see him and then spread the news about what they had heard. Based on the political rulers and contemporary events mentioned by Luke, as well as extra-biblical history, historians have generally calculated that Jesus was born around 4 B.C.

The Bible doesn't record many events from Jesus' early life, but Luke 2:21 says that he was named and circumcised eight days after his birth. Also, when Jesus was presented in the temple, two faithful servants of God, Simeon and Anna, recognized him as the long awaited Christ, as we read in Luke 2:22-40. And Magi from the east recognized him as the King of the Jews, whose birth was marked by supernatural movements of the stars, as we read in Matthew 2:1-12.

Jesus didn't remain in Israel for long, though. When the Jewish king Herod the Great learned from the Magi that the new king of the Jews had been born, he wanted to kill the newborn Messiah. So, he ordered the slaughter of all boys aged two and under in the vicinity of Bethlehem. But the Lord warned Joseph, who fled with his family to Egypt. When Herod died, the family returned to Israel. But in response to another warning from God, Joseph settled them in the small town of Nazareth, far from the new Jewish king, Herod's son Archelaus. These accounts are recorded in Matthew 2:13-23.

As Jesus grew, his family attended the annual feasts of the Jews in Jerusalem. And according to Luke 2:41-52, on one of these trips, when Jesus was twelve years old, he greatly impressed the religious leaders and teachers with his knowledge and wisdom.

When Jesus was about 30 years old, he began preparing himself for public ministry. First, he was baptized by John the Baptist, as we read in Matthew 3:13-17, Mark 1:9-11, and Luke 3:21-23.

Then, immediately after his baptism, Jesus fasted in the wilderness for forty days, as we read in Matthew 4:1-11, Mark 1:12-13, and Luke 4:1-13. During this time, he resisted Satan's temptations, before emerging to begin his public ministry.

While there are many things we could say about the period of Jesus' birth and preparation, we'll focus on just three events: his incarnation, his baptism, and his temptation. Let's look first at Jesus' incarnation.

INCARNATION

The theological term incarnation refers to Jesus' permanent assumption of a human nature, including both a human body and a human soul. Scripture speaks of the incarnation in many places, such as John 1:1, 14; Philippians 2:6-7; and Hebrews 2:14-17.

In this lesson, we'll focus on the theological significance of Jesus' incarnation by looking at his virgin birth, his status as the heir of David, and the hypostatic union of his divine and human natures. Let's begin with his virgin birth.

Virgin Birth

Jesus' mother Mary was a virgin when she conceived, carried and gave birth to Jesus. She conceived him through the miraculous intervention of the Holy Spirit, and she remained a virgin until she had given birth to Jesus. These facts are taught explicitly in Matthew 1:18-25 and Luke 1:26-38.

Jesus' virgin birth has at least three important implications. First, because Jesus was born of a woman, he is truly human.

According to passages like Genesis 1:21-28, God's original order was that his creatures reproduce according to their own kind. One specific result of this fact is that human women always give birth to human babies. This means that Jesus developed in his mother's womb in the same way that every other human baby does, so that he was endowed with a true human nature, consisting of both a body and a soul.

Gregory of Nazianzus, the bishop of Constantinople who lived from A.D. 325 to 389, wrote about the importance of Jesus' true humanity in his *Epistle 51*. Listen to what he said:

For that which He has not assumed He has not healed... If only half Adam fell, then that which Christ assumes and saves may be half also; but if the whole of [Adam's] nature fell, it must be united to the whole nature of Him that was begotten, and so be saved as a whole. Let them not, then, begrudge us our complete salvation, or clothe the Savior only with bones and nerves and the portraiture of humanity.

Echoing Hebrews 2:17, Gregory recognized that the salvation of human beings requires a savior that is like us in the fullness of our humanity.

Second, because Jesus was miraculously conceived by the Holy Spirit, his human nature was completely uncorrupted by sin. According to Romans 5:12-19, all human beings bear the guilt of Adam's first sin. And according to Romans 7:5-24, we're also corrupted and indwelt by that sin. But the Bible clearly teaches that Jesus was born without sin. We see this in 2 Corinthians 5:21 and 1 John 3:5, and it's implied in Jesus' birth announcement in Luke 1:35. While theologians have always recognized that there is some mystery involved in how Jesus avoided the guilt and corruption of sin despite his birth from a human mother, most agree that the virgin birth points unmistakably to the

supernatural sustaining presence and preservation of God by which this was accomplished.

It was important for Jesus to be sinless because Jesus was coming to redeem sinners, and so the whole typology, for example, of the Old Testament sacrificial system, expecting that the animals that are brought for sacrifice are without blemish, without fault, foreshadows the necessity that Jesus himself would be without sin and blameless when he came to atone on our behalf. The one who's coming to atone for sinners must himself be sinless.

— Dr. Rob Lister

In order to fulfill the Old Testament imagery of substitutionary sacrifice, the sacrifice must itself be a sinless, or perfect, sacrifice. I think we can imagine that if Christ was in any way a partner with us in the sinful nature and disposed to sinful behavior, he himself would automatically need someone to substitute for his need in the eyes of a holy God. But it was his sinlessness that qualified him to be an advocate, for other needy individuals. Another perspective — not contradictory to this but supplementary to it — is the understanding of Jesus as the second Adam, as the one who did it right where the first Adam had failed. Where Adam had failed to provide a life of perfect obedience, Jesus Christ fulfilled that. So whether you look at it in terms of him becoming the second Adam or becoming the perfect and adequate sacrifice for sin, the sinlessness of Christ is critically important and a very important element of the good news about the Messiah.

— Dr. Glen Scorgie

A third implication of Jesus' virgin conception and birth is that he really is the promised Messiah, who was sent to deliver his people from sin and death. In Matthew 1:21, Joseph received this prophecy in a dream:

Mary will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins (Matthew 1:21).

And in Matthew 1:22-23, Matthew interpreted the prophecy this way:

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" — which means, "God with us" (Matthew 1:22-23).

In this explanation, Matthew quoted Isaiah 7:14, and indicated that because Jesus' birth fulfilled this prophecy, it proved that he was the Christ.

Some Evangelical scholars believe Isaiah's prophecy about the virgin birth directly referred to Jesus. Others believe that it pointed to Jesus typologically. But all Evangelicals agree that the Holy Spirit miraculously caused Mary to conceive, and that Jesus' virgin birth proves he was the prophesied Messiah, through whom God would save his people from sin and death.

Having considered Jesus' incarnation in terms of his virgin birth, let's turn to his status as the heir of David.

Heir of David

In Matthew 1, Matthew begins his genealogy of Jesus showing how he's a son of Abraham, son of David. And this is really important to Matthew. The reason for that is back in the Old Testament, the time of King David, God effectively had established the pattern of his kingdom, how his rule was going to be exercised in the world. And David had been an advance type, or template, of a rule that God was intending, God's rule over God's people in God's place. And so it's really important, having set up that pattern back in the Old Testament, that Jesus should come and fulfill that pattern. So that's one really important reason. Another reason is, back in 2 Samuel 7, a book of the Old Testament where there is a promise given to David that one will sit on his throne forever and will be the one who institutes God's kingly rule. And that promise had actually been, in one sense, broken when there were no longer kings in ancient Israel — for five-, six hundred years, no kings. And so then Jesus comes, and we read in the Gospels that he's the one who is now sitting on David's throne. That's vitally important, that the Messiah, when he comes, comes from David's line.

— Dr. Peter Walker

It's critical to recognize that Jesus was the heir of David because this is what gives him the legal right to be the Messiah or Christ. In the 10th century B.C., God made a covenant with David, promising to establish an unfailing kingdom on earth under the kingship of one of David's descendants. We find references to this covenant in 2 Samuel 7 and 1 Chronicles 17.

David's kingdom was divided after the death of his son Solomon. But the Old Testament foretold that a future king from David's line, known as "the Messiah" or "the Christ," would eventually restore the kingdom. We read about him in places like Psalm 89:3-4, Psalm 110:1-7, and Psalm 132:17. He would renew David's kingdom and return the exiles to the Promised Land. And he would bring God's greatest blessings to the restored nation. These promises can be seen in many places, including Jeremiah 23, 30 and 33, as well as Ezekiel 34:20-31, and 37:20-28. This is why Jesus' genealogies in

Matthew 1 and Luke 3 highlight the fact that he descended from David. They are intended to demonstrate that Jesus had a lawful claim to the office of Messiah or Christ.

Having explored Jesus' virgin birth and status as the heir of David, we're ready to address the hypostatic union.

Hypostatic Union

The technical term "hypostatic union" refers to the fact that:

Jesus is one person with two distinct natures (a divine nature and a human nature) with each nature retaining its own attributes.

Jesus is the second person of the Trinity. For all eternity he has possessed full divinity with all its attributes. And when he was conceived and born as a human being, he added to his person a true human nature, consisting of all the essential attributes of a human being.

The ecumenical Council of Chalcedon, which met in A.D. 451, summarized the Bible's teaching about the hypostatic union in a statement variously called the *Chalcedonian Creed*, the *Chalcedonian Symbol*, and the *Definition of Chalcedon*. Listen to this excerpt from it:

Our Lord Jesus Christ [is] perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man, of a reasonable soul and body ... in all things like unto us, without sin ... to be acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one person and one subsistence.

This definition is rather technical, but for our purposes we can summarize it in three parts. First, it says that Jesus has two natures, namely, a divine nature and a human nature.

In the hypostatic union, we talk about a nature. We say two natures and one person and the natures are united to the person. We mean by "nature" that this is the stuff, this is the material, the properties, the substance of his human nature and also a different nature, his divine nature. So human nature is normally going to include two substances, a body and a soul, or a spiritual and physical element and that is complete kind of existence that you have to have if you want to live as a human being. And then the divine nature is going to be all the properties, all the powers, the essence of God. And when we say the word nature, we're saying Jesus has both kinds of existence, both modes of being, both ways of living. And so he is fully man, a hundred percent man and nature is just the label for being able to say, he's got

all the stuff that it takes to count as a human being. Divine nature, he's got all the stuff that accounts to be a deity, a divine person.

— Dr. John McKinley

The eternal Son of God always has possessed and always will possess every attribute that is essential to God. For example, he is infinite, eternal and immutable in his being, wisdom and power. As a result, anything the Old Testament says about the nature of God is also true of Jesus. We see this demonstrated in passages such as John 1:1-3, and 10:30; and Hebrews 1:2-3. This means that Jesus is an absolutely perfect Christ. He always does God's will, and he's utterly incorruptible. He will never take back a promise, or fail to fulfill it. And his innate perfections preserved him as an infinitely valuable sacrifice when he died for us on the cross.

At the same time, Jesus also possesses every attribute that's essential to human beings, such as a physical human body and a human soul. This is why he was subject to weakness, injury and death; and why he had normal physical limitations and so on. We read about Jesus' full humanity in passages such as Hebrews 2:14,17, and 4:15; and Philippians 2:5-7. And his human nature is critical to his role as Christ. It's what allowed him to be David's heir, and to hold human offices like prophet, priest and king. And as we read in Hebrews 2:14-17, it's what qualified him to be our substitute when he died on our behalf, since only a real human death could atone for human beings.

And in the incarnation, God, who is eternally generating the Son, overshadows Mary at the point that the Holy Spirit conceives in her our human nature. So we have everything that relates to us as humanity, everything that is essential to how God created us as people in his image. Jesus had affections that were human, he had a mind that was human; he made his decisions the way humans make their decisions on the basis of all the things that they consider. As Edwards said, "the final dictate of the understanding" was what he finally did. So everything that relates to our being and our actions as a human, Jesus took to himself. But also mysteriously, at the same time, though he emptied himself of the external manifestation of the glory he had with the Father, he did not empty himself of any of the central attributes of his eternal being as the Son of God. He still was omnipotent. He still was omniscient. He still had immutable holiness. He still had perfect knowledge as the Son of God of why redemption was taking place. And so, all of these things that were a part of his eternal deity, he surrendered none of them... So when we're asking the question about natures that exist in the hypostatic union, what we have affirmed is that we have a full human nature because it's humans that have to be redeemed. We have a full divine nature because only God can accomplish such redemption. God is Savior. So, full deity, full humanity, existing in one person.

— Dr. Thomas Nettles

Second, the *Chalcedonian Creed* also insists on a distinction between Jesus' two natures. Jesus doesn't have a hybrid nature that combines both divine and human attributes. His human attributes don't hinder his divine attributes; and his divine attributes don't somehow enhance his human attributes. Instead, each nature remains entirely unchanged. For example, we see this in the way John affirmed both Jesus' divinity and humanity in John 1:3, and 8:40. This is why Jesus needed to grow in knowledge, experience and favor, even though he was God. From the perspective of his human nature, Jesus still had to learn to walk, to talk, to reason, and so on. He still had to learn God's will. And these things are important to Jesus' role as Christ because they allowed him to grow in knowledge and experience from a human perspective, so that he could be even more merciful and sympathetic toward us in our weakness, just as we read in Hebrews 2:17-18.

Third, the *Chalcedonian Creed* affirms that Jesus is only one person.

When we're thinking about the hypostatic union, the meaning of person in that formula, the hypostasis, is the subject, or the agent. It's the entity that possesses the two natures. It's the one, the ultimate reality that is behind all the actions done through his natures, whether being an actor as God or an actor as man. So, "person," we can think of as whoever it is that possesses the nature. Whose body is this? This is my body, it's I, it's me, that's "person." Nature is the stuff that I have, and so person is kind of the deep reality of relating to others and self-consciousness.

— Dr. John McKinley

And the wisdom of God, this is the mystery of the incarnation, that there are these two natures in which you have a human will, a divine will, human affections, divine affections, human knowledge, and human ignorance along with divine omniscience all dwelling in this single person. And there are many things about Scripture that we come to understand when we realize there are times in which Jesus is speaking, peculiarly out of his role as the Christ in his humanity in obedience to and submissive to the Father. There are sometimes he is acting singularly in his deity. I tell you, "I forgive your sins." Who can forgive sins but God alone? But both of these are done by this one person, this one face. And so again, for redemption there has to be the unity of the person, the singularity of this person in which we have both God and man.

— Dr. Thomas Nettles

Jesus doesn't have two persons or two minds, as if a human person hosted a divine person in his body. And he isn't one person that is somehow a combination or hybrid of two distinct persons or minds, as if a divine person merged with a human

person. As we see in passages like John 17:1-5 and Colossians 2:9, Jesus is and always has been the same eternal Second Person of the Trinity, known as the Son of God. This is critically important because it means that Jesus still manifests every divine quality in a perfect way. For example, from the perspective of his humanity, he had to learn knowledge. But from the perspective of his divine nature and person, he always has been and always will be omniscient. And because Jesus manifests every divine attribute in a perfect way, we can trust and serve him without question, and rely on him to fulfill his every promise and plan.

Jesus is the only person in existence that is both fully God and fully human. And this special quality ought to be a great comfort to us. Because he's fully human, he can sympathize with us in all of our weaknesses and sufferings. Our savior has lived through them all. And he endured this life without ever falling into sin, so we can trust and follow him completely. At the same time, because he's also God, we can have complete confidence that no human weakness will ever take away his ability to redeem us, and that he has unlimited power and authority to fulfill his promises and plans for us. Because Jesus is fully God and fully man, he's the perfect ruler, intercessor and Savior.

Having considered Jesus' birth and preparation in terms of his incarnation, we're ready to turn to his baptism.

BAPTISM

We'll explore Jesus' baptism by looking at three ways that it prepared him for ministry, beginning with the fact that it confirmed him as the Christ.

Confirmed as Christ

In some sense, Jesus held the office of Christ from the beginning of his incarnation. He was born the heir to David's throne, and proclaimed by angels as the Christ. But his appointment wasn't publicly declared until his baptism, when it was announced to the world by the other members of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit confirmed that Jesus was the Christ by descending on him like a dove. And God the Father confirmed him as the Christ by speaking audibly from heaven.

Although neither the Holy Spirit nor the Father specifically used the word "Christ" at the time, God had already revealed to John the Baptist that the one who received these signs would be the Christ. We find these details in Luke 3:15-22, and John 1:19-36. This confirmation prepared him for office by formally announcing to the nation and to the world that God's Christ had finally come.

A second result of Jesus' baptism is that it anointed him to the office of Christ.

Anointed to Office

One objection that has been raised against calling Jesus the Christ is that he was never actually anointed with oil to the office of Messiah. But the gospel records show that

Jesus was anointed by the Holy Spirit at his baptism. This anointing officially declared Jesus to be the Christ, and also empowered him for ministry. As God incarnate, Jesus was omnipotent. But the office of Christ is a human one. So, he veiled his power and glory in order to be like the people he came to save. Like other anointed human beings, Jesus relied on the power of the Holy Spirit for his ministry. We see this in places like Luke 4:1, 14, and Acts 10:38.

Listen to what John 3:34 says about the power Jesus received from the Holy Spirit:

The one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit (John 3:34).

The third result of Jesus' baptism we'll mention is that it fulfilled righteousness.

Fulfilled Righteousness

When Jesus came to John the Baptist to be baptized, John objected because Jesus was already righteous. Jesus had never sinned, and therefore didn't need to repent. But Jesus responded by saying that it wasn't enough for him to be personally sinless; he also had to fulfill all the necessary righteous works that had been appointed to him. Listen to their discussion in Matthew 3:14-15:

John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented (Matthew 3:14-15).

The significance of Jesus' baptism becomes clearer when we understand that John wasn't the only one baptizing people in his day. A variety of Jewish groups, including John's, separated themselves from the corruption of Jerusalem at the time, and considered themselves to be Israel's righteous remnant. And they often used baptisms or washings to initiate their members. So, when Jesus was baptized by John, he performed a necessary righteous act by affirming and identifying himself with the true faithful remnant within Israel.

Now that we've looked at Jesus' birth and preparation in terms of his incarnation and baptism, let's turn our attention to his temptation.

TEMPTATION

The story of Jesus' temptation is a familiar one. Its details are recorded in Matthew 4:1-11, and Luke 4:1-13. In summary, the Holy Spirit drove Jesus into the desert where he fasted for forty days before being tempted by Satan. But even in his physically weakened state, Jesus remained spiritually and mentally powerful. Despite his

hunger, he refused to use his divine power to satisfy his needs. Despite his authority, he refused to prove himself by flaunting his privilege. And despite his goal of conquering the world for the Father, he refused to take the easy but sinful path of serving God's enemy.

Many theologians also point out that Jesus' temptation by Satan paralleled the temptation of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden in Genesis 3. As Paul pointed out in Romans 5:12-19, Jesus was the representative of his people, just as Adam had been. But whereas Adam failed and brought condemnation on the whole human race, Jesus overcame temptation, bringing salvation to his people.

Jesus was tempted. He was tempted in every point like as we are, yet without sin, the Bible says. One thinks, of course, of the event known as the temptation, or the temptations, in the wilderness, the threefold temptation following his baptism at the very outset of his public ministry where he encountered the Devil himself. Most of us probably never encounter the Devil — one of his interns will be fine for us — but for Jesus, Satan has to come in person. But the whole of Jesus' life was one of temptation. I think it would be a mistake to think that he was only tempted at that point. I think those temptations were massive in their proportion and very specifically focused as to his identity and mission. But during the whole course of his life, I think Jesus was tempted. The point, I think, is that Jesus is our representative. He is our substitute. He is the last Adam, the second man. And therefore, as Adam was tempted in the garden, so the last Adam, too, must be tempted by the serpent. If he is to represent us, he must be tempted in every way like we are tempted. Otherwise, he is not our substitute. Scripture is very clear that at no point in the course of his ministry did Jesus fall into sin. He was sinless. He was without sin in thought, in word, in deed. But I think it is for the purposes of being our sin-bearer, being our substitute, that it was necessary for him to be tempted.

— Dr. Derek W.H. Thomas

For our purposes in this lesson, we'll focus on three important facets of Jesus' temptation. First, his temptation taught him obedience.

Obedience

As Hebrews 5:8-9 say:

[Jesus] learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him (Hebrews 5:8-9).

Jesus was entirely sinless; he never disobeyed God. But he was also fully and truly human. So, he had to learn God's righteous requirements, and to overcome challenges and temptations throughout his life. As we see in the temptations he suffered, Jesus obeyed God both by keeping the requirements of his Law, and by submitting to the Father's plan for his life. And this obedience prepared him for his work as Christ, because as we read in Hebrews 5:9, it made him an acceptable sacrifice to God, so that he became the source of eternal salvation.

The second idea we'll mention is that Jesus' temptation gave him sympathy for his people.

Sympathy

Jesus didn't give in to temptation. But he still felt it acutely. He recognized that the things Satan offered him were desirable, and his weakened condition from fasting must have amplified his longing for them. And this experience caused him to grow in compassion and understanding for us as we suffer and struggle with temptation in our own lives. As we read in Hebrews 4:15:

We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are — yet was without sin (Hebrews 4:15).

Jesus faced and resisted the temptation to sin, gives Christians great comfort because he was fully human in every way. He experienced temptation but did not succumb to it. And there is a sense in which everything that Jesus endured becomes a model for how Christians can deal with temptation.

— Dr. Simon Vibert

When we consider that Jesus faced and resisted the temptation to sin, Hebrews 4 talks about that at length. One of the things that that does is address what's a fear for a lot of us is that we're alone, that we're having an experience that is unique when we are drawn to do something wrong or evil. And in fact, Jesus understood then in his earthly life what it was to be tempted, and today as he is in heavenly places as our great High Priest, he has that understanding. So we can be confident that we're not alone, that there is nothing that we can take to Jesus himself that he hasn't already understood and now is able to turn and to be our helper in the midst of that situation.

— Dr. James D. Smith III

The third idea we'll mention in relation to Jesus' temptation is his impeccability.

Impeccability

The word impeccability means inability to sin. Christians have used it for centuries to refer to the fact that Jesus was incapable of sinning. Theologians often talk about Jesus' impeccability in conjunction with his temptation because this was the time in his life when he would have been most likely to sin, if that were possible.

All Christians understand that Jesus never sinned. He never succumbed to temptation, or had an evil thought or desire, or said a sinful word. His sinlessness is asserted in passages like 2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 4:15 and 7:26; 1 Peter 2:22; and 1 John 3:5.

But it's also true that he wasn't even capable of sinning. As we've seen, Jesus was the Second Person of the Trinity. And God can't sin, because he can't act in ways that are contrary to his nature. All three persons of God always have been and always will be impeccable. We see this in Habakkuk 1:13; James 1:13; 1 John 1:5; and many other places.

But this doesn't make his temptation any less real. Because of his human nature, Jesus experienced temptation from a human perspective. He recognized the value of the things offered to him, and keenly understood the benefits they could provide him. So, his obedience and sympathy aren't lessened in any way. In fact, we might even say that because Jesus is impeccable, his obedience and sympathy are actually increased, since he learned perfectly from the experience, and now responds to us in a way that is perfectly suited to our needs.

The period of Jesus' birth and preparation are described rather briefly in the Gospels, so they're sometimes overlooked. But they contain many important truths. And one of the greatest of these is the assurance that the promised anointed one of God has come. Jesus' birth and preparation for the office of Christ reveal God's great love and mercy, because he hasn't left us in the grip of sin and death, but has kept his promises by sending his own Son as our Christ.

Having looked at Jesus' role as Christ in terms of his birth and preparation, we're ready to explore his public ministry.

PUBLIC MINISTRY

For our purposes in this lesson, we'll define Jesus' public ministry as beginning when he started to preach publicly, and ending with his final climactic approach to Jerusalem. Once again, we'll summarize the events that took place before looking into several details from this period.

Luke 3:23 says that Jesus was around thirty years old when he began his public ministry. And based on clues provided in the four gospels, especially John, many scholars believe Jesus' public ministry lasted around three years. In particular, John mentions that

Jesus attended three or four Passover feasts during this time, as we see in John 2:23, 6:4, 11:55, and perhaps 5:1.

According to Matthew 4:13-17, Jesus began his public ministry in Capernaum, a city in the region of Galilee, on the northwest side of the Sea of Galilee. He preached the kingdom of God and performed miracles throughout the region of Galilee and other cities in Israel, as we see in Matthew 4:23-24. During this time, he also chose twelve disciples and prepared them to join in the proclamation of God's kingdom, as recorded in Matthew 10 and Mark 3. Later he extended his ministry into other regions of Israel, including Samaria and Judea.

At the end of his public ministry, Jesus intentionally traveled to Jerusalem in order to be crucified. Along the way, he prepared his disciples for the fact that he was about to be killed by the people of the very kingdom he had been anointed to save.

Although Jesus' main ministry was to proclaim the good news of repentance and faith because the kingdom of God was near, he felt free to do this in a wide variety of ways. He ministered to different types of people, confronting average Israelites, religious leaders, social outcasts, Gentiles, and every other type of sinner. He met different sized groups, from crowds of thousands, to private households, to individuals. He taught in many different types of places, such as homes, synagogues, and open spaces. And he utilized a wide range of teaching strategies, including parables, questions, prophecies, sermons, and even miracles. And in every case, people recognized that he ministered with unique authority, and they reacted to him strongly — some with belief and repentance, and others with anger and rejection.

The Gospels contain far too much information about Jesus' public ministry for us to do more than merely highlight three key issues: first, Jesus' proclamations of the gospel; second, his demonstrations of power; and third, the affirmations of his anointing to the office of Christ. Let's look first at the gospel that Jesus proclaimed.

GOSPEL

Jesus preached the gospel in many ways and forms, some of them subtle, and others very direct. He used parables, sermons, conversations, prophetic offers of blessing and threats of judgment, predictions of the future, prayers, and even miracles. But when the gospel writers summarized his message, they tended to describe it most fundamentally as a call to repentance in light of the coming of the kingdom of God.

Listen to this summary of Jesus' gospel in Matthew 4:17:

From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near" (Matthew 4:17).

Mark described Jesus' message in similar ways in Mark 1:14-15. And Matthew ascribed the same gospel message to John the Baptist in Matthew 3:2.

We'll look at two aspects of Jesus' gospel: first, his message that the kingdom was coming; and second, his call for immediate repentance. Let's look first at Jesus' teaching about the kingdom.

Kingdom

When we open the Gospels and begin to read them, there's one thing that may surprise us but is inevitably going to strike us, and that is that what Jesus was preaching and teaching about and modeling was clearly the kingdom of God. There's no doubt from John the Baptist's preaching which foreshadows Jesus to the very first words of Jesus, "The kingdom of God is drawn near," or "has drawn near," or "the kingdom of heaven has drawn near." And then in all his teaching, "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven," all the parables about the kingdom of heaven, all the teaching, all the ways in which he shows himself to be the true Davidic king riding into Jerusalem on a donkey, all the manifest ways make it very clear that the Gospels, the evangelists, the gospel writers, want us to clearly understand that Jesus' message, his whole life, was about the bringing, the restoration of God's reign or God's kingdom.

— Dr. Jonathan Pennington

Like all Jews in his day, Jesus knew that God was the eternal sovereign over all of his creation. But the Old Testament also revealed that God planned for his eternal kingship to be displayed in his visible kingdom on earth. As we saw in a prior lesson, he began this process when he created the world and appointed Adam and Eve as his vice-regents. But they failed miserably in their assigned task of perfecting the world. God's kingdom moved forward again in the nation of Israel as it grew into a great empire. But it was seriously set back again by Israel's sin and exile. And although God offered to restore the nation in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, the people's unfaithfulness resulted in the exile being extended for several centuries. By the time of Jesus, Israel had endured hundreds of years of exile, waiting for the Christ to bring the fullness of God's kingdom and all its blessings to earth. So, when Jesus announced the good news that the kingdom was at hand, this was a message of tremendous hope.

Jesus announced the good news that the final stage of God's kingdom on earth was coming in his day. The patterns of heaven were going to characterize the entire world. As we see in the Beatitudes of Matthew 5:3-12, all God's faithful people would be tremendously blessed in God's kingdom. Their sorrows would end, and they would inherit the entire earth. No foreign powers would compel false worship. No corrupt religious leaders would compromise with Israel's enemies for the sake of relative tranquility. Those who had sinned would be forgiven. Those who had been exiled would be restored. Those who had fallen under the curses of sickness and disease would be healed. The Lord would personally defeat Israel's enemies, purge the people of their sin, and restore the entire creation.

But as wonderful as Jesus' gospel message about the kingdom must have sounded, it also contained a condition: repentance.

Repentance

Jesus warned that God's kingdom was coming quickly, and that it would be manifested not only in blessings for God's faithful people, but also in judgment against his enemies. So, if Israel wanted to receive the promised blessings, they first had to repent of their sin.

Repentance from sin involves turning from that sin. But insofar as it is evangelical repentance, it's not just turning away from something. It is also at the same time turning towards something. That something is a someone. It's Jesus, and we turn towards him in faith. So, there's an abandonment of my sin and a turn towards Christ in faith. At the same time, we could probably think through or tease out perhaps a couple of different dimensions of what that repentance involves, or looks like. One of those is an intellectual, or cognitive, awareness of my sin. I'm not likely to repent where I don't identify as a sinner and understand that I have broken God's laws in some way, shape or form. So, it has to be a sense of awareness, knowledge, conviction that I am a sinner and that what I've done is wrong in the eyes of God. At the same time, however, it is possible that someone could sort of conceptually recognize, what I've done is displeasing to God and also not care about it. So, the second dimension would be a dimension of remorse, an emotional conviction that not only have I done something wrong, but I regret it. I'm displeased by it. I have sort of the grief towards my sin that God has as well. Those two components then in tandem lead to the third component which is the exercise of the will, or the volitional capacity to turn from that sin as a promise or pleasure that was insufficient to deliver on what it promised, and turn towards Christ instead as the basis of superior promises and pleasures.

— Dr. Rob Lister

It's often helpful to think about repentance like turning over a coin. In a single motion, we turn away from sin and toward righteousness. We begin to turn away from sin by feeling genuine sorrow over having broken God's law, and for hurting our neighbors if they have been affected. And we complete our turn away from sin when we confess our guilt to God and ask for his forgiveness. These aspects of repentance are evident in passages like Jeremiah 31:19 and Acts 2:37-38.

But repentance also means turning toward God by asking him to cleanse and restore us, and by determining to obey him in the future. This doesn't mean that we will never sin again. But it does mean that genuine repentance includes a desire to please God by obeying his commands. We see this in places like Joel 2:12-13 and 2 Corinthians 7:10-11.

Repentance in the Bible is a great word. It's "*metanoia*." And if we're going to repent from our sin, it means this whole understanding of *metanoia* change. We change from our sinful ways. It means if we're going in that direction and Jesus touches our lives, we begin going this direction. We change. We change whatever it is he wants us to change. Truth be told, it's everything. This whole understanding of change of mind. It's not just a change of what you believe intellectually. Actually, I love the Old Testament word for "know." It's "*yada*," and that means to experience and to encounter. So it's not simply the mind that we can know with, but it's our hands, it's our feet, it's our feelings, it's our heart, it's everything about us. Change of mind means change of everything. And I believe inasmuch that we change everything, we begin changing, for instance, things that we do and things that we're about. We begin changing our behavior. If there is no change of behavior, there's probably no change. I had an old seminary professor who said, "You do what you believe and you believe what you do." That has a whole lot to do with repentance of the mind.

— Dr. Matt Friedman

Jesus' message that God's kingdom is coming to earth is wonderful news. But it can never be separated from the necessity of repentance. Only those who repent of their sin and turn to God in faith will be allowed to enjoy the blessings of his kingdom.

In addition to proclamations of the gospel, Jesus' public ministry included many demonstrations of power that testified to the truth of his message.

POWER

In Acts 10:38, the apostle Peter summarized Jesus' miraculous power in this way:

God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power ... [H]e went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him (Acts 10:38).

Jesus performed many miracles that exhibited the power of the Holy Spirit. He demonstrated mastery over creation, as when he turned water into wine in John 2:1-11. He showed his authority over evil spirits and their effects, as we see in passages like Matthew 12:22; Mark 1:23-26; and Luke 9:38-43. He healed sickness and disability, as we see in Mark 10:46-52; Luke 8:43-48; and John 9. Jesus even raised the dead, as we see in Matthew 9:18-26; Luke 7:11-15; and John 11:41-45. In fact, Jesus performed more miracles than any other prophet in Israel's history. The New Testament mentions at least 35 specific miracles, and the Gospel of John indicates that he performed innumerable miracles beyond these. As we read in John 21:25:

Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written (John 21:25).

Jesus' demonstrations of miraculous power had at least two implications we should consider. First, they confirmed his identity as the Christ. And second, they assured his eventual success in bringing God's kingdom to earth. Let's look first at how Jesus' miracles confirmed his identity.

Confirmed Identity

Jesus' miraculous works of power confirmed his identity as the Christ, the one specially anointed by God to bring in the final stage of his kingdom. As the Christ, Jesus was God's authoritative ambassador. And his miracles demonstrated God's strong approval of everything that Jesus said. We see this in Luke 7:22; John 5:36, and 10:31-38; and many other places.

Beyond this, many people in Scripture associated Jesus' miracles with the anointed offices that were aspects of the broader office of Christ. For example, they saw them as a fulfillment of his role as prophet in Luke 7:16; and John 6:14, and 7:40. Jesus himself connected his miraculous power to the duties of priests in Luke 17:12-19. And his miracles are associated with his office of king in Matthew 9:27, 12:23, 15:22, and 20:30. And listen to what Jesus said in John 10:37-38:

Do not believe me unless I do what my Father does. But if I do it, even though you do not believe me, believe the miracles, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father (John 10:37-38).

Jesus' miracles proved that his gospel message was true. He really was the Christ, and he really was bringing the last stage of God's kingdom to earth. As he said in Luke 11:20:

If I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come to you (Luke 11:20).

Jesus' mighty works proved that he was the Christ — the one who had brought the heavenly kingdom to earth in order to end Satan's tyranny over God's people and creation.

Having seen that Jesus' demonstrations of power confirmed his identity as the Christ, let's look at how they also assured his success.

Assured Success

Jesus' miracles demonstrated that he had the power necessary to fulfill his claims and promises. He had all the power he needed to make God's kingdom on earth just like

his kingdom in heaven. And in fact, many of his miracles of blessing provided a foretaste of that very kingdom. For example, when he healed the sick and raised the dead, he prefigured the kingdom where there is no disease or death, as described in Revelation 21:4. And when he fed thousands of hungry people, he provided a concrete example of the abundance that will characterize his everlasting kingdom, as we read in places like Exodus 23:25-26; Joel 2:26; and Luke 12:14-24.

Jesus also demonstrated that he had all the power he needed to destroy the enemies of his kingdom. For example, when he exorcised demons, he showed that he had the power necessary to establish an unshakeable kingdom — one that could never be threatened — as we see in Matthew 12:22-29.

Jesus' power drew the attention of everyone that witnessed it. And while his enemies maliciously dismissed his power as a deception of the devil, the truth is that Jesus' power came from God. And it proved that Jesus was the Christ, and that he had the ability to fulfill every offer, promise and threat he made. And for us as Christians, this should be a great comfort and reason for excitement. It means that our faith in Jesus is well placed. No matter what doubts we might have, and no matter how long God takes to complete the work he began in Jesus, Jesus has given us sufficient reason to trust him — no matter what. He really is the anointed one, the Christ. And if we are faithful to him, we are guaranteed a place of honor and blessing in his everlasting kingdom.

Now that we've looked at Jesus' gospel proclamations and demonstrations of power, let's consider his public ministry in terms of the affirmations of his anointing to the office of Christ.

AFFIRMATIONS

Jesus' anointing as Christ was confirmed in many ways during his public ministry. But for the sake of illustration, we'll focus on two noteworthy affirmations: Peter's apostolic confession that Jesus was the Christ; and Jesus' transfiguration in glory. Let's look first at Peter's apostolic confession.

Apostolic Confession

Listen to Matthew's record of Peter's confession in Matthew 16:15-17:

[Jesus asked,] “Who do you say I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven” (Matthew 16:15-17).

This same event is recorded in Mark 8:27-30; and Luke 9:18-20.

Peter's confession plays a pivotal role in the Gospels really, because it appears in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the three Synoptic Gospels.

And the first half of all three gospels really focuses on Jesus' divine authority; the demonstration of his authority through his miracles, through his exorcisms, through his healings, through his nature miracles and through his teaching. And so, Peter gets it, and recognized that Jesus is indeed the Messiah. And then from that point on it really launches into the role of the Messiah which is the suffering role. Having said that, Matthew, or, Mark and Luke seem to place a slightly different emphasis on Peter's confession. In Mark and Luke, all those miracles leading up to that point, apparently demonstrate for Peter, confirm for Peter, that Jesus is in fact the Christ; is in fact the Messiah. So he acknowledges that God has been at work through Jesus and recognizes kind of in his humanity he recognizes that Jesus is the Christ. Matthew, in what follows the confession, the first thing Jesus says is, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but my Father in heaven." So Matthew has a greater emphasis on the fact that this is a divine revelation through Jesus' work, no doubt, through his signs of authority, but that Peter is only really getting it because God has revealed it to him. So that sense of divine revelation is more important, it seems, in Matthew's gospel.

— Dr. Mark Strauss

Peter's affirmation of Jesus' anointing to the office of Christ was a direct revelation from God. As we've seen, people should have been able to deduce that Jesus was the Christ simply by looking at his miracles. But Peter's confession as the spokesman for the apostles was more than that. It was an authoritative prophetic revelation from God. As such, it was an infallible confirmation of the fact that Jesus really was the Christ.

One of the most remarkable things in the Gospels is that moment when Simon Peter declares, in response to Jesus' question, "Who do you say that I am?" "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God. You are the Messiah." It's a defining moment. Now, what's so remarkable about it? Well, it is, as Jesus himself says, a moment of revelation, when God himself has revealed to Simon Peter something which he could not have understood himself. But it's also because there's been such longing and expectation — over what, 500 years — that this Messiah figure would come. And now Peter is declaring that this person who is standing in front of him, "You are the Messiah," and so you've just got to feel the incredible amount of expectation and buildup, and now suddenly, this is the moment.

— Dr. Peter Walker

Having seen that Peter's apostolic confession affirmed Jesus' anointing to the office of Christ, let's look at Jesus' transfiguration in glory.

Transfiguration

“Transfiguration” is the name theologians have given to the event when Jesus was revealed to his disciples in glory. It refers to the fact that his appearance was radically transformed, revealing a portion of his divine glory. This event is recorded in Matthew 17:1-8; Mark 9:2-8; and Luke 9:28-36. It’s also referred to in 2 Peter 1:16-18.

In summary, Jesus took Peter, James and John up a mountain to pray. And while they were there, Jesus’ appearance changed. His face shone with glory and his clothes became dazzlingly white. While Jesus’ appearance was altered, Moses and Elijah appeared with him, and God’s voice was heard from heaven, affirming that Jesus was his Son. And when Peter suggested that the disciples build shelters for Jesus, Moses and Elijah, God singled out Jesus as being worthy of the greatest honor and obedience. This was significant because Moses was the lawgiver and liberator of God’s people, and Elijah was the faithful prophet that called the nation of Israel back from apostasy. It meant that Jesus stood in continuity with the law and the prophets, and that he was fulfilling the expectations set by the greatest leaders of Israel’s past. But it also meant that he was the greatest anointed one of all, the final Davidic heir who was bringing God’s kingdom to earth.

The transfiguration is this amazing scene where Jesus goes up on the mountain, and his disciples, just three of them, go with him. And they get this display of the glory of Christ. And so, first we get a glimpse of these two natures of Christ, where this man, nevertheless, is transfigured and we get a display of his glory that had always been true of him, but as that Christmas hymn says, was veiled in flesh, but we see the Godhead. We get this blinding display of his glorious presence, so glorious that the disciples come down off the mountain and they themselves are glowing. But when we think about the fulfillment of the covenant, that’s powerful, because who does he meet with in the transfiguration? He meets with Elijah and Moses. And so in this we see Jesus as the fulfillment of the Mosaic Law, and the fulfillment of the prophetic office, fulfilling his messianic identity in these ways. So the old covenant is coming to its fulfillment in Jesus the Messiah, as he meets with the giver of the Law, Moses. And then the fulfillment of the great prophetic office in Elijah, Jesus here comes, meets with them, and establishes his Messianic identity in that amazing transfiguration.

— Dr. K. Erik Thoennes

Now that we’ve looked at Jesus’ birth and preparation for the office of Christ, and at his public ministry, we’re ready to turn to his passion and death.

PASSION AND DEATH

We use the term “passion” to refer to the sufferings that Jesus endured, especially during the week before his crucifixion. In many ways this is the darkest part of Jesus’ story, because during this week Jesus was rejected by humanity, denied and betrayed by his followers, and executed by his accusers. And worse than this, Jesus’ Father in heaven poured out divine wrath and judgment on him in our place. But even in this dark story there’s a ray of hope and light. Jesus’ passion and death show us just how far the Triune God was willing to go to save us. They testify to the divine love and sacrifice that deserve our thankfulness, obedience and praise.

In this lesson, we’ll define Jesus’ passion and death as the period beginning with his arrival in Jerusalem and ending with his time in the tomb after his crucifixion. While this part of Jesus’ life lasted only about a week, it contained many significant events. Once again, we’ll begin with a brief summary of the period.

Around the year A.D. 30, Jesus went to Jerusalem for the Passover feast. When he approached the city on the colt of a donkey, many people recognized him and hailed him as Israel’s king. For this reason, his entry into the city is commonly known as the Triumphal Entry. We read about it in Matthew 21:1-11; Mark 11:1-11; Luke 19:28-44; and John 12:12-19.

Once in Jerusalem, Jesus was angered by the money changers in the temple. So, in an act of prophetic condemnation and royal judgment, he overturned their tables and drove them from the temple. The Gospels record this temple cleansing in Matthew 21:12-17; Mark 11:15-18; and Luke 19:45-48. For the next several days, Jesus engaged in disputes with the religious authorities and taught everyone that came to listen to him.

Then, on the night before the Jewish feast of Passover, Jesus gathered with his disciples and shared a final meal, often called the Last Supper. During this meal, he instituted the Lord’s Supper as an ongoing commemoration and communion until his promised return. This event is recorded in Matthew 26:17-30; Mark 14:12-26; and Luke 22:7-23. That same night, he also gave them many instructions both through teaching, often known as his Farewell Discourse, recorded in John 13–16, and through his high priestly prayer in John 17. On that same evening, the disciple Judas left in order to betray Jesus, as he had planned with the Jewish religious leaders in Luke 22:3-4 and John 13:27-30. Afterward, Jesus and the other disciples walked to the Garden of Gethsemane. While Jesus was praying, Judas led a group of Jewish religious leaders and soldiers to the garden, and they arrested Jesus. He was accused before the Jewish high priest Caiaphas and the Jewish leadership, and stood trial before the Roman governor Pilate and the Jewish king Herod Antipas. Under the stress of the situation, Jesus’ disciples abandoned him, and Peter denied him three times. Jesus himself was beaten, ridiculed, and sentenced to death. These events are recorded in Matthew 26:31–27:31; Mark 14:32–15:20; Luke 22:39–23:25; and John 18:1–19:16.

Jesus was crucified around noon on the day following his arrest. He was nailed to a cross and publicly hung from it until he died. In the midst of this great agony and suffering, he promised mercy to a repentant thief, provided for the care of his mother, and asked God’s forgiveness for those who were putting him to death. Around 3 o’clock, he

cried out to God and died. These events are recorded in Matthew 27:32-54; Mark 15:21-39; Luke 23:26-47; and John 19:16-30.

At that time, an earthquake shook the land and the temple veil was torn from top to bottom. After a Roman soldier pierced him with a spear to verify that he was dead, Jesus' body was taken down from the cross. Because the Sabbath was about to begin, some of his followers hastily prepared his body for burial and placed it in a borrowed tomb. The record of this horrible afternoon can be found in Matthew 27:51-61; Mark 15:38-47; Luke 23:44-56; and John 19:34-42.

We'll consider Jesus' passion and death by focusing on three events from that period: Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, his institution of the Lord's Supper, and his crucifixion. Let's look first at his triumphal entry.

TRIUMPHAL ENTRY

Jesus entered Jerusalem riding on the colt of a donkey in order to fulfill the prophecy of Zechariah 9. The donkey was significant because it was the mount ridden by kings during times of peace, when they were confident that there were no threats against them. This symbolic action was intended to display Jesus' confidence as Israel's rightful king; to affirm those that were faithful to his kingdom message; and to rebuke those that weren't.

As Jesus neared the city, the people began to recognize him and to welcome him. In order to honor him, many laid palm branches and even their cloaks on the road, and they praised him loudly. As we read in Mark 11:9-10,

Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted, "Hosanna!" "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!" "Hosanna in the highest!" (Mark 11:9-10).

But not everyone welcomed Jesus. He was rejected and opposed by the Jewish leadership, such as the priests and teachers of the law — the very ones who should have been most excited by his arrival. By rejecting God's Anointed One, they proved that their own ministries were opposed to God and his work. Listen to Jesus' words to Jerusalem when he entered the city, recorded in Luke 19:42-44:

If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace — but now it is hidden from your eyes. The days will come upon you when your enemies will ... not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you (Luke 19:42-44).

This rejection continued as the religious leaders spent the early part of Jesus' final week asking all manner of questions in their attempts to discredit him before the people. They also tried to provoke the Roman authorities to oppose him, and repeatedly challenged Jesus' identity and authority as Christ.

At his triumphal entry and for days afterwards, the people praised and accepted Jesus while the religious authorities rejected him. Why did people have such diverse reactions to him? Well, we can understand it at different levels. First of all, those in authority had the most to lose. And we can see there is a general orientation to power and authority. It's just human nature, and Jewish authorities were no different than any other human beings. Those who have power want to hold on to it, and Jesus came as a threat to their power. They understood the kingdom of God in a narrow way, in a nationalistic way, in an ethnocentric way, in a tribal way, and they had the most to lose. And just as it was told to Mary in Luke's gospel, this child shall be the cause of the rise and fall of many in Israel and a sign to be opposed. John's gospel begins with the anticipation that this is the light which came into the world and the darkness did not, some translations say, "comprehend it," but I think, rather, we should understand, "overpower it." Jesus came as the light of the world, and the darkness had everything to lose. And so the religious authorities manifest that. But we also should remember that it's not very long, it's late in holy week, as we call it, where everyone, even the crowds that had followed Jesus, cried out for the release of Barabbas instead of Jesus. That Jesus came not fulfilling people's expectations of what they wanted God to do. Instead, he came manifesting what God was determined to do, and that means a threat to our own independence, a threat to our own autonomy. And we don't like to die to self, and so Jesus brought the threat of overturning our human wills, and that's why he was ultimately, from a human level, rejected.

— Rev. Michael Glodo

Having looked at the triumphal entry, let's turn to a second major event from the week of Jesus' passion and death: his institution of the Lord's Supper.

LORD'S SUPPER

As we've mentioned, Jesus' passion and death took place during the Passover week. So, one of the things that Jesus did during this week was eat the Passover meal with his disciples. He did this immediately before his arrest and crucifixion, and the event is commonly known as the Last Supper. During this Last Supper, Jesus did something very special that Christians have been commemorating ever since: he instituted the Lord's Supper as a Christian sacrament or ordinance.

As we've said, the Last Supper was a Passover meal. It commemorated the fact that God had rescued the nation of Israel from slavery in Egypt. But at the end of this meal, Jesus used the symbolism of Passover to draw attention to his own work as the Christ. Specifically, he selected two items from the dinner — the unleavened bread and a

cup of wine — and assigned new meaning to them. According to Luke 22:17-20, Jesus associated the bread with his body, which he was about to present to God as an offering for sin. And he associated the cup of wine with his blood, which would also be part of that same offering for sin. Moreover, when we combine his teachings in Matthew 26:29 and Mark 14:25 with his instructions in Luke 22:19, we see that Jesus taught his disciples to use these elements on a perpetual basis as a memorial to him, until he returns and finishes the work he began.

The Lord's Supper in Christian tradition has often been described as the visible words of Christ because they give a visual demonstration of what happened on the cross. So broken bread, wine poured out, point us to Christ whose body, nailed to the cross, his blood shed for us, and the way in which the symbolism works, or the sacrament works, is to point us back to Christ, to enable us to partake of the benefits of his death by eating and drinking in memory of all that he did for us. And there is a sense in which believers also feel that there's a great spiritual strengthening that happens when we eat and drink, we participate in the benefits of all that Christ has done for us at that point.

— Dr. Simon Vibert

There are two aspects of the meaning of the Lord's Supper that we should mention specifically, beginning with its reference to Christ's atonement.

Atonement

The basic symbolism of the Lord's Supper is easy to understand. The bread represents Jesus' body, and the wine represents his blood. But why are these significant? Because his body was given for us, according to Luke 22:19, and his blood was poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins, as we read in Matthew 26:28. In other words, his body and blood are significant because they're what he offered to God on the cross, in order to atone for our sin. We'll explore this topic in just a moment when we discuss the crucifixion.

The second aspect of the meaning of the Lord's Supper we'll mention is that it signifies the inauguration of the new covenant.

New Covenant

Listen to what Jesus said in Luke 22:20:

This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you (Luke 22:20).

Here, Jesus referred to the renewal of the covenant that the prophet Jeremiah had foretold in Jeremiah 31:31-34.

The new covenant is both the guarantee and renewal of the covenant promises previously made by God in the days of Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses and David. These prior administrations of God's covenant expressed God's benevolence to his people, but also required their loyal obedience, promising blessings to those who obeyed God and curses against those who disobeyed him. And as the Christ, Jesus was the administrator of the last stage of God's covenant with his people — the stage in which the covenant was “ratified” or “sealed” by the shedding of his blood. As we read in Hebrews 9:15:

Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance — now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant (Hebrews 9:15).

Now that we've looked at Jesus' triumphal entry and his institution of the Lord's Supper, we're ready to turn to his crucifixion.

CRUCIFIXION

Crucifixion was a form of the death penalty used in the ancient Roman Empire. Its victims were tied to a cross, or nailed to it, as in Jesus' case, and then hung on the cross until they died, typically by suffocation. Jesus' crucifixion was unique, of course, because it also served as an atoning offering for sin. As the Christ, it was his responsibility to die on behalf of his people, as we read in Hebrews 9:11-28.

There are far too many doctrines associated with the crucifixion for us to mention them all, so we'll limit ourselves to just two: the imputation of our sin to Jesus; and the fact that he died as a result of divine judgment against sin. We'll begin with the idea of imputation.

Imputation

Imputation simply means assignment or reckoning. But when we speak about the imputation of our sin to Jesus on the cross, we're referring to the act in which God assigned the guilt of sinners to the person of Jesus. So, when we say that our sin was imputed to Jesus, we mean that God blamed him for our sins. Jesus never actually sinned, and his person was never corrupted by sin. But from a legal perspective, God counted Jesus as if he had personally committed every sin imputed to him.

In continuity with the patterns of Old Testament sin offerings, Jesus offered himself on the cross as a substitute for his people. The book of Hebrews speaks of this extensively in chapters 9–10. Christ's role as our substitute is reflected in the fact that the Bible often refers to him as our sacrifice, as in Romans 3:25; Ephesians 5:2; and 1 John

2:2. It's also why he's called our ransom in places like Matthew 20:28; 1 Timothy 2:6; and Hebrews 9:15.

Before our sin was imputed to him, Jesus was blameless and perfect. But as strange as it may sound, once our sin was reckoned to his account, God viewed him as being guilty of all the sins that were assigned to him. This is what Paul was talking about in 2 Corinthians 5:21 when he said:

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21).

And so when we start to ask a question such as this: "Would it be just, would it be fair, would it be righteous for God to impute our sin to Christ?" Well, we tend to go to a human law court and think, "Would we impute someone else's guilt in a murder case to someone who didn't commit the murder?" The answer would be "no." From a human scale of justice that would be wrong. But the first thing we know about God's justice is that it's perfect and so, because he is perfect, we know that whatever he does is right. But, you know, the Bible actually tells us why it's right. Now, for instance, if God had just chosen someone random, and had just arbitrarily imputed my guilt to him, that wouldn't be fair, that wouldn't be just. That wouldn't meet God's own standard of righteousness. But what if before humanity was ever created God determined to redeem sinful humanity through his own Son, the only one who actually could bear our sin and make atonement for our sin because of his perfect righteousness, his perfect obedience? And what if this wasn't an arbitrary assignment, an unwilling assignment to someone who simply was told, "You're gonna have to bear the sin." What if Jesus said in the Gospels, "No one takes my life from me, but I lay down my life willingly for my sheep"? Then you come to understand that the justice of God is never more perfectly displayed than in his perfect plan to redeem sinful humanity through his own Son, who would willingly give his own life and would bear our sin in order that we might have peace with God. God's justice is perfect. Never more perfect than in the picture of what happens on the cross.

— Dr. R. Albert Mohler, Jr.

Now that we've considered the imputation of our sin to Christ, let's turn to our second topic related to the crucifixion: divine judgment.

Judgment

Human death is always a divine judgment against sin. We see this in Genesis 3:17-19; Ezekiel 18:4; and Romans 5:12-21. Death entered the human race when Adam

sinned in Genesis 3. And it has continued ever since because Adam's sin has been imputed to us.

Jesus' death was also a divine judgment against sin. Before God laid our guilt on him, Jesus couldn't die. But once our sin was imputed to him on the cross, his death became not only possible but necessary. It was the only just response God could make to such tremendous guilt.

As part of this judgment, Jesus also remained under the power of death for three days before his resurrection. But the good news is that he has borne the full wrath of God against our sin, so that there isn't any divine judgment remaining to threaten us. As Jesus said in John 5:24:

Whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life (John 5:24).

If I was to define sin, I would come up with a warped view of what that is. But God's understanding of sin and its seriousness requiring his judgment is actually the best news that I can receive. Of course, I don't like to look at my sin. I don't like the effects of sin in my life or in the world. But unless God judges it, it never truly is dealt with. I'll try to find any way I can to circumvent the nature of sin. But God's judgment means he knows exactly what sin is, what I've committed, but also what sin does around me to me. And so the Lord's giving himself in his sacrificial death to meet those needs and all those difficulties and problems is exactly the answer to my sin problem. Without that judgment, without that understanding and that righteous dealing with that horrific thing called sin, there would be no redemption. So Christ's atonement is the only good news there is. Every other religion in the world has tried to deal with a thing called sin, or a vision of sin, to get rid of it, to sublimate it, to say it doesn't happen, to deny the body. But Jesus comes with his full righteous judgment, and he tells us exactly what sin is. And as he does that, then he takes all of that into himself upon the cross. So for Christians, and for anyone, this is the best news of all.

— Dr. Bill Ury

Jesus is the Word of God incarnate. He is the Word made flesh. The Word who was with God, the Word who was God. He is the Son who has come from the Father's heart to make the Father known. It's important that we remember that, because then, when we see him laying down his life on the cross, taking our judgment, God's judgment against our sins and our judgment into his own life, it is God himself in the Son who is bearing his own judgment against his own sin in the face of our rebellion and our betrayal of God. What's

the good news? God loves us so much that he won't wait for us to pay for our sins so that we can know him. He won't wait for us to bridge the chasm that separates us from him. But he comes to us and he bears in his own being the ugliness, the wretchedness, the wickedness and evilness of our sins so that he can then pour out of himself not only his forgiveness but his divine presence and his divine life and his divine love into our hearts. That's pretty good news.

— Dr. Stephen Blakemore

So far in our lesson, we've looked at Jesus' office of Christ or Messiah during three periods of time: his birth and preparation, his public ministry, and his passion and death. So, at this point, we're ready to address our final topic: the period of Jesus' exaltation as Christ.

EXALTATION

We'll describe Jesus' exaltation as the period of time stretching from his resurrection all the way to his future visible return. We'll begin with a brief summary of the events from this time, and then explore some of them in more detail.

On the first day of the week after his crucifixion and burial, Jesus rose from the dead. Over a period of forty days, he appeared to many of his disciples. He taught them about the kingdom of God, explained his role in the fulfillment of Scripture, and established the leadership of his church through the apostles. These events are recorded in Matthew 28, Mark 16, Luke 24, John 20–21, and Acts 1:1–11.

At the end of these forty days, Jesus blessed his people and ascended visibly into heaven, while angels proclaimed that he would return again. These facts are reported in Luke 24:36–53, and Acts 1:1–11.

Upon ascending into heaven, Jesus presented his death to God as an atoning sacrifice and sat down at God's right hand. This began his rule or "session" over the affairs of his people, which will continue until he returns in glory to render judgment against his enemies and to bless his people with the new heavens and earth. We find these details in places like Ephesians 1:20–22; 2 Thessalonians 1:7–10; and Revelation 20:11–22:7.

We'll explore four aspects of Jesus' exaltation. First, we'll look at his resurrection. Second, we'll mention his ascension. Third, we'll consider his heavenly session. And fourth, we'll focus on his visible return. Let's begin with his resurrection from the dead.

RESURRECTION

Death is the greatest tragedy that human beings experience, and the worst manifestation of sin in this world. But the good news is that God's anointed Christ

conquered death for all of us. When he rose from the grave through the power of the Spirit, he proved to all creation that he really is God's favored Son and the heir to his kingdom. And even more wonderful than this, he ensured the future resurrection and blessing of all his faithful followers.

There are so many significant aspects to Jesus' resurrection that we can't mention them all. So, we'll focus our attention on just two, beginning with the way it furthered God's plan of redemption.

Plan of Redemption

God's plan to redeem humanity and the rest of creation depended on him fulfilling his covenant promises to establish his kingdom on earth under the kingship of a descendant of David, otherwise known as the Christ. But he couldn't do this if Jesus remained dead. In this sense, Jesus' resurrection was a critical step that enabled God to fulfill his covenant promises. This is one of the reasons that the New Testament calls the resurrection an affirmation of Jesus' role as Christ, as we see in Luke 24:45-46; John 2:17-22; Acts 17:3; and Romans 1:1-4.

The second aspect of Jesus' resurrection we'll mention is that it provides believers with many different blessings of salvation.

Blessings of Salvation

The New Testament associates Jesus' resurrection with a wide variety of blessings we receive as part of our salvation. It results in our justification, which is the forgiveness of our sins, in Romans 4:25. It's the source of the regeneration of our spirits, and it opens the door to our eternal inheritance in 1 Peter 1:3-5. It produces good works and a true witness to Christ in our bodies and lives, as we read in 2 Corinthians 4:10-18. And it's the source of the future bodily resurrection of believers, when we will have glorified bodies just like the one Jesus has, as we read in Romans 6:4-5 and 1 Corinthians 15:42-53. Although Christians rarely think of it in these terms, Jesus' resurrection is essential to many of the blessings of salvation we already enjoy, as well as to those we'll receive in the future.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is the central point of the New Testament. And out of it flows so many blessings. Firstly, the resurrection teaches us who Jesus is. It's a vindication of him as the Messiah, and the Lord, and the Son of God. So it teaches us great things about Jesus, and there's great blessing in that. But then, moving on, the key thing for Christians is that this means that Jesus Christ is alive today. He's risen from the dead, and this means that he's someone who we can actually know and meet now. More than that, actually, it means that Jesus' power, his risen power, is available

to us. And actually we believe that by the Holy Spirit this new life actually comes to reside in us. So it means that to live as a Christian is not to be trying to follow Jesus in our own strength. It means we actually have his risen power within us. But there's more to it than that. I mean, the resurrection gives us incredible hope for the future, and the resurrection is the pattern of what happens to us when we die. And we see in Jesus' resurrection God's pledge that death is not the end, that after the grave comes new life, resurrection — bodily life. And that, of course, for Christians throughout the generations, has given incredible hope as they, we, face human death. It's trust in Jesus that he will bring us through death into his life. And I'd like just to say one other thing — that the resurrection is also God's pledge to renew his creation. Jesus' body is a physical body, and he doesn't appear as just a spiritual being after that, he has a physical body. And that's a sign that God takes human matter and is going to redeem it and renew it. Creation is not bad; it's something that's going to be renewed. And we get that clearly taught in Romans 8 when Paul says that the whole of creation is going to be renewed. It's the resurrection which gives us that clue and that confidence.

— Dr. Peter Walker

With Jesus' resurrection in mind, let's explore his ascension into heaven.

ASCENSION

Jesus' ascension occurred when he was miraculously lifted into heaven, into the special presence of God. Now, of course, in his divine nature, the Son of God is present in all places at all times. But according to his human nature, the ascension moved Jesus' body and soul from our earthly realm into the heavenly one inhabited by angels and the souls of departed believers. The Scriptures record this event in Luke 24:50-53 and Acts 1:9-11, and referred to it in many other places.

We'll explore two aspects of Jesus' role as Christ that can be associated with his ascension: the apostolic authority Jesus granted to his apostles and his own enthronement at the right hand of God. Let's look first at the matter of apostolic authority.

Apostolic Authority

As a result of his unique accomplishments in atoning for sin and fulfilling all righteousness, God gave Jesus unparalleled authority and power over all creation. As Jesus told his disciples in Matthew 28:18:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me (Matthew 28:18).

Moreover, at his ascension Jesus delegated some of this authority to his apostles on earth, so that they could speak with infallible authority on his behalf, in order to establish and build up the church. The apostles who received this authority were the original eleven faithful disciples, Matthias who replaced the traitor Judas in Acts 1:26, and Paul who received his authority by a special dispensation.

As a result of this delegated authority, these apostles were enabled to write and approve new Scripture, and to speak infallibly in matters of doctrine. As we see in Acts 1:24-26, this authority was unique to the apostles who received it directly from Christ, and could not be passed on through human means. As a result, there have never been any other apostles that possessed this level of authority.

The apostle Paul alluded to this fact in Ephesians 2:19-20, where he said that the universal church was:

God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone (Ephesians 2:19-20).

The authoritative apostles were a special category of church officers, belonging only to the universal church's foundational period.

With this understanding of apostolic authority in mind, we're ready to look at a second feature of Jesus ascension into heaven: his enthronement.

Enthronement

Now, the seating of Christ with God in heaven means that Christ has been victorious all over all the enemies of God and his people. And particularly in the book of Ephesians where Paul says this in chapter 2, the enemies that Paul's talking about are the cosmic enemies of the universe, the rulers and authorities of this present darkness. Those forces have been conquered by the resurrection of Christ from the dead, and Christ is seated at God's right hand. And the wonderful good news is that we are seated also at God's right hand. So, as Christians we too have victory over all the demonic and evil forces of the universe. We do not need to fear the invisible powers that some people claim have power over us. We do not need to fear those because Christ has conquered them, and we are victorious together with him.

— Dr. Frank Thielman

When Jesus ascended into heaven, he presented his sacrifice in the heavenly temple, and then sat down at the right hand of God. This order of events is mentioned in Hebrews 1:3, 9:11-14, and 10:12-14.

The act of sitting down at God's right hand constituted Jesus' enthronement as God the Father's vassal or servant king in heaven. This messianic place of honor was first prophesied by King David in Psalm 110. And the New Testament frequently mentions that it now belongs to Jesus. For instance, we see this in Mark 16:19; Luke 22:69; Ephesians 1:20-21; and 1 Peter 3:22.

The enthronement completed Jesus' assumption of the office of Christ. He had been chosen before his incarnation and anointed at his baptism. But it wasn't until his ascension that he actually took the throne and began to rule in a formal capacity.

And every aspect of the Lord's actions and all of his movement, all of his personal relationship to every aspect of our time is important for redemption. The fact that he is at the right hand of the Father on a throne, spiritually speaking, is a great affirmation to us that there is victory at the end of all human history for us. He is the king who has won every battle. We don't sense it now, but in reality he has. That's the cosmic concept. The transformation of all the universe, his total lordship, that is all pictured for us as his reigning lordship on a throne. But the great thing about remembering who Jesus is, is the one that reigns is a glorified man. The Son of God who became the Son of Man. So that his incarnation never ceases. He didn't become some spirit alone. He has taken humanity into heaven, and the one who is at the right hand of God the Father is a Jewish carpenter who is the Son of God. He ever lives to intercede for us. There is this marvelous mix of his lordship, his sovereignty, his dominion, his absolute victory over all that has occurred. But also this incredible intimacy, this taking us into himself, that his intercessory life, this powerful prayer and concern for our lives continues. So this perfect Savior is exemplified to us on a throne. Yes, he has all worthiness to be worshipped and adored, but his worthiness is also, if you will, balanced from our perspective with this incredible self-giving, this amazing concept. I thought of all the hymns over the years that talk almost shockingly in present tense form about his bleeding wounds. My response at first was, well he bled and he died. But when the sing about his throne reality, they say five bleeding wounds he bears, received on Calvary. And I think they're trying to say don't forget his incarnation, that his throne life is an incarnate Christ who is the Lord of heaven and earth but also the Lord of your everyday needs. And so there's great implication for the Christian as you think about his work upon the throne even today.

— Dr. Bill Ury

Having explored Jesus' exaltation in terms of his resurrection and ascension, let's turn to his ongoing session in heaven.

SESSION

The word "session" is a technical term in theology for Jesus' ongoing rule and governing from the place of majesty and power in heaven. It refers to all the things Jesus is doing in his current reign as God's vassal king.

When the Scriptures describe what Jesus is doing now, they often say that he's seated at the right hand of God the Father. This language can be misleading to some modern readers. Jesus isn't just sitting next to the Father waiting for the time of his return; he's sitting on a throne. And that means he's reigning over his kingdom. He's the vassal king who sits at God's right hand. And he'll keep reigning over us and interceding for us until he returns. Jesus' session proves that he's victorious over sin and death, and it authorizes him to give his people continual comfort in the midst of every problem we face in life.

Scripture tells us that Christ is seated at the right hand of God. This is an anthropomorphic expression that shows that Christ received the reins of government of the church and of the universe. At his ascension, he is made to share in the corresponding glory that goes with this. But this reference to being seated, however, does not imply that Jesus ascended to a place of rest. He continues in his work as our king and prophet and priest.

— Rev. Jim Maples

We'll speak of the things Jesus does during his heavenly session in terms of the three smaller facets of his role as the exalted Christ: First, his prophetic word and Spirit. Second, his priestly intercession before the Father. And third, his kingly rule over his people. Let's look first at Jesus' prophetic word and Spirit.

Word and Spirit

As we see in Acts 2:33, one of the first ways Jesus' exercised his prophetic ministry was by sending the Holy Spirit as a gift to the church. Acts 2 records that when the Spirit first came, he was attended by tongues of fire, the sound of rushing wind, and the exuberant praise of God in the languages of the dispersed Jews. This was a prophetic work because the Holy Spirit empowered the church as Jesus' prophetic witness in the world. Peter explained that these signs fulfilled the prediction made in Joel 2 that in the end times, the Spirit would empower all his faithful people for ministry.

Since Pentecost, Jesus has continued to send the Spirit to minister to the church in prophetic ways, though the extraordinary manifestations of Pentecost have been far from

the norm. Perhaps the most common example is that he sends the Spirit to provide illumination and insight when we read the Scriptures.

Jesus' prophetic ministry during his session also included the inspiration of Scripture. He sent the Spirit to inspire the apostles to write Christ's infallible word to his people, as we read in places like 2 Timothy 3:16-17, and 2 Peter 3:15-16. And Jesus continues to minister to his church through the word by preserving the Scriptures for us, and by sending his Spirit to gift ministers to preach the word to their congregations and to evangelize the lost, as we see in places like Philippians 1:14, 1 Thessalonians 2:13, and Hebrews 13:7.

Besides his prophetic word and Spirit, Jesus' session also includes his priestly intercession.

Intercession

At his ascension, Jesus offered his own blood to the Father for the atonement of the sins of his people. This action is unrepeatable. But its benefits — like forgiveness, cleansing, and healing — need to be applied to our lives on a continual basis. Ultimately, we will enjoy unlimited purity, health and prosperity in the new heavens and earth. But in the meantime, Jesus intercedes with us before the Father, asking him to apply a portion of those blessings to us during our lives on earth. His intercession is mentioned in passages like Hebrews 7:25-26, 9:11-26, and 10:19-22; as well as 1 John 2:2.

Christ presenting his whole work as our priest involves two aspects to it. It involves his laying down his life for us, which we think of in terms of the cross — he goes there as our substitute; he takes our place. He takes our sin upon himself, and pays for that in full. The priest also was one who interceded for the people, who was the mediator, the go-between, between God and the people, praying for them, representing them. Christ does both of those works. It's not as if his cross is done and his priestly work of intercession doesn't take place. No. His cross is done. He is our substitute, our representative, yet he still continues to pray for us, intercede for us. Why does he do so? Not because the cross is ineffective, but because he is applying that work to us in an ongoing way. We continue to sin; we're not yet in a glorified state. He continues to plead what he has done before the Father on our behalf. He continues to pray by the Spirit in ways that we don't even know how to pray. And he does that as our go-between, as our mediator, as the one who represents us in every aspect of our life and he does so as both our sacrifice and intercessor.

— Dr. Stephen Wellum

Sadly, many Christians labor under the false impression that when they sin, they stand helplessly before God on their own, having to answer for their failures. But the

wonderful fact is that just as Christ paid for our sins on the cross, he now intercedes for us before our Father in heaven, ensuring that the Father will continue to forgive and to bless us. We're never alone in God's heavenly court, because Jesus continually prays on our behalf.

Jesus still has an ongoing, personal, relational role that he plays in our lives as our advocate, our mediator, our representation. He's our lawyer that daily, continually goes before the great Judge and pleads our case. The great news is because of his atoning work he never loses a case. He's always appealing to his perfect, completed work on our behalf in his intercessory role as our great high priest, and it's always successful, it's always effective.

— Dr. K. Erik Thoennes

With Jesus' word and Spirit and intercession in mind, let's turn to his rule as King.

Rule

Jesus' ongoing rule consists partly of governing the church, which the Bible describes both as his bride, in places like Ephesians 5:23-29, and his body, as we see in 1 Corinthians 12:27.

As the son and heir of David, Jesus also rules the nations, subduing them to his righteous rule and governance. We see this idea developed in Matthew 28:19-20; 1 Corinthians 15:24-28; and Revelation 22:16.

Moreover, as the exact representation of God and the true image of restored humanity, Jesus rightfully rules as Lord of all creation, as we see in Hebrews 2:7-8.

And beyond this, Jesus is so highly exalted that he has full authority above all other powers and authorities, such as angels and demons. We see this in Romans 8:38-39; and Colossians 1:16, and 2:15. Listen to how Paul summarized Jesus' royal rule in Philippians 2:9-11:

God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:9-11).

Jesus governs all things — the church, the nations, creation, and the spiritual world of angels and demons. His rule doesn't always seem predictable to us. But, he rules according to God's hidden plan. The Bible assures us that because of Christ's rule over all, his followers have nothing to fear. Our eventual victory is assured. Nothing can happen to us that's beyond his control and authority. Everything that exists is under his

authority and power — from the workings of the entire universe to the tiniest sub-atomic particle. And eventually, all the kings and people of the earth, and all spiritual beings, will acknowledge his supremacy and bow down to him.

Having explored Jesus' resurrection, ascension and session, we're ready to turn a future aspect of what Jesus will do as the Christ: his visible return.

RETURN

The New Testament teaches that because Jesus is the Christ, he will return visibly in his glorified body to consummate God's kingdom on earth. The return of Christ is a central affirmation of Christian faith, and is taught in passages such as Acts 1:11; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10, and 1 Corinthians 15:23.

We'll frame our discussion of Jesus' final return by looking at just two of the things he'll accomplish then: the judgment of all his spirits and humanity; and the renewal of creation. Let's look first at the judgment of spirits and humanity.

Judgment

As Christ and King, one of Jesus' roles is to act as judge on the last day, giving each angel, demon and human being its due. As Jesus himself said in Matthew 25:31-46, every human being who has died will be resurrected, and then all humanity will be judged on the basis of their works. Those who have done good works will be rewarded with eternal, blessed life. But those who have done evil works will be condemned to everlasting torment. The judgment is also mentioned in places like John 5:22-30; Acts 10:42, and 17:31; and 2 Corinthians 5:10.

Now, of course, the Bible also teaches that people can only do good works if the Holy Spirit indwells them with power. And if it weren't for the fact that believers have been justified in Christ, even these would be of no value. There's absolutely nothing about believers themselves that makes them superior to unbelievers. As Paul wrote in Ephesians 2:8-10:

It is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do (Ephesians 2:8-10).

On our own, all humanity is guilty before God. But in the last judgment, those of us who have faith in Christ will be counted as having died for our sins in the death of Christ. So, instead of being condemned, we'll be rewarded for the good works God has done through us.

In our blessed state, we'll be completely free from the fear of death. Our glorified bodies will be like the one Jesus already has. And we'll live forever in peace and prosperity, free from the guilt, corruption and presence of sin. Above all, we'll see our God and Savior face to face, and rest in his favor.

As part of our reward, we'll also be given authority in the new heavens and earth, in order to reign over it with Christ. We see this in Romans 8:17; and 2 Timothy 2:12. And one of the first ways we'll exercise this authority is by joining Jesus in sitting in judgment over the angels and demons, as Paul taught in 1 Corinthians 6:3. The outcome will resemble the judgment on humanity. The righteous angels will be rewarded, and the wicked demons will be condemned, just as we read in Matthew 25:41.

With this understanding of the judgment of spirits and humanity in mind, let's turn to the renewal of creation that will also take place at Jesus' return.

Renewal

As Paul taught in Romans 8:19-22, when God cursed the ground in response to Adam's sin, it affected the entire creation. As a result, the whole universe is subject to corruption. But as we read in Romans 8:21, and Revelation 22:3, when Jesus returns he'll remove the bondage of sin and death from creation. Then we will inherit and rule over a good and perfect earth that is even better than the first creation. The prophets of the Old Testament visualized this restored creation in terms of abundant food, peace between peoples and animals, and joyful worship and service to God. We see this throughout the books of Isaiah, Jeremiah and Zechariah. This renewal of creation will first require the cleansing of the world by fire, as the apostle Peter revealed in 2 Peter 3:10-13. But the result will be wonderful. As Peter said in 2 Peter 3:13:

In keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness (2 Peter 3:13).

The picture of the new heavens and the new earth that we get in the book of Revelation for example is that it will be both a garden and a city. There are trees there that kind of recollect the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and the Tree of Life particularly. But there's also a great city. A great New Jerusalem comes down from heaven with a river flowing through it, which again gets us back to the garden. So there will be all the delights and attractiveness of the garden, but all the sophisticatedness, all the civilization that you would expect in a city. And we look forward to that. There will not be any disasters. Now, I think nature will continue to be a very powerful demonstration of who God is and there will perhaps be great impressive works of God's power in the skies and in the earth, but they won't be disasters because there will be no sorrow, there will be no sadness and God will protect his people from all that. So

practically speaking, we look forward to the new heavens and the new earth, says Peter, wherein dwells righteousness. It will be a perfectly righteous, perfectly just society. It'll be something that will be good for all of us. Our sorrows that we have here on earth, all our tragedies that we mourn today and rightly so, that won't happen again when we go to glory, and everything will be made right. All of God's justice will prevail, and we'll be so thankful for God's mercy.

— Dr. John Frame

Think about it this way. We all know that creation can be a wonderful place. Even though creation is still under the curse of sin, at times we can still be astounded by its beauty; we can be amazed by its complexities; we can be overwhelmed by the joys it brings us. Now, imagine what creation would be like without the curse of sin, without pain, without disease, without war, and even without death. Imagine the wonder of living in the new creation when Jesus returns — its beauty, complexity, and joys. Because Jesus is the Christ who reigns over all, he has both the authority and the power to make a perfect world for us, where we'll glorify God and enjoy him forever.

As followers of Jesus the Christ, our great hope is that he will return and grant us the blessings of his kingdom. This vision of the future ought to motivate us to serve God with a sense of urgency as we proclaim his gospel to the lost. It should encourage us to pursue a life of purity, even though we know we can never be condemned for our sin because we're kept securely in Christ. And it should encourage us to love and thank him for the great blessings he has promised us.

CONCLUSION

In this lesson on Jesus the Christ, we've surveyed the facts and significance of Jesus' earthly life and ministry by looking at the periods of his birth and preparation, his public ministry, his passion and death, and finally his exaltation. Each of these portions of Jesus' life gives us significant insight into Jesus' role as God's Christ.

Jesus Christ is the most powerful, exciting person who has ever lived. What's even more exciting is that he still lives today, serving as our prophet, priest and king from his throne in heaven. And if we serve him faithfully, he assures us in his Word that our blessings in the next world will be far beyond our greatest hopes. In our future lessons in this series, we'll explore Jesus' offices of prophet, priest and king in great detail. But even at this point, we've already seen more than enough reasons to marvel at the wonder and greatness of the Christ and to commit our lives to him.

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We Believe in Jesus

LESSON
TWO

The Christ
Faculty Forum



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We Believe in Jesus

Lesson Two: The Christ

Faculty Forum

With

Dr. Frank Barker
Dr. Steve Blakemore
Rev. Larry Cockrell
Dr. Steven Cowan
Dr. Matt Friedeman
Dr. R. Leslie Holmes
Dr. Dennis Johnson
Dr. Robert Lister

Dr. Jeffrey Lowman
Rev. Jim Maples
Dr. John McKinley
Dr. Thomas Nettles
Dr. Jonathan Pennington
Dr. Glen Scorgie
Dr. James D. Smith III
Dr. Mark Strauss

Dr. Frank Thielman
Dr. Derek Thomas
Dr. William Ury
Dr. Simon Vibert
Dr. Peter Walker
Dr. Willie Wells
Dr. Stephen Wellum
Dr. Ben Witherington III

Question 1:

How can we be certain that Jesus was a real, historical person?

The central claim of the New Testament is that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ, the Jewish Messiah, the Son of David that inherited the throne of Israel, and that will reign forever and ever. But in order for this claim to be taken seriously, it's critical for Jesus to be a real person. Is he? How do we know the biblical writers didn't just invent him? How can we be certain that Jesus was a real, historical person?

Dr. Steven Cowan

The question sometimes gets asked whether Jesus was a real historical person. And yet, there are very, very few scholars who would doubt that Jesus was a real historical person. The vast majority of Bible scholars, even the most liberal of scholars, will grant that there really was a person named Jesus of Nazareth who lived and taught in and around Galilee and Jerusalem in the first century A.D. and who was crucified by Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor. And the reason why the vast majority of scholars are convinced of this is that the evidence for it is very, very strong. First of all, we have the four gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, all of which tell the story of Jesus and which are at least semi-independent of each other. The Synoptics are interesting in that they have important relationship to each other—Matthew and Luke probably borrowed from Mark some of their material—but the Synoptic Gospels tell the story about Jesus. Luke himself begins his gospel by telling us that he wants to describe the history of what really happened about Jesus and what happened to him and through him. Then we have John's gospel, which everyone admits is independent. Paul talks about Jesus as a historical figure. So we have all of these divergent voices in the New Testament itself telling us about Jesus as a historical person.

But beyond that, we even have extra-biblical sources that mention Jesus as a historical person. We have, for example, the Roman historian Tacitus who speaks of Jesus as a person who lived in Galilee and was crucified by Pontius Pilate and who had a large following that believed he was raised from the dead. Tacitus doesn't believe that, but he definitely believes Jesus was a real person who had a following that believed that. We have Josephus the Jewish historian who lived in the 1st century and would have been a late contemporary of Jesus and his apostles, maybe a young man during that time, anyway. And Josephus talks about this person called Jesus of Nazareth who preached that he was the Messiah who had a following that believed he was the Messiah, who was crucified under Pontius Pilate, and who his disciples believed had risen from the dead. So we have all of these divergent voices testifying to the fact that Jesus was a real historical person. And even beyond that, we can say that it's impossible to explain the origin of Christianity as a movement if there really never was any such person as Jesus.

Dr. Mark Strauss

Occasionally someone will come along and say, "Jesus was just a myth; he never existed." To me, the claim is historically ludicrous based on the evidence. It's something like saying, "We don't think Abraham Lincoln was a real person or George Washington was a real person." It seems to me the evidence for the reality of Jesus, as a person, is just absolutely overwhelming. I mean we have primary source, first-hand references to Jesus. The apostle Paul, for example, Paul refers to the brothers of Jesus whom he knows, and the direct associates of Jesus whom he knows. So the idea that Jesus could have been a myth created, when we've got, actually, primary source, first-hand documentation of who he is, that's just stretching the bounds of the imagination.

Question 2:**How do we know the biblical portrait of Jesus is accurate?**

Evangelical believers accept that Scripture is the inspired, truthful Word of God. And we embrace its teaching that Jesus is the Christ. But there are plenty of skeptics in the world that challenge these beliefs, and their perspectives sometimes cause Christians to doubt. So, it's important for us to be able to answer questions, like how do we know the biblical portrait of Jesus is accurate?

Dr. Ben Witherington III

Well, if you're asking the question about the biblical portrait of Jesus, one of the things actually, surprisingly enough, that really gives us reason enough to believe that it's accurate is there are a lot of things predicated to Jesus, or said about Jesus, or even said by Jesus that a later pious group of Christians is unlikely to make up. It's unlikely, for example that the gospel writers would have made up the idea of a virginal conception because it immediately suggests that Jesus was illegitimate to those who are skeptical. It's unlikely that the gospel writers would make up the idea that the first to see Jesus on Easter morning were women and that they were the first

witnesses of the risen Jesus. It is unlikely that they would make up a testimony that when a young man approaches Jesus and says, “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit everlasting life?” Jesus’ response is, “Why do you call me good? There is nobody good, but God alone.” Now, this is suggesting, possibly would suggest to the skeptical, that Jesus is neither good nor God? It’s this offensive odd stuff that later pious Christians were very unlikely to have made up. So this gives us a reasonable degree of certainty that we’re dealing with an honest and authentic portrait of Jesus.

Question 3:

Why did the Messiah have to be a descendant of King David?

One of the claims the New Testament makes about Jesus is that he descended from David, Israel’s second king, who lived about a thousand years before Jesus was born. This ancestry is important because only a descendant of David could be the promised Messiah. But why? Why did the Messiah have to be a descendant of King David?

Dr. Frank Barker

Well, the Messiah had to be a descendant of David because Old Testament prophets indicated that. For instance, in 2 Samuel chapter 7, it says that, “When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name.” David had wanted to build a house for God’s name, and he said, “No, your descendant will do that.” Well, actually that was talking initially about Solomon who would build the temple, but ultimately was talking about the Lord Jesus Christ who would build the true temple, which is made of living stones, true believers. And Jesus dwells by his Spirit in those true believers. And so the temple symbolized the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, which would be indwelt by his Spirit. And it goes on to say here, it says, “Your throne should be established forever.” So it wasn’t just talking about Solomon and the house he would build, but about Jesus Christ who would be a descendant of David’s and would build the real temple in that way.

Dr. Stephen Wellum

Why did the Lord Jesus Christ as the Messiah have to be a descendant of David? The answer to that is rooted in God’s plan in terms of what he has promised. Ultimately, he has to be human — the last Adam. The New Testament picks that up. But in the plan of God, humanity comes through a specific family, a specific nation, a specific tribe. Particularly what I’m thinking of there is Abraham’s family, the nation of Israel, the tribe of Judah, and particularly David’s line. That is where we have in terms of the Davidic covenant. 2 Samuel 7 makes promises to David as the representative of Israel, that it’s through his offspring, through his lineage, that God’s rule will come to this world. The Davidic king is presented as the one who will fulfill ultimately the Adamic role of ruling over the nations, carrying out the creation mandate that was given to each one of us. So, the Messiah, in order to fulfill God’s plan, has to be a

descendant of David, has to fulfill God's promises through the Davidic covenant to the nation of Israel, ultimately, in terms of God's promise, all the way back to Genesis 3:15.

Dr. John McKinley

The Messiah had to be an heir in David's line, somebody in his lineage, because that's how God set it up. All the promises throughout the Old Testament about salvation to come were promised to David and according to what your son David is going to do. Somebody, a distant descendant, and this is repeated and developed all the way through. So, because God set it up that way, the only way it could be fulfilled was to have somebody who is in David's line — whether lineage, being born that way, or being adopted into it and designated as the heir. If God had promised to do it another way then there would be no need for the Davidic line, but because he had articulated it already, it's David's line, someone like David, a man after God's own heart, then that's the way he's going to play it out.

Dr. Willie Wells

In order for the Jews to be able to accept Jesus as the king, he had to line up with the parameters of the Old Testament. And the Old Testament, Jesus satisfied every bit of it. That people then were under the Law, and the Law had parameters set that, you know, he had to be a Jew for this. And Jesus satisfied all of that. He came so that the Law would be fulfilled. People said that “the heathen” was not the Son of God, but he came, he fulfilled every bit of the Law. There was nothing that the Law had already actuated out that he did not fulfill. And so he is the only one that can put the seal, he's the only one that can break the seal because of his position coming down through the lineage of David. Now this is very interesting. Why did God choose such a line as that? It wasn't a perfect line, but it was the line that God chose. And when we think about the sovereignty of God, you know, God can use anybody, and he chose to use the frailness of mankind to bring himself down through. And so when we think about the Davidic position, not only did he satisfy the Jewish principles of being a Jew, but he also takes on the title of the kingship. And so one day we're going to see him not only just the earthly king, but we're going to see him as the heavenly king that he is. In Jesus, we'll see that he has satisfied every part, every portion, every particular whim that was given out. Everything that God had set out and placed into action, Jesus satisfied.

Question 4:

In reference to the hypostatic union, what do the terms “person” and “nature” mean?

Jesus isn't just the human descendant of David. He's also God. God the Son, the second person of the Trinity, became incarnate by Mary, so that Jesus was and still is both fully God and fully human. Theologians refer to the union of God and humanity in Jesus as the “hypostatic union.” The technical definition of the hypostatic union is that Jesus is one person — the second person of the Trinity —

and that he has two distinct natures — a divine nature and a human nature. But this definition itself requires some explanation. For example, in reference to the hypostatic union, what do the terms “person” and “nature” mean?

Dr. James D. Smith III

The nature is really the stuff which comprises something. We call it, in terms of human life, human nature; it's the DNA of what we're about as humanity. So, to use an analogy, all of which fall short at some spot, but to use analogy, my wife and I have three children. They have the same DNA—that's their nature as human beings — but then they are quite diversified as persons. There is an individuation, there are accents, there are particular nuances that are part of that quality. And that's an element, not with a scientific terminology, but that's some of what the early church saw in the personhood of God.

Dr. Dennis Johnson

The term hypostatic union itself often sounds confusing, and then when you hear it explained that we're talking about divine nature of the second person of the Trinity united with a full and complete human nature, sinless human nature, but full and complete: body, soul, mind, the whole works in one person. That concept in itself, as well as the term, is amazing. Especially in the light of the fact that Scripture so often emphasizes in the Old Testament that we should not confuse God and man. Yes, man is made in God's image and God's likeness, but we shouldn't confuse the Creator and the creature. And here in the New Testament we find this very clear announcement that in Jesus Christ we meet one who is obviously fully human, exhausted to the point of sleep in the midst of a storm on the Sea of Galilee, and at the same time fully God, so that when roused from that sleep, as the Creator of the universe, he ushers a word, “silence,” and the whole storm stops in obedience to its Creator. So there's a text right there that puts the hypostatic union right before us and demands that we, if we hear the Word of God, that we accept it. And of course we could add many texts that talk about the humanity of Jesus, the deity of Jesus, the oneness of his person.

What I think is so intriguing is the way the epistle to the Hebrews emphasizes how crucial it is that the mediator between God and man, the great High Priest, be fully God and fully man. That he, as Hebrews 1 says, is the Creator who is the same while all of creation may change. And that theme that the writer starts with from Psalm 102 — that the Creator is the same, the Son is the same through all eternity — he picks up at the end through Hebrews 13: “He's the same yesterday, today, and forever.” He's eternally God, the Creator who sustains all things by the word of his power. He's fully God. And then Hebrews says, for our sake because we need a high priest who is fully human, he takes to himself flesh and blood just as we have. He is our brother. He can intercede for us from the standpoint of one who shares our human nature, who has endured every trial and temptation with absolute obedience, and who knows what it's like to undergo human testing. So we need a human high priest, a brother. We also need a divine High Priest who lives forever to intercede for us. And we have that in the one person of Jesus Christ. So Scripture reveals that he is God and man in one person, and particularly I would say in the book of Hebrews, Scripture tells us

precisely why we need this mediator that God has provided. The eternal Son who has become our brother to intercede for us, to give his life for us as the atonement for our sins. And that, to me, is really the substance of what we need to understand about the hypostatic union of the two natures in the one person of Christ and why it is so important for our faith.

Dr. Jeffrey Lowman

When we think about the subject of the person within the hypostatic union of Christ, we really are referring to who Christ is in his essence. Nature, Christ having a human and divine nature, deals with the composition, if we can use that term, of who Christ is. But the person deals with his ontology, it deals with his being, it deals with him as being one. And so when Christ acted, he acted both in his human and his divine nature. And so his work is a work of one who is 100% human and 100% divine because he is one person. The question of what is the nature or the natures of Christ in the hypostatic union is one of the more difficult questions in theology, and the reason for this is we're seeking to understand a mystery. The nature has to do with Christ's humanity and his deity, and he had both a human nature and a divine nature. And what is interesting in the way the Scripture presents that is that these are not blends; he is fully human and he is fully divine, and they do not come together in a confused manner, but Christ at the same time was both human and divine.

Dr. Thomas Nettles

We've spoken about the hypostatic union in terms of the necessity of two natures coming together. One of the questions that the early church had to deal with, though, in trying to figure out the mystery of how these two natures came together, was the relative importance of these natures and whether one dominated the other, or whether both could remain intact, as it were. And some gave an answer that said, well, the deity comes into the mind and just the rational principle of man is where deity came and replaced the human mind. But as the church thought about that they said, well, if the human doesn't have a mind, that's the most important of what it means to be human, and so we can't say that the deity somehow replaces the rational principle. Then there are others who said, the deity is so powerful that it absorbs the human nature, and it's just like a drop of water being put into the ocean. The human nature loses its identity because of its identification with the deity. So after the incarnation there's only one nature. But then there are others who said, no, you have to have both natures there. And so, what you have is the deity coming along side and the human person being in perfect conformity of the will of the divine person, but you actually have a human person and a divine person. This is called Nestorianism. It's a kind of adoptionism. The problem with all of these was, on the one hand, it did not have both natures, but it destroyed the integrity of the person. Nestorianism destroyed the singularity of the person. If you don't have a single person who is our Redeemer then we cannot have redemption because this single person has to do all things that are necessary both toward God and toward man. And the wisdom of God — this is the mystery of the incarnation — that there are these two natures in which you have a human will, a divine will, human affections, divine affections, human knowledge, and human ignorance along with divine omniscience all dwelling in this single person.

And there are many things about Scripture that we come to understand when we realize that there are times in which Jesus is speaking, peculiarly out of his role as the Christ, in his humanity, in obedience to, and submissive to, the Father. There are some times he is acting singularly in his deity. “I tell you, I forgive your sins” — who can forgive sins, but God alone? But both of these are done by this one person, this one face. And so, again, for redemption there has to be the unity of the person, the singularity of this person in which we have both God and man.

Question 5:

Why was it important for Christ to be sinless?

Because God can’t sin, and because Jesus is God incarnate, Jesus lived a perfectly sinless life before dying on the cross. And theologians have often pointed out that Jesus’ sinlessness was critical to his work as Christ. Why was it important for Christ to be sinless?

Dr. John McKinley

It was important for Jesus to be sinless because he functions as a substitute sacrifice in our place. If he had any sin, he wouldn’t be acceptable as a sacrifice to be punished in our place, to take away our sin. This follows the Old Testament pattern that sacrifices in the form of animals had to be in some sense, acceptable because they were pure; they were innocent. So being all white was a sign that they were unstained and unblemished. So, had Jesus ever sinned, he wouldn’t be able to stand in. He would’ve needed somebody else to stand in for him. But because he never sinned, he’s able then to be bearing our sin as a substitute and then punished for it and completely remove it from us. Everything has been put on to him, and that’s the only way he can bear our sin.

Dr. Thomas Nettles

Suppose Jesus had sinned just one sin. Well, that’s okay, just one sin? Anybody can overcome one sin, but would that have made him a perfect sacrifice? No. So, if you bring a lamb that is sort of the runt of the flock or maybe is not one that you want to shear because there’s something about the wool that you don’t like, and so you’ll give this one as a sacrifice, is that honoring to the type that God is setting forth of what he is requiring of his own Son? He is requiring perfect obedience. He is requiring obedience unto death, even the death of the cross. He cannot even waffle right toward the end and back out and say, okay I’ve gone far enough, but this I can’t take. He can’t do that. He’s got to go all the way. And that’s what he did.

Rev. Jim Maples

It was necessary for Jesus to be sinless because Christ worked to carry out his messianic task as Messiah, as Savior, as the last Adam. And to effect the salvation of those he came to save directly depended upon his personal obedience to God’s law. We speak of Christ’s active obedience, that is, all the things that Christ did to observe the Law of God and to keep it perfectly. If Christ had not been sinless, his human

nature would have been damaged just as ours is. He would have been unable to make atonement for his own self much less anyone else. Playing off that, if Christ had only suffered the penalty for our sin, we would have been in the same state that we were as Adam before the Fall. We still would not have had any holiness, righteousness, obedience to the law. So Christ's perfect obedience which, this double imputation that took place at the cross, our sins were imputed to Christ, but his righteousness, his obedience, his holiness, was credited to our account. So it was very important that Christ be sinless, and his perfect obedience actually merits for his elect their adoption as the sons of God and eternal life.

Question 6:

How could Jesus Christ, the Son of God, have been tempted to sin?

Jesus was fully God, and God can't be tempted to sin. But the New Testament makes it clear that Jesus experienced true temptation. For example, prior to beginning his public ministry, he spent forty days in the wilderness being tempted by the Devil. Jesus didn't give in to these temptations. He didn't even respond with a sinful thought or desire. But he was still genuinely tempted. How could that have happened? How could Jesus Christ, the Son of God, have been tempted to sin?

Dr. John McKinley

Jesus can be tempted even though he is God — even though God can't be tempted because God can't be deceived by anything — because he also truly a man. So there are certain things he can experience and do as God that he can't as man, and certain things he can do and experience as a man that he can't do as God. So, as a man, he has real needs, he has a finite mind, he has vulnerability to pain, he can be threatened and he can have needs for food or the desire to escape suffering. So he's living two lives simultaneously and he's playing by the rules of both lives in their game, so to speak. So as God, yeah, he's totally exempt, he cannot be touched by temptation, and it has no pull on him whatsoever. But in his human life, when he's on earth, he is living truly in our kind of existence. And in that existence he feels hungry when Satan says, "turn these stones into bread," he actually has something, part of his human nature that is pulling at him with a desire to want to do that. When he's in Gethsemane and he is faced with the prospect of going to drink the cup of God's wrath, as a creature he is feeling desires, needs, fear that he has as a man, but he doesn't have as God. And so in that framework, yeah, he wants to flee the cross. He's got a human will of wanting to run away, but he's able to surmount temptation as a man because he is relying on God's help, he is resting on God's word, and he is being a man led, empowered, strengthened, by God, the same way all of us are able to. And so it's a somewhat paradoxical experience, but it's kind of the same situation of God can't die, but as a man he can die. God can't be born, but as a man he can be born. So it's part of that framework in what's possible for him as a man.

Question 7:**Why is it helpful for Christians to know that Jesus faced and resisted the temptation to sin?**

Because Jesus was not just God but was also a human being, he could be tempted. And although he never gave in to sin, he felt his temptation just as intensely as we do. And the fact that Jesus was tempted is good news for believers. Why is it helpful for Christians to know that Jesus faced and resisted the temptation to sin?

Dr. Robert Lister

Jesus is two things for us, and sometimes we separate those unhelpfully. He is certainly our Redeemer, the one who atones for our sin and lives victoriously, perfectly over our sin in a way that we couldn't do for ourselves. And we certainly don't want to diminish or undermine that at all. Jesus is also, however, our example, and so a passage like 1 Peter 2 even says that Jesus is an example to us in not sinning. And, you ask the question, how am I to emulate Jesus as my example in not sinning? And this is where the humanity of Jesus becomes very important for us — fully God, fully man — but the purpose of the incarnation is so that he will live in our place perfectly, overcoming sin and temptation in his humanity, trusting the Father and the power and the resources that are common to us as humans. So he achieves victory on our behalf, which we entirely depend on him to do. But we also can take comfort and follow an example of Jesus in overcoming temptation and sin. We can actually emulate the things that he does because he's relying on resources that are common to us. We can enter into prayer. We can spend time studying the Scriptures. We can rely on the resources of the Holy Spirit. We can surround ourselves with Christian community, involvement in our local churches and have brothers and sisters supporting us, and so be engaged in the battle for victory over temptation in the way that Jesus was during the time of his incarnation.

Dr. John McKinley

It's important for Christians to know that Jesus was truly tempted to sin, faced it, succeeded through it, and never sinning as a result, for a whole bunch of reasons, in how we think about him and how we think about ourselves. One reason why it is important is that Jesus proves that temptation to sin is not a sin. The fact that he was sinless and went through temptation can assure us that even though we feel like there's something wrong, actually the battle is now something that we're engaged in, and we need to turn away from sin — not the fact that we're sinful just because we're being tempted. Adam and Eve were also tempted even though they hadn't sinned before then. So Jesus kind of demonstrated that temptation is in itself not a bad thing. It can actually be a positive thing that God's using as a test for us to show obedience in the face of some kind of resistance. Temptation for Jesus is also important because it's the way he was able to earn righteousness — the obedience that we were supposed to manifest, that we're supposed to in our lives, but we fail at. He faces the test, is tempted significantly throughout his life and each time surmounts it. So, as far as Jesus living in our place and doing the life that we ought to, loving God and loving

his fellow man as himself, temptation in his life proves that he really struggled and was victorious.

Also, in Jesus being tempted, he shows us how to face temptation. He gives us in the ways he dealt with it — at least the ones we're told about — a pattern for some strategies for how to resist temptation. In the wilderness, at the beginning of his ministry, he is under the influence of the Holy Spirit, following the Spirit's lead into the wilderness. And Luke tells us, when he comes out of the wilderness, he is still being led by the Spirit. So it is the basic Christian thing of walking with the Spirit, being open to God leading us, strengthening us. That is one of the ways that Jesus beat temptation, and then we can also. And then we're told specifically, probably having come from Jesus himself, that when he resists Satan, he's doing it by recourse to God's Word. Temptation is something that afflicts us because we're tempted to believe a lie, that something that is actually bad is good. Now, Jesus is not ultimately deceived by this. God is never deceived, so God can't be tempted, but we are susceptible to being tempted because it might seem that suffering is always bad and getting something by cheating or stealing or lying is actually a good. But Jesus shows us in the wilderness that God's Word is what we really need as the antidote to all the lies that might come up in our lives as part of temptations. And so, by our trust in what God has told us to believe, we can overcome temptation the way Jesus did.

Jesus' temptation is also important for us because by it we are assured that he really understands what we are going through. Hebrews 2:17-18 and Hebrews 4:15-16 assure us that he is not distant from us, that the fact that he never sinned doesn't mean that he didn't ever struggle, that he really understands what we're going through, and so we shouldn't shrink back from him because we're struggling with some kind of pull to a sin. But instead, we should come to him, even just to start out praying, "Jesus, help me" is going to diminish the temptation somewhat. And it's the encouragement from his experience in temptation that is supposed to drive us in Hebrews 4:16 to seek the throne of grace, to find mercy and receive grace to help in our time of need, and specifically at the time of temptation. So Jesus received help by relying on the Holy Spirit, relying on God's Word, and then also by prayer. In Gethsemane, we find that he is praying desperately, intensely, and he's commending his disciples to pray that they don't enter into temptation, and that is something that we should be doing as well as Jesus patterned for us. How do we beat temptation? Well, we're not supposed to beat it on our own. We're supposed to do it exactly the way Jesus did, by having recourse to God, and in that God will strengthen us, and God will lead us through it. And it will have been a test that we passed instead of simply a temptation that overcame us.

Finally, Jesus' temptation, the reality of it is something that proves the reasonableness of him as an example for us for how we're supposed to live. Jesus is a true human being and part of a true human experience is that he was assaulted, he was vulnerable all through his life, probably from very early childhood and to the day he dies with the pull to do the wrong thing, and yet Jesus is held up in Scripture for us as someone's supposed to walk in his steps, even taking suffering. Well, that only makes

sense if Jesus truly lived a life that was in the muck and grime and the pain of what we experience. So he understands, and he sets himself out as a leader for us and we can receive help from him as somebody who knows what we're going through.

Question 8:

What was the central message of the gospel that Jesus proclaimed?

During Jesus' public ministry, he taught extensively on many different topics. But all his various teachings were united and consistent because they all flowed from and tied into his role as Christ. What was the central message of the gospel that Jesus proclaimed?

Dr. Peter Walker

As we look back at Jesus' message, it's worth looking at his central proclamation that the kingdom of God is at hand. That's the first thing that Jesus said. And so, when we're asking, "What was Jesus really on about?" we must look there. It seems to me that that phrase, "the kingdom of God is at hand" gives us a great clue. Jesus is claiming that with his arrival, God is now the coming King. So the first thing he's saying is that God is ruler, you need to bow to him, and you need to recognize his rule in your life, and you need to recognize his rule, through me, Jesus. But more than that, when we recognize that the kingdom of God was something which in Old Testament hope they were longing for God to bring in, we realize that Jesus is also saying, I am the fulfillment of the Old Testament story. So, a very important part of Jesus' teaching is, "I am the fulfillment. I am the expected answer to the problems that were there before." And when we look back to find out what was that Old Testament story all about, well, some of their hopes were, yes, that God would bring a king. But they were also expecting God to redeem his people. So, Jesus is saying, "I'm the one who's now going to redeem God's people." When you think that in ancient Egypt the Israelites were rescued from Egypt and redeemed, what Jesus is offering us is redemption. Not from slavery in Egypt, but from what? Well, slavery to sin. When you look back into the Old Testament you discover also a longing that God will fulfill his covenant, and this covenant is God's plan to bless the entire world through Abraham's descendants. And so when Jesus comes and says, "I am the fulfillment of that," then we're getting the message that God is going to do, through Jesus, that which is going to overcome evil and is also going to bring all people everywhere into his kingdom. So that's the central thing that Jesus is claiming. He is the fulfillment of the Old Testament.

Dr. Jonathan Pennington

The idea that Jesus preached primarily, or focused on in his preaching, on the kingdom of God may at first strike us as a little odd, until we recognize that the major story of the Bible starting way back in creation itself is, too, a message about the kingdom of God. Even though the language "kingdom of God" rarely, if ever, occurs in the Old Testament, per se, the hope and the expectation and the vision that God is a ruling king, a good ruling king, from creation on, is clearly a major theme, and in

fact, in the prophets becomes the major hope for a day coming when God will restore his reign through a Davidic messiah, a Christ, an anointed one. So when we get to the Gospels we really shouldn't be surprised that what Jesus is announcing and proclaiming is the kingdom of God. It's there. It's because it's a part of the whole message of the Bible, and it's, in fact — when you look beyond the Gospels into the Epistles — it's, in fact, what they are building upon and presupposing and teaching as well. And, I was going all the way to the book of Revelation, the hope is for the restoration of God's reign. So we can see at the center point of history itself, in the center of the Bible, the Gospels — which witness to Jesus' life and death and resurrection — we are not surprised to see that his message is the same message of the whole Bible, God's reign, God's kingdom is coming from heaven to earth, from creation to new creation.

Dr. R. Leslie Holmes

The central message of the gospel that Jesus proclaimed was really quite simple. It had two significant points to it. The first one was the call to repent. Now that really was the same message as the Old Testament prophets had brought calling the people to repent, which means to turn around. That's the message of John the Baptist. In Matthew 3 we read that John came preaching repentance, and Jesus preached repentance, meaning that we are to turn around. And that repentance has a mental component — it changes our mind; it has an emotional component — it changes our hearts; and it has an “actional” component, I like to say, which is to say it changes our actions. So when our minds are changed, we see we've been wrong, we start to think differently, our emotions are involved in that, and then volitionally we give our wills to doing the right thing, the new thing. That's the first part of the message of Jesus. The second part of the message of Jesus is the kingdom of heaven is come, and the kingdom of heaven was in fact the central theme that he kept returning to again and again and again. When you read, for example, his Sermon on the Mount recorded in Matthew 5 and 6, you see that he comes back five different times to talk about the kingdom, and he's talking about the kingdom that comes when Christ dwells in our hearts.

Question 9:**What does repentance from sin look like?**

When Jesus Christ proclaimed the coming of the kingdom of God, he often urged his audiences to repent. Without repentance, we can't experience the forgiveness of sins we so desperately need, and we can't share in the joy of Christ's kingdom. But, what does repentance from sin look like?

Dr. James D. Smith III

Repentance from sin in the Christian life can look like a number of things. Let's just site three growing out of the Scriptures. Sometimes, as in 1 John 1:9 where it says, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive our sins, cleanse us from all unrighteousness,” it's a very personal kind of thing. And repentance from sin can

simply be a change of heart. It can be a change of how we think about things, changing customary response patterns, for example, or seeing things in a new way, God's way. And that's one-on-one. It can also be a situation in which we know that, either because we've wronged someone else, or in fact, we've done something where we need the help of someone else to pray for us, to strengthen and encourage us, stand with us. James 5:16-17 is a passage like that where we confess our faults to one another and pray for each other so there's a healing that takes place. So it can be an individual thing with God, it can be with one another, and then sometimes there are occasions where a wrong that we've done requires a public act. David experienced that in Psalm 51 where he talked about having ultimately sinned against God, and yet he goes public with the fact of his sin and the fact of his repentance: "Create in me a clean heart, O God; renew a right spirit within me." So sometimes, when it's of that magnitude, or the effects of our sin are devastating to peoples around us, those peoples need to know that God's worked in our lives and we've decided to follow Jesus.

Dr. William Ury

The Bible shows repentance in some very visual ways. I love Hebrew. I've always loved the language because it's so pictorial. The word for repentance, the basic word, is "*shub*," which means to turn. And that's what it looks like basically; it's the choice to turn from sin. Now, of course, that turning is enabled by the gracious work of God. There's no way that anyone could turn from any sin without God enabling that turning. In Greek the word for repentance is "*metanoia*," which is a change of mind. And of course, the mind is not just the mental mind. It's a change of the whole orientation of one's life. 2 Corinthians speaks about having a godly sorrow. And I'm sure we have pictures of what that means with tears and beating one's breast because we're in agony, and that may be sufficient at some points for repentance, but I think the much more deep conception than just my emotional repenting is a foundational turning of my being, to say, "Lord, I have run my life one way and it's gotten me nothing but hell, hell in my life, and hell maybe in the future. So I am turning toward you. I am turning all of my self-trust to trust you. I'm laying all of my goals, my dreams that I used to have for myself, I'm turning all of those and pointing them all toward you for you to clarify, for you to remove, for you to change in whatever way you'd like."

When I think of Paul's repentance, if you will, on the road to Damascus, I think what happened there was he confronted Jesus, and he realized that his life — religious, moral, good — was totally demonic at base. It was self-centered. And so, when he met Jesus, he turned, his entire life turned, it pivoted, and he began to realize the lordship of Jesus was the only way that real life could flow into his life. Sometimes I think in the Western church we have specific places where we say for ourselves, that's where you go to repent. You go to an altar or you look a certain way on your knees. I'm not going to diminish that. That's important to have. But I think there's an ongoing repentance in the believer's life where through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, believers realize, I've got all kinds of idols in my life I didn't realize. And so, not out of fear but out of love, I say, Lord, I repent of that. I no longer am going to go

that way or treat another person that way. So it looks like typical response in daily life to a person you love. I want my life to please that person's heart or mind. And so I willingly repent, lovingly repent day by day because I love that One more than I love myself. So, there can be godly sorrow in a graphic way, there can be turning of one's entire existence fundamentally to become a Christian, but there's also a daily repentance, which is the expression of love that I think we see throughout Scripture and I know throughout church history. I think that's why repentance is so important and sort of what it looks like in real life.

Question 10:

What does the Transfiguration teach us about Jesus' role as Christ?

Jesus' role as Christ or Messiah was often misunderstood during his earthly ministry. But at certain times and with certain audiences, God revealed his purposes with greater clarity. One of these instances was Jesus' transfiguration, when he appeared speaking with Moses and Elijah, and his glory was revealed in brilliant light. What does the Transfiguration teach us about Jesus' role as Christ?

Dr. Simon Vibert

The Transfiguration is clearly significant for the synoptic gospel writers because at this point Jesus starts looking forward to his death on the cross. And before we go into that "final days" of Jesus's life, Jesus is transfigured. Moses and Elijah are present, presumably as representatives of the Old Testament Law and the prophets, all finding fulfillment in Christ. But of course, also, we have the voice from heaven saying, "This is my beloved Son; listen to him," and the attestation from the Father, not only over Jesus's sonship, but actually the fact that all believers ought to listen to Jesus's words because they have the endorsement of the Father.

Dr. Frank Thielman

Jesus appears on the Mount of Transfiguration with Elijah and with Moses. Elijah is the great prophet who worked many miracles, just like Jesus also was a great prophet who worked many miracles. And Moses was the great teacher of Israel, the great Law-giver of Israel, and Jesus is presented in the New Testament also as a great teacher. And if you look at the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus also gives a kind of law. He gives a reinterpretation of the Mosaic law there — his own teaching. And so we can see how Jesus is tied back into the Old Testament, and has to be interpreted by means of the Old Testament. But at the same time the narrative makes very clear that Jesus is greater than either Elijah or Moses, that Jesus can't be explained simply in terms of Elijah and Moses because God himself appears on the scene and says, "This is my Son with whom I am well pleased." So the Transfiguration is one of those places in the New Testament where we can see both the continuity, the really critical and important continuity between Old and New Testament, and some of the discontinuity, some of the surprises that Jesus brings to us as someone who comes on the scene fulfilling all that the Old Testament has to say.

Dr. Peter Walker

That moment in the Gospels when Jesus is transfigured and his glory is seen by Peter, James, and John, is again one of those most powerful parts of the gospel narrative. It's telling us some very important things about who Jesus is. Firstly, it's telling us that Jesus is eternal, and has an eternal glory. And if you'd read the rest of the Synoptic Gospels up to that point, you might not have noticed that. You might have thought that this was just a human being who happened to be a great teacher. Now it's nailed. Now it's actually revealed quite clearly — albeit just to three people, Peter, James, and John — that actually, behind the scenes, Jesus has an eternal glory. So that's really very important. But then you remember that Jesus is there with Elijah and Moses, and in that we see clear teaching that Jesus is greater than these two great figures from the Old Testament — one, Moses, summarizing the Law; one, Elijah, the head of the prophets, if you like, the Law and the prophets, and Jesus in the midst. He is greater than those two. So it's an incredible revelation of who Jesus is, greater than the Law and the prophets. And one final part of the Transfiguration narrative which is also key; in Luke's gospel it says that they are discussing Elijah and Moses with Jesus, his exodus that he's about to accomplish in Jerusalem, exodus, picking up the whole story of the redemption from Egypt. And so we see clearly that the Transfiguration is teaching us that Jesus Christ is going to be the one who's going to do a new redemptive act in Jerusalem, like the old exodus, which is going to set people free.

Question 11:**What does the Lord's Supper signify?**

Jesus delivered many public teachings and miracles that indicated the nature of his messiahship. But one of his clearest teachings came in a more private setting, during the “Last Supper” — the last meal Jesus ate with his disciples before he was crucified. During this meal, Jesus instituted the sacrament we call the Lord's Supper. How did this ceremony point to his role as Christ? What does the Lord's Supper signify?

Dr. Thomas Nettles

God gives us many things in order for us to know what he has done for us. To remind us as Christians as to how he has been active for our redemption, and to remind us of the great grace that is involved in this and the great privilege we have to be God's people. One of the ways he has done this is in baptism, which signifies our union with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection. But then the ongoing reminder of that, and that God is continually involved in redeeming us through the removing of corruption, that there is a continued work that God does for us, that Christ is presently interceding for us and his blood is still operating for us, and the Holy Spirit is still working within us to make sure that our union with Christ is having all the proper effects — and the reminder of that, God has graciously given us, is something we call the Lord's Supper. Jesus himself instituted this when he had the last Passover meal with his disciples, and he gave them wine, he gave them bread, and he said, “This cup

is the blood of the new covenant... and this bread is my body which is broken for you.” And so he was reminding them that it was in his humanity that he is actually taking our sin, that he was made sin for us. As Peter says, “in his own body on the tree” he did this. So, when the church comes together to be reminded of the nature of this sacrifice — that it was actually given by God, that it involved a death, that it involved the shedding of blood, and that it is presently operating for us — we partake of the Lord’s Supper and we remember this death until he comes again. We call forth and we seek to properly discern the Lord’s body, as Paul told us, meaning that we recognize that we are without any righteousness before God, that we are still condemned unless he had taken in his own body our sin. So we celebrate the ongoing effect of the death of Christ for sinners and the resurrection of Christ for sinners, since we do it until he comes again — it’s a recognition that he is coming again — when we partake of the Lord’s Supper.

Dr. Peter Walker

One of the fascinating things in the Gospels is to see how Jesus in the upper room when he breaks bread with his disciples, is doing it not that far away from another place in Jerusalem which Jesus has visited a few days before, which is the temple. And the temple is the place into which Jesus had gone and had done this cleansing of the temple, signifying that everything the temple stood for was now about to come to an end. And people wondered, how on earth is he doing that and why? And now, if you like, Jesus with his disciples on his own gives the answer: instead of the temple being the place where sacrifices are going to be made, Jesus is going to open up an alternative new way. And that’s what’s going in the Last Supper, Jesus opening up an alternative to the temple, an alternative sacrifice. And as he breaks bread and then he says, “This is my body,” their eyes are opened to the reality that Jesus is about to die, and is about to give his life as a sacrifice. He’s opening up a new way into God’s presence. In contrast to the temple, now this is the way. And he’s placing himself right at the center. One of the fascinating things about the story is that we’re uncertain whether or not there would have been a Passover lamb on the table. I personally believe that there wasn’t, and that Jesus is celebrating this just a fraction ahead of schedule because he’s going to be dead the next day. Therefore, there wasn’t a Passover lamb on the table. But when Jesus says, “This is my body broken for you,” effectively he’s saying, “I am that Passover Lamb. That which you need to eat at this meal is me.” So he’s making an incredible claim that he is the one who is going to be like the Passover lamb, redeeming people. And when you remember also that in a Jewish context, drinking blood and cannibalism are absolutely horrific things, the symbolism and the horror of Jesus saying, “This is my body, this is my blood,” they would have recoiled. But Jesus is saying, “You need to realize that I’m the one who’s going to die for you, and the only way you’re going to get the benefits from what I do for you is if you take this bread and drink this wine.” It’s very powerful stuff.

Dr. Willie Wells

The significance of the Lord’s Supper really brings about signifying of the union between fallen man and the saving grace of God. When we look at the communion, the specifics of it, it brings us into great contact, or communication, or union with

Christ himself. And when we look at the opportunity that we have with becoming covenantally connected with him, we think about Jesus' body, how it was given, so that the lostness of mankind could be redeemed, and we think about the blood of Jesus, how it brings in and restores us, or brings us back into rightful fellowship with him. And 1 Peter says here in 3:18, the NIV rendition of it says, "For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit." And so when we partake of the Lord's Supper, we think about the communion. It goes beyond just a celebration or a ceremony. It really signifies the position of mankind, how we were apart from God, but as a result of Jesus Christ's death, burial and resurrection, we have been united with him, and, therefore, fellowship with the Lord has been reestablished.

Rev. Larry Cockrell

What does the Lord's Supper signify? It represents our Lord's instituting of this sacramental right where bread is broken and wine is poured out, and thanksgiving to the Father for the Son's atoning sacrifice. And in addition to that, it also points to a future time when the Lord shall return himself, for he said he would not drink this food of the vine any longer until he drinks it anew with us in his kingdom. And so as believers, we get to share in the Lord's table and to share in this tremendous grace, which gives us tremendous hope and tremendous encouragement that while we await his return, we can enjoy communion and fellowship with him even now.

Question 12:

Was it unjust for God to impute our sins to Jesus?

As the Christ, Jesus died to atone for our sins. To accomplish this atonement, he agreed to have the guilt of our sins "imputed" to him or "reckoned to his account." But how was this just? Why should anyone have to take the punishment for crimes that other people committed? Was it unjust for God to impute our sins to Jesus?

Dr. Simon Vibert

Well, it might seem unfair to impute our sins to Jesus on the cross because we believe that Jesus was innocent and did nothing that was worthy of death, but the Bible writers consistently say that it was just, because, actually, he stepped in to pay the price for the sin of human beings. And the legal language is used quite often by Paul, particularly in Romans, to describe the fact that Christ, through his sacrificial sin-bearing death, enabled us to be justified in the sight of God because he paid for the price of our redemption. So, in that respects, to say that it is unjust would be to misunderstand, actually, the nature of the atonement that Christ made on our behalf on the cross.

Dr. Derek Thomas

Was it unfair or unjust for God to impute our sin to Jesus on the cross? This is a very important question. It is one that has been asked from the very beginning. Certainly the church fathers addressed this issue of the justice of so-called imputation. But it

has also been raised in recent years among otherwise Bible-believing evangelical Christians. One notorious statement within recent years has been that this view of imputing sin to somebody who is without sin, or to put it more generically, for someone to bear the consequences of another's crime or fault, is inherently unjust, and in the case of Jesus, is a kind of, and I quote now, "cosmic child abuse." And so the ethics of imputation is the question at hand, and it is a question that is not just about the imputation of sin to Jesus, but it is also the same generic question as the imputation of Adam's fall and transgression to us. So, that statement of Paul, for example, "As in Adam all die ... so in Christ shall all be made alive," what applies to the one, applies to the other. And I think that one has to consider that at the point at which Jesus was condemned, at the point at which God's righteous retribution came upon Jesus, at that point, he is a sinner in the legal sense. He has been reckoned to be sin. So it's not unjust. It's not as though God is punishing somebody who is sinless at that point. At that point legally, he is reckoned to be a sinner.

Now, you can take the question further back and ask, is it just for God to reckon him to be sin? The punishment, I would argue, is not unjust, because at that point he is legally, constitutionally reckoned a sinner. But is the reckoning itself unjust? And I think that if you were to examine, for example, similar cases — they're not exact but similar — one thinks of the famous incident in the book, *Bridge Over the River Kwai*, about Japanese imprisonment of soldiers during the Second World War building a railway through, was it Burma, and into China, somewhere there, and at the end of the day, the prisoners are lining up and they count the shovels and one is missing. The Japanese guard says that unless the person who has hidden this shovel owns up, everyone is going to die. And after a tense moment — and this is a true story — one of the prisoners steps forward and the prison guard shoots him dead. Now they recount the shovels, and there were none missing. So he gave his life for others. Is substitution inherently unjust? We would look at that incident and say, no, that was an act of heroism. Now there's more in Jesus' death than heroism, but we wouldn't say that was inherently unjust for him to do that. Jesus volitionally, of his own accord, entered into a covenant. Theologians speak of a covenant of redemption, a pre-temporal covenant, an agreement with the Father to redeem lost sinners. And that, I would argue, is not unjust, it is an act of love and unimaginable grace.

Dr. Glen Scorgie

You know many people think about the human analogy to the dynamic of the cross whereby Christ assumed responsibility for the sins that human beings committed. And people wonder about the fairness or the justice of such a transfer of guilt. I think the answer to that is that there's something about grace that shatters our whole understanding of the dynamics of retribution and compensation. Grace upsets the apple cart. Grace says karma is not the final answer to how the dynamics of the universe work. I think Jesus was getting at that himself when he told the parable of the people who came on board to work for a certain employer at different parts of the day, different times of the day, and ended up all getting paid the same. I think it was Jesus' way of saying, there's something about grace that's outrageous. But thank God there's something in the world as outrageous as this.

Question 13:**What kinds of blessings do believers receive as a result of Christ's resurrection?**

Jesus' atoning death purchased salvation for believers. But his death wasn't the end of his ministry as the Christ. In fact, Scripture talks about many blessings that believers receive as a result of the things Jesus did after he died, including his resurrection from the dead. What kinds of blessings do believers receive as a result of Christ's resurrection?

Dr. Frank Thielman

We're often familiar with the benefit, great benefits we receive from Jesus's death. When he died on the cross, he atoned for our sins, and so we're forgiven and at peace with God. But I think people are sometimes, well, they're confused about the benefits that we receive from Jesus's resurrection. Was the resurrection just a confirmation that, yes, God has indeed forgiven us by Christ's death on the cross? And that's certainly true; that's part of it. But the resurrection of Jesus is a very rich concept in the New Testament. There are multiple benefits that we have as believers from it. The first and most important of which Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 15, and it's also described in other places. And that is, Jesus' victory over death in the resurrection means that we too have victory over death and that our bodies will one day be raised. We'll be physically raised. Our bodies will be similar to the bodies we have now. There'll be continuity between our physical bodies now and our physical bodies then. They'll be different. Those bodies will be immortal, Paul says, and they will be able to live an immortal existence. So they won't be subject to death and corruption. That's the way Jesus's body was when he rose from the dead in the Gospels' accounts of Jesus's resurrection. And the way his body functioned and appeared tell us a bit about what our life will be like one day when we too are raised physically from the dead.

Another benefit of the resurrection that sometimes people don't think about is that when we're raised together with Christ, we are seated together with Christ, Paul says in Ephesians 2:6, in heavenly places. Paul says we are made together alive with him, we are raised together with him, and we are seated together with Christ. Paul also says in Romans 6 and in Colossians 3, that our resurrection together with Christ has huge implications for the way we live our lives. We're no longer under slavery to sin, but we are instead, according to Romans 6, enslaved to righteousness. Because Christ has been raised from the dead, we have been buried with him through, with his death, in baptism. When we become Christians we are buried with him and we are raised now, just as he was raised to newness of life. And so Paul says in Romans 6 that that means the way we used to live, before we became Christians, our old way of life that did not honor and please God, has now started to be, set aside, and we are beginning to live a new resurrection life just as Jesus was raised from the dead. Colossians 3 also makes that point. Paul's very careful though, here, to say that we have not yet been raised from the dead in that final eschatological sense. There is a sense in which we have been raised with Christ, but there is more yet to come. We will never be

completely sinless until that final day when we are finally raised from the dead and occupy our resurrection bodies.

Dr. Thomas Nettles

We focus much on the death of Christ because it is true that it is in his own body on the tree that he bore our sin, and that God is pouring out his wrath. And it's true that at the end of that time of suffering, which was exquisite, Jesus said, "It is finished." But then we know that the story doesn't stop there. God still has work to do to show us that it was finished, that the atonement has been made, that it has been complete, that he is perfectly satisfied with it. And so, after our Redeemer does experience the grave — he experiences the deadness of death in his body — he was raised from the dead by the power of the Father, by the glory of the Father. He was raised from the dead according to the Spirit of Holiness. He was raised from the dead by his own power resident within him. He says, "I have power to give my life; I have power to take it again." So the resurrection is a demonstration that the triune God is happy with the atonement that Christ has made, is fully satisfied with this. So one of the blessings that we have is the assurance that, indeed, when we go to God that Christ's death has been sufficient. It also lets us know that Christ is, even now, at the right hand of God, interceding for us, this continued blessing, that if any man sinned we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

It also shows us that death, indeed, has been conquered. He has released from this fear those who all their lives were fearful of death, and he has destroyed him that has the power of death, and he's shown this by the resurrection. If the atoning work had not been satisfactory, then he would not have been raised from the dead, but since he has been raised from the dead, we know that it's satisfactory. The Scripture also tells us that when he was raised from the dead, he ascended into heaven, and he gave gifts to men. All of the gifts that we have come as a result of this work being completed, and he, as it were, the psalm says, he enters into glory: "Who is the King of Glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle." And so he has won this victory, and he gives gifts to men. So all the gifts that we have in the church, the gifts of teaching, the gifts of preaching, the gift of the Spirit to sanctify us, all of these have been given by Christ in his resurrection, so we are utterly dependent upon this. Paul says, "If Christ be not raised, then we're of all men most miserable." God lays it all out there and says all of this is true because of the resurrection, and Jesus said, "You'll know that I'm the one I claim to be when I'm raised from the dead." So our entire confidence and all the gifts that we have are at least indicated to us, and then given to us, by the resurrection of Christ.

Question 14:

Why does Jesus still need to intercede for us?

When Christ's earthly work was finished, he ascended to heaven. The New Testament makes it clear that one of the things he's doing there is interceding for us. And part of his intercessory work is protecting us from the Father's displeasure.

But why do we need him to do that? Weren't all of our sins forgiven at the cross? Why does Jesus still need to intercede for us?

Dr. Glen Scorgie

The Scriptures assure us that Jesus is eternally interceding for us as believers. And in the minds of some people this might raise the question of why this is necessary, and whether the cross as a historic and decisive achievement was sufficient. Well, I think the answer is that the cross is indeed a comprehensive, fulsome, and sufficient payment for the sins of the entire world, past, present, and future. This is core to our belief. The cross is the crux of history, the definitive and final achievement. And yet, you know, in the Christian life there is the historic and positional status we enjoy, and then there's also the existential reality of our ongoing living-in-the-present-moment relationship with Christ. And so when we sin, there is not a removal of the sufficiency of the cross, but there is an element of damage to the intimacy and the relationship where we're fully appropriating all that the cross has achieved for us in our existential, living-Christian life experience. And so, built into the gospel is a continual existential reiteration, reactivation, reinforcement of the truth that is there all the time, the provision that is there all the time so that we are continually cycling through the wondrous reality that where sin abounds, grace abounds all the more. That, I think, is the assuring significance of the intercession of Jesus Christ for us now and forever more.

Rev. Jim Maples

Jesus still needs to intercede for us, and that does not influence or reduce in any way the effectiveness of the cross. In his mediatorial work as priest, he continues to intercede for his people. As priest, he is a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. He is constantly interceding on behalf of his people. He continually offers up his sacrifice, his completed sacrifice, to the Father as the sufficient basis for the bestowal of God's pardoning grace. He is constantly applying the work he did on the cross and making it effective for the justification and the sanctification of sinners. He always lives to intercede for those that are his, pleading for their acceptance before God on the basis of his completed work.

Question 15:

How should the fact that Jesus is enthroned in heaven affect the way we live and worship?

After God raised Jesus from the dead, he seated him at his right hand and placed everything under his feet. As Christians, we can take great comfort in the fact that the one who is seated at God's right hand is the same Lord and Savior who loves us and died for us. But beyond that, how should the fact that Jesus is enthroned in heaven affect the way we live and worship?

Dr. Steve Blakemore

When the Scriptures tell us that Jesus is exalted at the right hand of the Father and that the Father has given to him a name that is above every name, we need to remember that that is not simply a statement that affirms how glorious Jesus is, but it is a statement that reminds us of all that he has done in his life of perfect obedience, of self-sacrifice, to redeem God's creation. So, for instance, his resurrection from the dead is God's testimony to us that his creation will not be abandoned. Even in all of its fallenness and sinfulness, God cannot abandon his creation to the power of death and destruction. Jesus is resurrected from the dead. He ascends back into heaven, the victorious one who has overcome the power of death and the power of sin. So his enthronement in heaven reminds us of what he has done in God's great plan to reclaim all of creation. But not only that, his overcoming of sin and death is the undoing of Adam's fallenness. As Paul says in Romans 5, just as sin and death came into the world through one man, such a more glorious gift has come into the world through Jesus — that life has come into the world. And Jesus, undoing the power of Adam's fallenness, has in essence created in his glorious resurrected ascendancy, back to the Father's throne, he has created for us a whole new way of life. It's not that Jesus rises from the dead and then asks us to try really hard to be good people. No, he has paved a way that we can live if we live in him. And that way of life will take us all the way to the right hand of the Father, for even now we are seated with Christ in heavenly places.

Thirdly, the ascendance of Jesus and his enthronement means that the Holy Spirit has been poured out, for he goes back to the Father, not to rest in his own glory, but so that the Spirit could be sent upon those who believe, in that our lives can be transformed by the presence of God — lost in the Fall but reclaimed for us by Christ. Given to us in Christ. Therefore, how should we live and respond and worship? We live by saying to God, "Make me like Jesus. I know there's not a bunch of rules I should follow. I know there's not a bunch of legalisms I should keep, but make me like Christ. Fill me with his character. Let me live in his victory over sin and death, over fear, over anything that would hold me back from being what you want me to be, Father. Let me live in the victory of Jesus." That's the way it should affect our lives. How should it affect our worship? We should be filled with an absolute awe-filled love for this God, this God who would break the power of sin, this God who would carry our humanity in Christ back to his own throne to let us live in Christ there at the right hand of the Father, spiritually speaking. All over the great love of God for us should drive all of our worship. And a joy unspeakable and full of glory should not only mark our worship but every day that we live if we understand what it means that Jesus is exalted at the right hand of God.

Dr. Matt Friedeman

Well, that Jesus is enthroned in heaven has everything to do with how we live and worship today. But you know, I think one of the weak parts of what we do is worship. I find out that when I teach my people to pray in the church where I pastor, we always talk about the four parts of prayer: adoration, confession, thanksgiving and supplication. Beautiful stuff, but I've found in the evangelical tradition, the "A" part

of that, the adoration is really the weakest part. And I think we've got to find a way not only to worship with our songs, with our lips, but also with our lives. I'm thinking right now of Revelation. One of the things that's going to be done quite a little bit in heaven is worship. All over Revelation you see these songs that come — "Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God forever and ever, Amen." Beautiful stuff. That's the stuff that ought to be on our lips all day long, not just on Sundays, but all over our life all day long. What do the songs of heaven have to do with us and how we live the day? How we handle our finances today, whether we go to see that movie or don't go to see that movie, or whatever else it might be, our lives ought to be lives of worship, our lips ought to be lips of worship. It's what we'll be doing in heaven that ought to have impact on what we're doing today.

Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, the promised Son of David that was foretold by the prophets in the Old Testament. He is both God and man in one person. And through his life and work, he has saved us, is saving us, and will continue to save us from sin and death. As Christians, we are abundantly blessed, and we should live every day in grateful worship of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

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We Believe in Jesus

LESSON
THREE

THE PROPHET



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We Believe in Jesus

Lesson Three

The Prophet

INTRODUCTION

When people face problems or have to make important decisions, they often turn to others for advice. If the issue is small or familiar, they may ask their family or neighbors what to do. But, when the issue is large and there will be long-term consequences, people often look for an expert, someone who can be trusted to give authoritative and true guidance about what should be done. Throughout the history of Scripture, God often provided this kind of fully reliable guidance through his prophets. These men and women authoritatively applied God's covenants to the situations his people faced.

This is the third lesson in our series *We Believe in Jesus*, and we have entitled it "The Prophet." In this lesson, we'll explore the ways that Jesus fulfills the office of prophet, authoritatively applying God's covenant to our lives.

As we mentioned in a prior lesson, in the Old Testament God instituted three offices through which he administered his kingdom: the offices of prophet, priest and king. And in the final stage of God's kingdom, which we commonly call the New Testament age, all three of these offices find their ultimate fulfillment in Christ. For this reason, studying the importance and function of these offices throughout history can help us understand Jesus' present administration of God's kingdom, as well as the blessings and obligations of his faithful followers.

When most people hear the word "prophet," they tend to think of someone who makes predictions about the future. And this is even true of most Christians. But while it's true that biblical prophets did sometimes foretell the future, this was not the main focus of their ministry. Most fundamentally, God's prophets were his ambassadors. Their job was to explain God's covenants, and to encourage his people to be faithful to him. And this was also the heart of Jesus' prophetic work.

In line with this understanding of what prophets did, we'll define a prophet as:

God's covenant ambassador, who proclaims and applies God's word, especially to warn of judgment against sin, and to encourage the kind of loyal service to God that leads to his blessings.

Our lesson will explore three topics related to Jesus in his role as prophet. First, we'll examine the Old Testament background to his prophetic office. Second, we'll explore the New Testament's teaching on the fulfillment of this office in Jesus. And third, we'll consider the modern application of Jesus' prophetic work. Let's begin with the Old Testament background to Jesus' prophetic office.

OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND

Whenever Christians think about Jesus as our prophet, it's important to remember that he wasn't the first prophet that ever served God and his covenant. Throughout biblical history, there were hundreds of prophets of the Lord. They weren't equal to Jesus in power or authority. But their service to God foreshadowed all the ways Jesus fulfilled this kingdom office. So, if we want to understand what Jesus did as prophet, it helps to begin with the prophets that came before him.

Our discussion of the Old Testament background of Jesus' prophetic office will divide into three parts. First, we'll mention the qualifications for the office of prophet. Second, we'll look at the function of prophets. And third, we'll consider the expectations the Old Testament created for the office. Let's look first at the qualifications for the office of prophet.

QUALIFICATIONS

As we have already suggested, Old Testament prophets were ambassadors or emissaries of God's covenants. In his covenants, God revealed himself as the great Emperor of his people, and his prophets served as the emissaries or authorized messengers of his royal court in heaven. They brought God's word to the people of Israel and to various other nations, and exhorted them to be faithful to God as their king. Of course, many of the nations surrounding Israel also had prophets of their own that resembled God's true prophets in superficial ways. But these false prophets used trickery, superstition, and demonic powers to represent their false gods.

False prophets in biblical days, both in Israel and around in other countries, did and said and looked and behaved a whole lot like true prophets. But I think above all, the thing that comes out when you look at the Bible in books like Kings and Chronicles and other prophetic books is the fact that Old Testament prophets will distinguish themselves as true prophets from others because they speak in the name of the Lord himself. And as they speak in the name of the Lord himself, they do not violate what God has said in his Word. They do not violate what other true prophets have said, and they distinguish themselves that way. I think that another factor that's very important, however, is that prophets in the Old Testament were usually people who stood against popular beliefs, and unfortunately, especially in northern Israel, there was a period of time when the prophets were on the payroll. When Amos says in Amos chapter 7, "I'm neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet," what he's telling the high priest there in the northern kingdom is that he's actually not on the payroll of the king or the high priest. "I'm not a prophet," meaning a professional prophet, "nor am I the son of a prophet," meaning "nor am I in a school of prophecy. And so you

can't tell me what to do." And the reason Amos says this is because the high priest tells him, "Go home and stop bothering us up here in the north; go back south." And Amos says, "I can't do it because God has commanded me to do it." And we find very often that prophets like Jeremiah, Micah, and others actually encounter these false prophets who are on the payrolls of the kings. If there's one thing that we can say sociologically about prophets, it's this: they are not on the payroll of kings. They are not on the payroll of the priest. They stand for God as a witness against the abuses, and the crimes, and the evil primarily that are being inflicted by people like kings and priests.

— Dr. Richard L. Pratt, Jr.

In a world where there were many false prophets, it was very important for Israelites to be able to distinguish true prophets of God from false prophets. For this reason, the Old Testament laid out several qualifications for true prophets of God.

These requirements are mentioned in Deuteronomy 18:17-22, where Moses wrote these words:

The Lord said ... "I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him... But a prophet who presumes to speak in my name anything I have not commanded him to say, or a prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, must be put to death." ... If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the Lord does not take place or come true, that is a message the Lord has not spoken (Deuteronomy 18:17-22).

In this passage, we can see at least four qualifications for true prophets of God. As Moses taught here, true prophets were called by God. They were given God's word to speak to the people. They demonstrated their loyalty to God by speaking in his name only in accordance with his commands. And their ministry was authenticated by the fulfillment of their message.

Our exploration of the qualifications of Old Testament prophets will focus on each of the four requirements that Moses' mentioned: First, true prophets had to be called by God. Second, they had to be given God's word to speak. Third, they had to be loyal to God by speaking only according to his command. And fourth, their ministry had to be authenticated by the fulfillment of their message. We'll look at each of these criteria in more detail, beginning with the fact that true prophets were called by God.

Called by God

In the Old Testament, God called many people to serve him as prophets. This call was not an invitation; it was a divine summons. God, the divine king, commanded one of his citizens to serve as his ambassador. We see this divine summons every time the Old Testament records the call of a prophet.

For instance, consider the call of the prophet Ezekiel in Ezekiel 2:1-2:

He said to me, “Son of man, stand up on your feet and I will speak to you.” As he spoke, the Spirit came into me and raised me to my feet, and I heard him speaking to me (Ezekiel 2:1-2).

Here, we see that when God commanded Ezekiel to stand and hear the commission, he also sent his Spirit to ensure that Ezekiel complied. The calling of a prophet was an exercise of God’s authoritative choice as the heavenly king of his people.

God frequently issued these prophetic calls directly to the prophet — often audibly. God directly called Samuel in 1 Samuel 3, Isaiah in Isaiah 6, Amos in Amos 7, and Jeremiah in Jeremiah 1.

But at other times, God commissioned prophets indirectly, by instructing one prophet to call another. For instance, in 1 Kings 19:16, God commanded the prophet Elijah to commission his successor Elisha. This delegated calling also sheds light on the company of the prophets or the sons of the prophets seen in places like 1 Kings 20, and 2 Kings 2, which were groups of prophets centered around an established divinely called prophet. But whether the call came directly to the prophet from God, or through an authorized servant of God, the prophet’s call ultimately came at the initiative of the Lord. Without this supernatural call, no one could become a prophet, regardless of his or her good intentions, devotion to God, or knowledge of God’s word.

Besides being called by God, Old Testament prophets also had to be given God’s word to speak.

Given God’s Word

The Holy Spirit inspired prophets to speak whatever God commanded them. True prophets could do nothing else when they prophesied. But when we compare the ways different prophets in Scripture spoke, we can see that divine inspiration did not mean that prophets had no control over their words. On the contrary, the Holy Spirit utilized the prophets’ personalities and perspectives as he infallibly presented his prophetic message through them. In this regard, the inspiration of prophecy was identical to the inspiration of all other Scripture.

Listen to the way Peter spoke of the Holy Spirit’s inspiration of prophets in 2 Peter 1:20-21:

No prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:20-21).

As we see here, the Holy Spirit superintended the words of true prophets in the Old Testament. And this guaranteed that their words were authoritative and infallible.

The Holy Spirit worked through the personality and the perspective of the particular prophet that he was dealing with. I guess that the traditional framework for understanding that theologically is “organic inspiration,” that God works through his servants, through his prophets, and uses their personality, uses their particular point of view, uses their education and the lack thereof for his purposes. I guess one could also think about using the doctrine of sanctification and understanding how God takes things that are human, earthly and physical, and sanctifies them for his own purposes to use them for his own means, and he does that with the prophets as well. With that said, though, I think there are instances within the prophetic literature where you’ll see God actually dictating to the prophets, you know, “You need to go and say this to the people,” and Isaiah or Jeremiah or Ezekiel, they go and they say it. So, there is, there are points within the prophetic literature where God will dictate to his prophets, but at the same time, God uses who they were, and didn’t override their personalities in bringing forth his prophetic work for both Israel, ancient Israel, and the church.

— Dr. Mark Gignilliat

The third qualification of Old Testament prophets was that they had to be loyal to God by conforming their prophecies to his Law.

Loyal to God

Although prophets did not simply take dictation from God, the Holy Spirit did not give them complete freedom to say whatever they pleased. Not only did they have to convey what God commanded them to speak, but they also had to ensure that their prophecies agreed with God’s existing revelation, especially as it was recorded in Scripture.

Listen to Moses’ words in Deuteronomy 13:1-4:

If a prophet ... announces to you a miraculous sign or wonder, and if the sign or wonder of which he has spoken takes place, and he says, “Let us follow other gods ... and let us worship them,” you must not listen to the words of that prophet or dreamer... It is the Lord your God you must follow, and him you must revere. Keep his commands and obey him; serve him and hold fast to him (Deuteronomy 13:1-4).

Moses taught something very important here: Even if a prophet could work miracles and foretell the future, he was to be rejected if his instructions violated God’s commandments.

We see this same emphasis in Lamentations 2:13-14, where Jeremiah grieved over the fact that false prophets in Israel had led the nation astray. Jeremiah said that

these prophets had “failed to expose ... sin,” that is, they had approved of the people's violation of God's law. Rather than holding the people accountable to God's covenant, they had encouraged disobedience. And in this way, they had demonstrated that they were false prophets.

Finally, the fourth qualification of Old Testament prophets was that their prophecies had to be authenticated by fulfillment. That is to say, their predictions had to come true.

Authenticated by Fulfillment

Listen to Moses' words in Deuteronomy 18:22:

If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the Lord does not take place or come true, that is a message the Lord has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously. Do not be afraid of him (Deuteronomy 18:22).

All the words of God's prophets could be depended on because they accurately relayed the words of God, whose character and covenant promises are utterly trustworthy. True prophecies are unfailing because God has both the power and the right to bring them to pass in whatever way he intends, and because he is committed to keeping his word.

Sometimes, prophecies were authenticated by relatively quick fulfillment. For instance, in 1 Kings 17:1, the prophet Elijah declared that there would be no rain or dew until he gave the word. And as we learn in 1 Kings 18, it remained dry for three years before God finally ended the drought. And in 2 Kings 7:17-20, we see an immediate fulfillment of Elisha's prophecy that the king's officer would die.

At other times, prophetic fulfillments were not so immediate. For example, around the year 930 B.C. a true prophet predicted the birth of Josiah, who would be a faithful heir to David's house. This prophecy is recorded in 1 Kings 13:2. But the predicted child Josiah wasn't born until about 630 B.C. — almost 300 years after the prophecy — as we read in 2 Kings 22:1. And the prophecies about Jesus' birth took even longer to fulfill.

Now, at this point we should pause to mention that sometimes even the words of true prophets did not come to pass precisely as they stated them. But in light of Moses teaching, how could this happen? In order to answer this question, it's important to realize that when we read Old Testament prophecy, we sometimes get the wrong impression of their predictions. Although many people think that the prophets predicted the future precisely as it would unfold, in reality, this was not always the case.

For the most part, prophets warned of the curses that would come if people persisted in sin, and they offered the blessings that would come if people acted faithfully. The goal of these prophecies was to motivate the people to repent of their sin and to persevere in faithfulness to God and his covenant. Only when true prophets indicated that God had sworn to do something were their predictions absolute.

As a result, one legitimate way for prophecy to be fulfilled was for the people to change their behavior and thereby affect the outcome of the prophecies. In these cases,

the prophecies were actually fulfilled properly, even though their warnings or offers did not come to pass as stated.

There are many examples of this in Scripture, but the basic principle is described in Jeremiah 18:7-10, where we read these words:

If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed, and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned. And if at another time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be built up and planted, and if it does evil in my sight and does not obey me, then I will reconsider the good I had intended to do for it (Jeremiah 18:7-10).

So, there's a principle that's announced to us in Jeremiah 18 whereby God effectively says, "If I threaten judgment on a nation or a people and they repent, I will withhold the judgment that I intended to do to them." And the flipside is stated as well, "If I promise blessing on a people or king or a nation, and they cease obeying my commands, then I will bring judgment where I had formerly promised blessing." And this principle then seems to get worked out in such a way that this condition is explicitly stated here, and apparently is carried out in other passages in ways that are implicit, specifically in contexts where God is threatening judgment or promising blessing, and probably the classic example is in the book of Jonah, where God sends Jonah to announce judgment on the people of Nineveh. Jonah does this and the people of Nineveh repent, invoking this criterion of human repentance, which it seems is what God was trying to stir up in their hearts in the first place.

— Dr. Rob Lister

In one way or another, the words of true prophets are always fulfilled. Sometimes they come to pass as stated. At other times, human beings respond to prophecies and thereby bring about a different result. But in all cases, the outcomes of true prophecy are consistent with God's covenant and character, and authenticate the ministry of his true prophets.

Moses described the qualifications of the prophetic office as a way for God's people to recognize which prophets truly spoke for God. He did this because he wanted them to discern and obey the messages of true prophets, and to live in fidelity to God's covenant. And it's important for us to keep these qualifications in mind, too, because they were the same qualifications that Jesus met when he served as God's prophet in the New Testament age.

Now that we've looked at the qualifications of prophets, we're ready to consider the function of their office.

FUNCTION

We'll mention three aspects of the function of prophets. First, we'll speak of their authority. Second, we'll mention their task. And third, we'll touch on the methods they used to carry out this task. Let's look first at their authority.

Authority

As we mentioned at the beginning of this lesson, a prophet is:

God's covenant ambassador, who proclaims and applies God's word, especially to warn of judgment against sin, and to encourage the kind of loyal service to God that leads to his blessings.

In the Old Testament, God was presented as the great king who ruled over his people through covenants. And his prophets were ambassadors of these covenants who explained what God had revealed to them in his heavenly court.

In the ancient Near East, powerful emperors or "suzerains" often ruled over smaller nations or "vassals" at a distance from their capital. These suzerains typically imposed a treaty on vassals that spelled out the terms of their relationship. Normally, the Bible refers to this kind of treaty as a covenant.

To administer and enforce these covenants, suzerains employed ambassadors that spoke in their name and wielded their delegated authority. It was the ambassador's job to remind vassal nations of the terms of the treaty, to warn them of the curses that would come if they were unfaithful to the terms of the treaty, and to encourage the vassals to obey these terms in order to obtain the blessings of the treaty.

Knowing this ancient Near-Eastern history is important because in the Old Testament, God often described his relationship to his people in terms of a suzerain-vassal covenant. And as the suzerain, he appointed prophets to be the authoritative ambassadors that reminded his vassal people of the terms of his covenant.

Because the prophets were God's ambassadors, their words were to be received as if God had spoken them himself. The Holy Spirit also inspired the prophets so that they would correctly proclaim God's thoughts and intentions in response to the people of Israel. In this way, God ensured that all his prophets would always speak authoritatively and truly when they represented him.

Why do we take the words of true prophets seriously? Because true prophets speak for God, as his agents. Therefore, if we do not take their words seriously, we are uncircumcised in heart and ears, as the Bible describes it. This means that our hearts have not been changed yet. We, in fact, are rebelling against God. Thus, if we refuse to listen to the words of the prophets, we refuse to listen to the Word of God. And we are rebelling against God himself. Thus, it is a very serious issue.

— Dr. Peter Chow, translation

With this understanding of prophetic authority in mind, let's turn to the task God assigned to his prophets.

Task

To understand the task of the prophets, let's take another look at ancient Near-Eastern suzerain-vassal treaties. When suzerains imposed covenants on vassal states in the ancient Near East, these covenants spelled out the details of the arrangement between them. They listed: the suzerain's benevolence in the past, that is, the good things the suzerain had already done for the vassal; the loyalty that the vassal was required to render to the suzerain, including many rules or stipulations the vassal was required to follow; and the consequences that would result according to the vassal's obedience or disobedience to the terms of the treaty, namely, blessings for the vassal if the vassal obeyed the terms, and punishments or curses if the vassal disobeyed.

And very similar dynamics were true of God's relationship with his covenant people. So, as God's covenant ambassadors, prophets were assigned the task of reminding God's people of the details of his covenant, and of using threats of judgment and offers of blessing to encourage them to obey its terms.

When Israel was in good standing before God, the prophets reminded them of the consequences of their actions to encourage them to persevere in faithfulness. For instance, we see examples of this in Jeremiah 7:5-7, 21:12, and 22:4-5.

But when Israel was not in good standing before God because of serious or prolonged disobedience to the terms of the covenant, the prophets charged them with rebellion and disloyalty. They described Israel's sins and reminded the people of the covenant curses in order to drive them to repentance. We see examples of this in Jeremiah 8 and Amos 4:1-3. And in many cases, the prophets even offered Israel blessings if the nation complied with the demand for repentance. We find this type of prophecy in Joel 2:12-27, and many other places.

Now that we have looked at the authority and task of biblical prophets, we should briefly mention the methods they used to accomplish their job.

Methods

Without a doubt, the most common method the prophets used to accomplish their task was speaking. Prophets performed their job primarily by proclaiming God's words to his people. They accused people of sin, commanded them to obey, encouraged them to persevere, warned them of judgment, and offered them blessings. They told parables. They foretold the future. They prayed. And they even interceded for God's people. We see this hundreds of times in Scripture. Moreover, many prophets also wrote down their words, which is why we find so many prophetic books and other writings in the Bible.

But the prophets also used other methods that relied more on special actions than on verbal communication. For instance, the Holy Spirit gave some prophets power to perform prophetic signs and wonders. These miraculous works of power testified to the

prophets' legitimacy as God's ambassadors, and demonstrated God's intention to back up the warnings and offers that the prophets proclaimed.

As one example, the prophet Moses announced the Lord's will to both the Israelites and the Egyptians, and his words were attended by countless miracles and signs, such as the ten plagues upon Egypt, the parting of the Red Sea, and many other miracles recorded in the books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers. These works of the Holy Spirit's power testified that Moses was a true prophet, and warned both the Egyptians and the Israelites to obey him.

The ministries of the prophets Elijah and Elisha also included many miraculous events, as we see in 1 Kings 17 through 2 Kings 13. The prophet Samuel also performed miracles, such as calling thunder and rain in 1 Samuel 12. And an unnamed prophet in 1 Kings 13 gave a miraculous sign by withering king Jeroboam's hand.

In addition to miracles, many prophets also performed symbolic actions that confirmed their verbal messages. And they even engaged in spiritual encounters as they urged God's people to obey the terms of his covenant.

Seeing the prophets as God's covenant emissaries helps us understand that the Bible's threats of curses and offers of blessings are all grounded in the covenant relationship between God and his people. God is not capricious in his dealings with his people; he does not act in wildly unpredictable ways. Instead, he seeks to enforce the terms of his covenant — and these terms are no secret. He graciously gives us his law, and he sent ambassadors to show us how to apply it to our changing circumstances. God makes it easy for his people to know what he requires because he wants us to walk before him in faithfulness, to experience his blessings, and to accomplish his goals for his kingdom.

Now that we've looked at the qualifications and functions of the office of prophet, let's turn our attention to the expectations the Old Testament created for future prophetic ministries.

EXPECTATIONS

Old Testament expectations for the future of the office of prophet were of two basic types. On the one hand, some expectations were created by the nature of the historical development of the office. On the other hand, other expectations were created by specific prophecies regarding future prophets. We'll look at both types of expectations, beginning with those based on the historical development of the office of prophet.

Historical Development

Because God's relationship with humanity has always been governed by his covenants, there has always been a role for prophets to remind people of the terms of those covenants. But throughout history, this role has occasionally changed. As God's

kingdom shifted and grew throughout history, the role of prophets adjusted to meet its changing needs.

We'll consider the role of prophets during four different stages of history, beginning with the long period of history before Israel had a king, which we'll call the pre-monarchy.

Pre-Monarchy. This is the period of time that corresponds to God's covenants with Adam, Noah, Abraham and Moses. In the beginning of the pre-monarchical period, God's kingdom had not been set apart from the rest of the world in a particular nation. And even when the nation was set apart in the days of Abraham, it still had no king. At this point in time, prophets performed a variety of tasks and were called by a number of descriptive titles. In general, we can say that they spoke with God, received visions, and held humanity accountable to God's covenants.

For instance, when God first created the world, he spoke directly with Adam and Eve; they received his revelation by walking and talking with God, as we read in Genesis 2–3. They fulfilled their prophetic role by teaching their children about God and his covenant. And some of their descendants also had similar relationships with God, such as Enoch who is mentioned in Genesis 5:24.

In the days of Noah, God spoke directly with Noah as well, as we read in Genesis 6–9. But he also called Noah to prophesy covenant judgment against the world because it had sinned so greatly against him, as Peter taught in 2 Peter 2:5. Beyond this, Noah performed the very public prophetic action of building the ark and filling it with animals to confirm his message.

God also spoke directly to Abraham, and revealed to him his plans for the future. Through his talks with God and his communication of those talks to other people, Abraham also served a prophetic role, which is mentioned in places like Genesis 20:7. Abraham's descendants Isaac, Jacob and Joseph also served as God's prophets. They received dreams and visions from God, and also angelic visitations. Each of these prophets held the people accountable to God's covenant by proclaiming his word to them, and by exhorting them to be faithful to the Lord.

In the days of Moses, we find another significant period of pre-monarchical prophetic activity. According to Numbers 12:6, Moses himself was God's preeminent prophet at this time. At this point in history, God gave his people a written covenant in the form of the Ten Commandments and the Book of the Covenant in Exodus 20–23. And it became Moses' responsibility to administer this covenant by explaining it to the people, governing them according to its terms, and exhorting them to be faithful to God in order to receive the covenant blessings rather than the covenant curses. Other prophets contemporary with Moses and after him continued to perform these functions, though none with the scope and influence of Moses' ministry.

While the office of prophet had been extremely broad during the pre-monarchy, it became clearly formalized in the days of the monarchy, when the nation of Israel had settled the Promised Land and was living under the rule of a king.

Monarchy. The monarchical period began with Saul, Israel's first king. But it's most closely associated with Saul's successor David and his descendants.

During the monarchical period, the office of prophet became focused on the central arenas of power, especially the king's court and the city of Jerusalem, and the number of prophets increased. With the king as the focal point of God's vassal people, the prophets' work of reminding people of the terms of God's covenant was commonly accomplished by direct contact with the king.

During this period, the primary role of prophets was to remind the kings and their courts of the nation's duty to serve God faithfully. For instance, the books of 1 and 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles record many interactions between the prophets and the kings of Israel and Judah. Even so, the prophets also continued to speak to the people in general, reminding them of the Lord's covenant requirements and of the consequences of their behavior. The prophets also commanded the neighboring nations to live in peace with Israel and Judah.

The reason that the Bible mentions Israel and Judah as two different kingdoms... Of course, they were one kingdom initially, but then the kingdom divided under Solomon's son Rehoboam — that was around 920 B.C. or something like that — and the northern kingdom had ten tribes; the southern had two. The northern kingdom was called Israel. The largest tribe there was Ephraim, but that whole ten got to be called Israel. And the Southern was called Judah, the largest tribe there, and the capital of the southern was, of course, Jerusalem.

— Dr. Frank Barker

After the Solomonic era, there was a split between the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom. The northern kingdom was referred to as Israel, and they had their own central place of worship as well. And then the southern kingdom was referred to as Judah. And after the split of the kingdoms you'll often see prophets who go to different places, like they'll be, Hosea was a prophet to Israel, and you'll have Isaiah who's a prophet to Judah. And so there's respective realms of ministry that are related to these split kingdoms of the north and the south.

— Dr. Mark Gignilliat

Sadly, the kings and people of Israel and Judah did not obey the prophets. And as a result, they were eventually subjected to the covenant curse of exile from the Promised Land.

Exile. The northern kingdom of Israel was exiled in 723 or 722 B.C. and taken into captivity in Assyria. The southern kingdom of Judah was exiled in 587 or 586 B.C. and taken into captivity in Babylon.

The office of prophet continued to be oriented toward the kings of God's people, even during the exile. But at this stage of history, there was no king, so the emphasis was on restoring the king and the kingdom to God's people.

To reach this goal, the prophets encouraged God's people to repent of their sin, and to return to covenant faithfulness, so that God would grant them his covenant blessings. The prophets also proclaimed that if the people returned to God, he would strengthen them to keep his covenant so that they wouldn't fall under his covenant curses again. As we read in Jeremiah 31:33-34, the Lord would even make it impossible for them to break the covenant ever again, so that they would live by his law with enthusiasm. Through this ministry, the prophets hoped to persuade God to restore their kingdom in the Promised Land under the kingship of a righteous descendant of David.

Eventually, the period of exile came to a partial end during a period of restoration.

Restoration. This post-exilic or restoration era began around 539 or 538 B.C. There was still no king in Israel or Judah at this time, but Jerusalem and the temple were eventually rebuilt, and many families returned to live in the Promised Land.

There were still relatively few prophets at this time. But some faithful prophets, like Haggai and Zechariah, kept watch on the leaders and the general population in order to encourage them to be faithful to God. They exhorted the nation to be faithful during the restoration attempt so that God would see it through to completion. Unfortunately, the people did not heed the prophetic warnings, and the restoration efforts faltered.

During the period of restoration, the expectations for the kingdom were that God would eventually fulfill his promises to David by returning one of his heirs to the throne of Israel and Judah. We see this hope expressed in places like Zechariah 12–13. In the beginning, the hope was that the obedience of the people would move God to bless them. But as the restoration faltered, the hope became that God would eventually have compassion on his people despite their sin, and restore the kingdom for his own name's sake.

By tracing the historical development of the office of prophet, we can see that the prophets were always God's authoritative ambassadors who were tasked with the job of holding God's people accountable to his covenant. And this consistency created a particular expectation for future prophetic ministries. Specifically, it indicated that all God's future prophets would also be his authoritative emissaries, whose job it would be to remind his people of his benevolence toward them, of the loyalty he required of them, and of the consequences of blessings and curses.

But there were also expectations created by the ways the office of prophet changed over time. In the beginning, God's prophets were not closely associated with the office of king. But once Israel had a king, we see that the role of prophets was closely tied to the royal office, and that each time substantial changes affected the office of king, there were repercussions in the office of prophet.

So, this indicates that the expectations for the office of prophet in the New Testament period were to be drawn primarily from the last stage of Old Testament history, namely the post-exilic restoration, when God's people were still waiting for a Davidic king to return to the throne. In particular, the expectation was that the future prophets would herald and accompany the messianic king, ushering in a new age of fidelity to God's covenant.

Besides the Old Testament expectations for future prophets that were based on the historical development of the office, there were also expectations created by specific prophecies regarding future prophets.

Specific Prophecies

There are too many Old Testament prophecies regarding future prophets for us to mention them all. So for our purposes in this lesson, we'll limit our discussion to just three. The first one we'll mention is the hope that God would eventually fulfill the exilic prophecy that a special prophet would be a herald of the Lord himself.

According to Isaiah 40:3-5, a special prophet would announce that the Lord was coming to conquer all his enemies and to restore the Davidic monarchy. And once this herald appeared, restoration would be imminent.

Second, the people also still awaited the final prophet like Moses, who would rise up to lead the people in righteousness, just as Moses had done in the pre-monarchical period. Recall the Lord's words to Moses in Deuteronomy 18:18:

**I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers;
I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I
command him (Deuteronomy 18:18).**

In the Old Testament, we have anticipation of the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in terms of his work, in terms of prophet, priest and king. Deuteronomy 18 is a very, very important passage which speaks of a prophet in the future to come, like a Moses. In the Old Testament context, like a Moses was one who, like Moses, met God face to face, who uniquely received God's revelation. In fact, Moses stood as sort of the pinnacle of all the prophets. As you work through the Old Testament, particularly even at the end of Deuteronomy 34, there is the announcement there that no prophet like Moses has yet arisen. And this sets us up for one to come who will be like a Moses, yet greater, who will speak God's word, who will give us God's truth, who will know God face to face, and that really is culminated in our Lord Jesus Christ. John 1 picks this up, our Lord who knew the Father from all eternity, who discloses him. Acts 3 picks this up as well that this is the fulfillment of this, so that Jesus is the one who brings God's kingdom; he brings God's revelation to pass. He is the one who fulfills Moses' role yet in a greater way. And Hebrews 1 particularly emphasizes that that God speaking through the prophets, including Moses, is now culminated in Jesus Christ his Son who brings that revelation to pass.

— Dr. Stephen Wellum

On some level, God's people always expected their Lord to send this prophet like Moses. Sadly, no Old Testament prophet was able to demonstrate the same powerful spiritual gifts that Moses possessed, or to bring about the full blessings of God's covenant. But in the days of the restoration, there was renewed hope that God was finally about to send this prophet to restore the kingdom.

Third, there was an expectation that when the kingdom was fully restored in the future, there would also be a restoration of prophecy. False prophets would be purged from the land, and the number of true prophets would increase.

As the restoration prophet Zechariah wrote in 13:2 of his book:

“On that day, I will banish the names of the idols from the land, and they will be remembered no more,” declares the Lord Almighty. “I will remove both the prophets and the spirit of impurity from the land” (Zechariah 13:2).

Moreover, the people were still expecting the fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel regarding the multiplication of true prophets of God that would attend God's full covenant blessings. Listen to what Joel prophesied in Joel 2:28-29:

And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days (Joel 2:28-29).

These future days, which Joel also referenced by the term “afterward,” were the end times, the last days, when God would fully establish his kingdom over the whole earth and pour out his ultimate blessings on his people. It was expected that at that time, prophecy would be extremely common among God's faithful people, as they all promoted God's covenant, and encouraged each other to worship him.

The Old Testament closes with Israel in disarray and with little hope for the immediate success of the kingdom. Even so, the faithful in Israel maintained confidence that God would eventually fulfill all the Old Testament expectations for his kingdom, and that he would accomplish this in part through the office of prophet. And as we'll see, this is exactly what happened in the ministry of Jesus.

Having investigated the Old Testament background to the responsibilities and ministry that God gave to his prophets, we're ready to turn to our second main topic: the fulfillment of the prophetic office in the person of Jesus.

FULFILLMENT IN JESUS

The New Testament makes it clear that Jesus is God's ultimate prophet. He is perfectly qualified to serve as God's authoritative covenant ambassador. He perfectly executes the functions of the office. And in him, all the Old Testament prophetic expectations are fulfilled.

Our discussion of Jesus' fulfillment of the prophetic office will focus on the same categories we used to describe the Old Testament prophets and their work, specifically: the qualifications, function, and expectations for the office. Let's turn first to the way Jesus met the qualifications of a prophet.

QUALIFICATIONS

As we saw earlier, true prophets in Israel had to meet four qualifications: They had to be called by God. They were given God's word to speak to the people. They were required to be loyal to God by speaking only what he had commanded. And their messages had to be authenticated by their fulfillment. And as we'll see, Jesus met each of these qualifications. First, Jesus was called by God.

Called by God

Jesus was specifically called by God to be his prophet. We can see this quite clearly in the events surrounding his birth, baptism, and transfiguration.

To begin with, listen to the prophet Simeon's words at Jesus' birth in Luke 2:30-35:

My eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel... This child is destined ... to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed (Luke 2:30-35).

Simeon revealed that from the time of Jesus' birth, our Lord was called to be a prophetic revelation and sign to his people.

Beyond this, at Jesus baptism God the Father and the Holy Spirit both showed that Jesus had been called as a prophet. In Matthew 3-4, Mark 1, and Luke 3-4, God the Father spoke audibly and the Holy Spirit appeared as a dove to show that Jesus was the Son of God who had been appointed to a special ministry. In all these chapters, Jesus' baptism sets him apart for his public ministry of proclaiming the prophetic message of repentance and the coming of the kingdom of God.

But perhaps the action that most clearly identified Jesus as a prophet was his transfiguration, which is described this way in Matthew 17:2-3:

[Jesus'] face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light... Moses and Elijah [were] talking with Jesus (Matthew 17:2-3).

Jesus appeared with the greatest prophets of the Old Testament: Moses, the law-giver and standard for those who would speak God's word to his people; and Elijah, the miracle-worker whose preaching called the faithless house of David to repentance. Just by his presence with these two men, Jesus was shown to be a great prophet.

But notice what happened next in Matthew 17:4-5:

Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters.” While he was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!” (Matthew 17:4-5).

God commanded Peter and the other disciples to listen not to all three prophets, but simply to Jesus. They were to heed him above Moses and Elijah. In this way, God himself demonstrated that Jesus was the foremost prophet of all time.

It’s interesting in the narrative of the transfiguration that God commands or urges the disciples to listen to Jesus. I think it’s important to recognize that he did not instruct them to abandon Moses or Elijah, but to give primacy to Jesus. The whole point, I think, of that moment was to establish the fact that Jesus Christ is the zenith of the revelation of God. The tradition of the Jews was to recognize and respect Moses as the embodiment of the Law, and Elijah as one of the most famous of the prophets. It’s not that the Law is obsolete, or the prophets are obsolete. Certainly, we would not want to abandon our Old Testament. But it is the quintessential and supreme and superior nature of the revelation in Jesus Christ that is being underscored here. It’s rather like the first chapter of the epistle to the Hebrews where God has spoken to us in many times and in different ways through his prophets, but now, now we come to the purest and fullest. It’s not God sending a messenger but God himself amongst us. That’s, I think, the underlying subtext of the transfiguration command.

— Dr. Glen Scorgie

For the second qualification, Jesus specifically stated that he had been given God’s word to speak.

Given God’s Word

Take, for example, Jesus words recorded in John 14:24:

These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me (John 14:24).

Jesus made similar statements in places like John 12:49 and 14:10. In fact, in John chapter 1 Jesus is actually referred to as God’s Word.

The word “Word” used in John 1, the Greek word “*logos*” has been discussed much by theologians down the years, and it certainly may well be true that there could be some Greek understanding to the idea of God as reason, or God is wisdom, but clearly the idea of the word of the Lord, the word of God is a very dominant theme in the Old Testament, and John may well be picking up illusions that we used in Greek philosophy, but actually also applying it to Jesus as God’s Word, the revealer of God, the God who said, “Let there be light” spoke and it happened, and maybe John is just saying that when the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, he came so with all the authority and communicative power that God has exercised throughout all of the Old Testament too.

— Dr. Simon Vibert

First of all, we can see the Word of God as a person, the Lord Jesus Christ, and then secondly as speech of God. But John addresses him as the “Word of God.” And what he primarily does in that regard is basically communicating to us our Lord’s role in making known, the Father to us. And the Hebrew writer would say that no one has seen the Lord at any time, but Jesus Christ who was in the bosom, you know, obviously came forth and has made him known unto us.

— Rev. Larry Cockrell

John, if he’s doing anything evangelistic, it is just driving to the same point that this is God, you have to deal with it. And that is reaching to John 20:28, where John wants us to have seen Jesus as God, speaking God’s word to us. We can trust it because he is the Word of God.

— Dr. John McKinley

Third, Jesus fulfilled the prophetic qualification of being loyal to God.

Loyal to God

Throughout his ministry, Jesus continually insisted that he was carrying out the Father’s will. He spoke and did only those things that the Father commanded. We see this in many places, such as John 5:19, 30, and 8:28.

Jesus also made it clear that all his words and works were consistent with those of the prophets that had come before him. For instance, he spoke approvingly of the ministry of John the Baptist in Matthew 11:9-14. He affirmed the prophet Jonah in Matthew 12:38-45. He inaugurated his own ministry in Luke 4 by claiming to fulfill

Isaiah 61 and the promised arrival of an anointed prophet. In fact, Jesus repeatedly and constantly affirmed the truth and abiding validity of the entire Old Testament Scripture. As he said in Matthew 5:17:

Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them (Matthew 5:17).

In these and other ways, Jesus showed that everything he said and did was a demonstration of total loyalty to God.

Finally, Jesus also met the qualification of having his prophetic messages authenticated by their fulfillment.

Authenticated by Fulfillment

The Gospels often prove Jesus' status as an authentic prophet by pointing out that his prophecies were fulfilled. Sometimes his words came true immediately, like when he successfully controlled nature, performed exorcisms, healed the sick, and raised the dead. In these cases, things like the weather, demons, illness, and even death itself immediately obeyed his authoritative, prophetic commands. At other times, his prophecies were fulfilled later, as when he predicted the future.

For instance, in John 18:9, John provided this comment:

This happened so that the words he had spoken would be fulfilled: "I have not lost one of those you gave me" (John 18:9).

Here, John referred to something Jesus had said in his high priestly prayer in John 17:12, and he indicated that Jesus' words had been fulfilled.

And of course, the words Jesus spoke about his own impending death and resurrection were also fulfilled, as we see in places like Matthew 16:21 and 20:18-19, and John 18:32. Through fulfillments like these, Jesus was shown to be a true prophet of God.

But not all of Jesus' prophecies were fulfilled in his lifetime. Many of them had to do with the future, and often with the distant future. In some cases, the fulfillment of these prophecies is recorded elsewhere in history.

For example, listen to the prophecy Jesus gave in Luke 21:5-6:

Some of his disciples were remarking about how the temple was adorned with beautiful stones and with gifts dedicated to God. But Jesus said, "As for what you see here, the time will come when not one stone will be left on another; every one of them will be thrown down" (Luke 21:5-6).

Jesus said that the Jewish temple would be destroyed because the Jews refused to repent of their sin. But the temple was still standing when Jesus died. It was destroyed shortly afterwards, though, when the Romans sacked Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

Obviously, not all of Jesus' prophecies have been fulfilled. For instance, he still hasn't returned to consummate the kingdom of God. But he will. In fact, we can and should be utterly confident that Jesus will eventually fulfill all his promises. Because in every case where we can evaluate his prophecies against Scripture and the rest of history, his words have always been authenticated by their fulfillment. And since his words have always come true in the past, we should expect them to come true in the future, too.

I think the confidence that we have is that if we go back into Old Testament history we can see how God has fulfilled his promises in the first coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. Step by step through all the way from his initial promise in Genesis 3:15 through the prophetic revelation we have, God has been anticipating the coming of his son, the Messiah. All of that took place. All of that was fulfilled now 2,000 years ago. And when Jesus then says, in light of his coming and his finished work, that he will return, that this will happen, we can be sure in light of God's keeping his promises in the past that he will continue to do so in the future.

— Dr. Stephen Wellum

Having seen that Jesus met the qualifications of the prophetic office, we're ready to look at his fulfillment of the function of that office.

FUNCTION

As we've said throughout this lesson, prophets were God's covenant ambassadors. They explained his will to his people, exhorting them to repent from their rebellion, and encouraging them to serve God loyally. In particular, we looked at three aspects of their function: their authority, their task, and their methods.

At this point in our lesson, we'll describe Jesus' function as a prophet in ways that parallel the function of Old Testament prophets. First, we'll see that Jesus also had authority to speak for God. Second, we'll see that his task was similar to that of Old Testament prophets. And third, we'll show that his methods were similar to theirs. Let's look first at Jesus' authority to represent God.

Authority

The New Testament makes it abundantly clear that Jesus had authority to speak on behalf of his Father. We see this in passages like John 7:16-19, 12:49-50, and 14:24. In these passages, Jesus spoke with an authority that had been delegated to him by God the Father.

As Jesus told the crowds in Jerusalem in John 7:16-19:

My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me... He who speaks on his own does so to gain honor for himself, but he who works for the honor of the one who sent him is a man of truth; there is nothing false about him (John 7:16-19).

Jesus' authority from the Father is also evident in his teaching that whoever received him also received the Father, and whoever rejected him also rejected the Father. This is clear in many, many passages, such as Matthew 10:40, Mark 9:37, Luke 9:48, and John 13:20, and 12:44. As just one example, listen to Jesus' words in Luke 10:16:

He who rejects me rejects him who sent me (Luke 10:16).

Those who turn away from the person and message of God's authoritative messenger will eventually recognize the authenticity of the message. But sadly, by that time they may have lost their opportunity to respond.

Listen to this account of Jesus confrontation with his opponents in John 8:26-28:

"I have much to say in judgment of you. But he who sent me is reliable, and what I have heard from him I tell the world." They did not understand that he was telling them about his Father. So Jesus said, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am the one I claim to be and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me" (John 8:26-28).

With this understanding of Jesus' prophetic authority in mind, we're in a position to look at the task Jesus was sent to accomplish.

Task

As we noted earlier, because the prophets were God's covenant ambassadors, they were assigned the task of reminding God's people of the details of his covenant, and encouraging them to obey its terms. And in his role as prophet, this was also the task assigned to Jesus. We see this especially in the way Jesus announced the good news that the final stages of God's kingdom were coming.

First, in all his teachings about the kingdom of God, he proclaimed the truth of God's kingship and authority, and thereby affirmed the existence of God's covenant with his people. We see this in many places, including the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6:10, where Jesus taught his disciples to pray for God's kingdom to come to earth, and for his will to be done.

Second, Jesus also confirmed that the terms of the covenant were still in force, and that the people had failed to obey them. This is clear from his exhortations that the people repent of their sins, such as Matthew 4:17, and Mark 1:15.

And third, Jesus affirmed the consequences of the covenant. For instance, in the seven woes of Matthew 23, Jesus exhorted God's people to obey God in order to avoid his judgment. And in the Beatitudes that begin the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:3-

12, he encouraged God's people to petition God for mercy, in order to receive his blessings.

Listen to the way Jesus summarized his task at the beginning of his public ministry in Luke 4:17-21:

The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." ... [Then he said], "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:17-21).

Here, Jesus specifically identified himself as the herald or announcer of the restoration of God's kingdom that had been prophesied in Isaiah 61.

Isaiah taught that when God came to bring final judgment against his enemies and to extend his kingdom through Israel to the entire world, he would begin this work through a special prophet. That prophet would announce the good news, or gospel, that God's kingdom was finally arriving. And in the course of that announcement, the prophet would also remind God's covenant people of their obligations — encouraging them to repent of their sin in order to avoid the covenant curses, and to persevere in faithfulness in order to receive God's covenant blessings. And according to Jesus' own testimony, our Lord himself was that prophet.

What is the relationship between the gospel and the kingdom of God? In the Gospel of Mark 1, the first recorded words of Jesus are, "the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe the gospel." The gospel is the good news proclaiming that the reign of God's kingdom has come into this world. Thus, all the miracles Jesus performed are signs of this coming kingdom. Since the rule and kingdom of God are here our sins are forgiven. The blind can see. The lame can walk. The lepers are cleansed. Demons are cast out, and the dead are raised. That is the good news. The good news of course, at its core, is the cross — the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. If Jesus did not die and rise again, he would not have won salvation for us. He would not have overcome the power of death. And the kingdom of God would not have come to us. Therefore, the gospel is the best news. The coming of God's kingdom is the greatest blessing and joyfulness for the human race.

— Dr. Peter Chow, translation

One of the real questions in the New Testament is what is the relationship between the kingdom of God and the gospel? If we start by understanding that the kingdom of God is the rule and reign of

God in the hearts of men and women, and that rule and reign manifesting itself in every sphere of life in which their lives touch. The way that they come into that rule and reign is through the message of the gospel, the *euangelion*, the good news, that Christ has laid his life down upon the cross for their sins. And through that transforming power of the gospel, then they are called to transform the world around them and bring in God's work of the kingdom to every area of their life.

— Dr. Jeff Lowman

Now that we've explored Jesus' prophetic authority and task, let's take a look at the methods he used to fulfill his ministry.

Methods

Like the Old Testament prophets, Jesus' primary method for accomplishing his prophetic task was speaking. That is to say, he held people accountable to God's covenant mainly by proclaiming God's words to them. He accused them of sin; he commanded them to repent and to obey God's will as it was revealed in the Scriptures; he encouraged them to persevere in faithfulness; he warned them of coming judgment; and he offered blessings to those who were faithful. He told parables. He foretold the future. He prayed. And he interceded for God's people.

Interestingly, one thing that Jesus did not do was write down his teachings for us in Scripture. But, just like some Old Testament prophets, he had disciples that did this for him. The New Testament contains four gospels — Matthew, Mark, Luke and John in which Jesus' disciples recorded his spoken prophetic ministry.

And like the Old Testament prophets, Jesus also used many methods besides speaking to conduct his prophetic ministry — methods that relied more on special actions than on verbal communication. Perhaps the most obvious way this is true is his miracles. Jesus performed more miracles than any other prophet in the history of God's people. And Jesus' miraculous works of power testified to his legitimacy as God's ambassador; they demonstrated God's strong approval of everything that Jesus said.

As Jesus said in John 10:25:

The miracles I do in my Father's name speak for me (John 10:25).

Jesus also performed symbolic actions like Old Testament prophets. For example, he received baptism from John the Baptist as a symbolic act in Matthew 3:15-17. And, like Old Testament prophets, Jesus also engaged in spiritual encounters. For instance, he triumphed over temptation by the Devil in Matthew 4:1-11, and Luke 4:1-13. And, he exorcised demons in Mark 1:25-26, and 5:13.

By looking at Jesus' prophetic authority, task and methods, we can see that he truly filled the office of prophet. And because of this, we can be assured that everything he prophesied will be fulfilled; the words of Jesus are faithful and true. And therefore we

have an obligation to listen to him and to obey them. For those of us who are in God's covenant community, our obedience to Jesus' words leads to God's covenant blessings, while our disobedience leads to his discipline. And for those who are not part of God's people, Jesus' prophetic words are both a warning of judgment against those who reject him, and an offer of life to all those who will repent of their sin and receive him by faith.

Having seen that Jesus fulfilled both the qualifications and function of the office of prophet, let's look briefly at how he fulfilled the Old Testament expectations for the future of the prophetic office.

EXPECTATIONS

Earlier in this lesson, we said that at the end of the Old Testament, there were at least three expectations for prophets during the final stages of God's kingdom: that there would be a prophetic herald of the Lord; that there would be a final prophet like Moses; and that there would be a restoration of prophecy. And as we'll see, all these expectations came to fulfillment in the person and ministry of Jesus.

Let's look at each of these expectations in relation to Jesus, beginning with the herald of the Lord.

Herald of the Lord

The expected prophetic herald had been prophesied in Isaiah 40:3-5, where we read these words:

A voice of one calling: "In the desert prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken" (Isaiah 40:3-5).

The special prophet foretold here was to announce the arrival of the Lord, who would then conquer all his enemies and restore the Davidic monarchy.

And in fact, Jesus himself was both the Lord who came to defeat his enemies, and the king who was heir to David's throne. Through Jesus, God was fulfilling all the prophecies regarding the last days and the kingdom of God. But who was his herald? How was the prophecy regarding the herald of the Lord fulfilled in Jesus? It was John the Baptist, who announced the coming of Jesus.

Listen to the words of John the Baptist in the gospel of the apostle John 1:23:

John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, "I am the voice of one calling in the desert, 'Make straight the way for the Lord'" (John 1:23).

John the Baptist had been assigned the role of announcing the arrival of God, who would come as a warrior to conquer his enemies and bless his people. And the one whom the Baptist announced and heralded was Jesus.

Listen to this account from the Gospel of John 1:32-34:

Then John [the Baptist] gave this testimony: “I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on [Jesus]. I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, ‘The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.’ I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God” (John 1:32-34).

John fulfilled his prophetic mission by identifying Jesus as the Son of God who had come to bring in the kingdom of God by defeating God’s enemies and restoring the throne to David’s house.

The second Old Testament expectation for future prophecy that Jesus fulfilled was that there would be a final prophet like Moses.

Prophet like Moses

In Deuteronomy 18:15, Moses spoke these words to Israel:

The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him (Deuteronomy 18:15).

In Acts 3:22-23, Peter explicitly taught that Jesus was the prophet like Moses whom the Old Testament had anticipated.

Jesus performed miracles on a scale that hadn’t been seen since Moses. He prophesied with greater knowledge than anyone since Moses had possessed. He knew God face to face as Moses had. And Jesus ensured that all those who responded in faith to his prophetic teaching would be counted as perfect covenant keepers, and thereby inherit the full blessings of God’s covenant kingdom.

As we read in Hebrews 3:5-6:

Moses was faithful as a servant in all God's house, testifying to what would be said in the future. But Christ is faithful as a son over God's house. And we are his house, if we hold on to our courage and the hope of which we boast (Hebrews 3:5-6).

In fact, the New Testament teaches that Jesus was not only the greatest prophet since Moses, but the greatest prophet of all time. Hebrews 1:1-2 teaches that before Jesus, God’s activity through his prophets took place over a large span of time and encompassed a variety of means and approaches. But in these days of the restoration of God’s

kingdom, God has given us even greater revelation through his son, the greatest prophet of all. As we see in John 1:18 and 14:9, Jesus is the fullest and clearest revelation of the Father's identity, will and salvation. In fact, according to John 1:14, Jesus is the very Word of God incarnate.

The superiority of Jesus' revelation to all other prophets who came before lies in the fact that Jesus not only proclaims the word of God, but is the very incarnate Word of God. He embodies the word of God. All other prophets that came before, as remarkable as their ministry was, they were spokesmen of God's word. Jesus, when he comes, he certainly is a spokesman of God's word; he certainly preaches the kingdom of God; preaches repentance; he preaches the commands of God, but he does so in a way in which, because of the incarnation, he also embodies the identity of God.

— Dr. Rob Lister

So, when Jesus comes as prophet, and he comes as prophet, priest and king, fulfilling all of these roles in Israel, all of the offices are fulfilled in Christ. As a prophet he is the one that was prophesied by Moses himself, one will come "like me." He then will really put an end to all other prophesy. Because the reason that God has spoken in a final way by his Son, is because none of the other prophets were God, and none of the prophets could absorb within them the full revelation of God. But now the one comes who actually is the revealer. The one comes who knows who God is because he is God. He knows all the plans of God. He knows the holiness of God. He knows precisely what needs to be done in order to propitiate God. So he bears within him every concern that God has, everything that God is interested in, he knows because he is God. And so, the graciousness of the revelation of Christ in his person, and then in his words, as our prophet, shows us that there is no other question we need to ask than that which Christ himself has revealed because he is wise enough to know what he can reveal and what he should not reveal. And he is fully knowledgeable enough to give us absolute truth and the absolute example in all that he does. He is the perfect prophet.

— Dr. Thomas Nettles

Jesus' significance as the fulfillment of the prophetic office cannot be overemphasized. He is the clearest, surest revelation of the Father's will and purposes, revealing both God's demands and God's promises for the restoration of his kingdom.

The third way that we see Old Testament expectations of prophecy fulfilled in Jesus has to do with the restoration of prophecy.

Restoration of Prophecy

As we have seen, the Old Testament anticipated a day when false prophets would be eliminated and true prophets would be extremely frequent among God's people. And through Jesus, this expectation began to be realized. With regard to the multiplication of true prophets, this began when Jesus ordained his many apostles to preach the word with power throughout the world. And it continued on the day of Pentecost when he poured out his Spirit on the church, with the result that they all began to prophesy in tongues.

Listen to the description of this event in Acts 2:4, followed by Peter's explanation in Acts 2:14-18:

All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them... Then Peter ... addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you ... [T]his is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: 'In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy'" (Acts 2:4, 14-18).

In the early church, Jesus sent his Spirit to empower the church for prophecy. Although modern churches often debate the continuing presence of such prophecy, no one can doubt that it was a powerful and prevalent ministry that Jesus used to establish his church in the early days of the kingdom.

But what about false prophecy? How was the Old Testament's expectation of the end of false prophecy fulfilled in Jesus? After all, many New Testament passages identify false prophecy as an ongoing problem for the church. We see this in Matthew 7:15 and 24:11, 24; 2 Peter 2:1; 1 John 4:1, and a number of other passages.

Well, the answer is twofold. On the one hand, false prophecy began to be restrained by the multiplication of true prophets, whose job it was to discover and condemn false prophecy.

Listen to Paul's teaching on this matter in 1 Corinthians 14:29:

Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said (1 Corinthians 14:29).

Paul made it clear that one job of the true prophets of the church was to root out and censor false prophecies.

On the other hand, it's clear that false prophecy is a continuing problem. But eventually, Jesus will completely do away with false prophets and their words. When he returns in judgment and consummates his kingdom, he will finally and irrevocably destroy all false prophets. Until that time, we live with the tension of knowing that Jesus has inaugurated his kingdom and begun to restrain false prophecy, but that he has not yet carried out the judgment that will end false prophecy forever.

Jesus is perfectly qualified for the office of prophet; he faithfully and truly performs the functions of a prophet; and he fulfills the Old Testament expectations for the office of prophet. And that is good news. In the Old Testament, God promised his people that one day a prophet like Moses would arise to lead his people into covenant faithfulness. And now, in Jesus, that promise is being fulfilled. For this reason, we recognize and honor Jesus as the greatest prophet of all time; we listen to and believe his words; and we submit to and obey his teachings. And we do so in the confidence that his prophetic word is sure, and that it will lead to our eternal enjoyment of God's covenant blessings.

Having examined both the Old Testament background and New Testament fulfillment of the prophetic office, we're ready to turn to our third topic, the modern application of Jesus' prophetic work.

MODERN APPLICATION

One convenient way to approach the modern application of Christ's prophetic work can be found in the *Westminster Larger Catechism*, answer number 43, which says:

Christ executeth the office of a prophet, in his revealing to the church, in all ages, by his Spirit and word, and in divers ways of administration, the whole will of God, in all things concerning their edification and salvation.

In this answer, the catechism summarizes Christ's prophetic work in terms of his revelation to the church. And it mentions at least two aspects of Christ's revelatory work. First, it speaks of the extent of Christ's revelation, specifically, in all ages, by his Spirit and word, and in diverse ways of administration. And second, it identifies the content of Christ's prophetic revelation, namely, the whole will of God, in all things concerning their edification and salvation.

Because the summary offered by the *Westminster Larger Catechism* is so helpful, we'll use it as a model for our own modern application of Jesus' prophetic work. First, we'll consider the extent of the prophetic revelation Christ provides, and its implications for our lives. And second, we'll focus on the content of the prophetic revelation we receive from Christ, and the obligations it places on us. Let's turn first to the extent of the revelation we receive from our prophet Christ.

EXTENT OF REVELATION

When the catechism says that Christ provides revelation to his church "in all ages, by his Spirit and word, and in diverse ways of administration," it affirms the biblical truth that Christ is the one who speaks to us through all of Scripture and true prophecy.

Jesus spoke many prophetic words himself, but he also sent his Holy Spirit to inspire true prophets before and after him, who themselves carried out their ministries in various ways. And the most important thing for us to infer from this process is that the whole Bible, both the Old and the New Testaments, is Christ's prophetic word to his church.

Now, it may seem strange to think that the whole Bible is Christ's word. After all, Jesus didn't write any books of Scripture. And even in the Gospels, there is a lot of material besides the quotations of things he said. But this has been the consistent teaching throughout church history.

For instance, the early church father Origen wrote of Jesus' prophetic work of inspiring Scripture in the preface to his work *On First Principles*, written in the early third century. Listen to what he said:

By the words of Christ, we do not mean those only which He spoke when He became man ... for before that time, Christ, the Word of God, was in Moses and the prophets... Moreover ... after His ascension into heaven He spoke in His apostles.

Origen's words, which have been affirmed throughout church history, state that Scripture, in all its parts, is the prophetic word of Christ. And this idea is entirely biblical.

For one thing, the Bible teaches that Jesus' prophetic ministry actually preceded his incarnation and earthly ministry because he inspired the Old Testament prophets.

Listen to the apostle Peter's words in 1 Peter 1:10-11:

Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow (1 Peter 1:10-11).

Peter taught that Christ had sent the Holy Spirit to inspire and motivate the Old Testament prophets as they studied and wondered about the fulfillment of God's promises of redemption. In this sense, the whole Old Testament is the word of Christ.

In the same way that Jesus' prophetic ministry began before his earthly ministry, it also continued after he ascended into heaven, because Jesus also sent his Spirit to inspire the apostles and the other writers of the New Testament in their work.

As Jesus said in John 16:13-15:

"The Spirit of truth ... will guide you into all truth... All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you" (John 16:13-15).

It's important for us to recognize that the whole Bible is Christ's word to us because it affirms that every book of Scripture is authoritative and relevant to the life of the modern church. To receive Christ as our prophet is to receive all his words to us as revelations of God's kingdom and covenant, including both the Old and the New

Testaments. We can't be satisfied to follow only the quotations of Jesus in the Gospels, or even all of the New Testament. We have to read, understand and obey everything in the Bible because it is all Christ's word to us.

Now, of course, we have to do this in ways that account for important historical changes. For example, later revelation, such as the New Testament, frequently shows us how to understand and apply earlier revelation, such as the Old Testament. But the basic principle remains unchanged: the whole Bible is the word of Christ for his church in all ages.

When we come to the Bible, all of us, I think, find that we have favorite places, we have favorite sections of the Word, and many people rightly are drawn first of all to the Gospels and to the words of Jesus. It is the case, however, as the Word affirms and as the early Christians and the first generations consistently affirmed, that all Scripture is inspired by God, and so it's profitable, it's useful for teaching, and useful for correcting mistakes in our lives and showing us what the right way, what the straight and level way is, the life-giving way. So even though we're allowed to have certain preferences and be drawn to particular books and sayings, the whole witness of Scripture is important because we are whole people, and as we relate to others, this draws us together with God's Word as the centerpiece.

— Dr. James D. Smith III

Properly understanding Jesus as our prophet, the one who is the fulfillment of the entire prophetic revelation, that in him all of God's promises have come to pass, means that the Old Testament revelation is his word as well. The gospel messages where he directly speaks is his word. By extension as well, his calling of the apostles — they act as his emissaries, they act as the one by the Spirit under inspiration to give us his word and to teach us who he is and what he has done, so that, whether it's the Old Testament, whether it's the Gospels, whether it's the Epistles, the entire Bible is for us and for our instruction. It's God's word to us that we are to follow completely and read it all now in light of the coming of Jesus Christ and all that he has accomplished for us.

— Dr. Stephen Wellum

With this understanding of the extent of Christ's prophetic revelation in mind, let's turn to the content of the prophetic revelation we receive from Christ, and the obligations it places on our lives.

CONTENT OF REVELATION

The *Westminster Larger Catechism* summarizes the content of Scripture by saying that Christ prophetically revealed to his church “the whole will of God, in all things concerning their edification and salvation.” Now, in one sense, this is a very broad statement affirming the sufficiency of Scripture. But when we view it in the specific context of Christ’s office of prophet, it helps us see that the whole Bible was delivered to us by Christ, God’s chief covenant emissary, in order to instruct us regarding the terms of his covenant; and in order to motivate us to avoid its curses, and to pursue its blessings through faithful obedience. God’s will, then, is the terms of his covenant and its application to our lives. And our edification is our proper understanding of the terms of that covenant, while our salvation consists of covenant blessings.

The whole Bible is God’s covenant word to his people. And since Christ is God, the whole Bible is also his word. For example, Jesus frequently affirmed the perpetual validity of the Old Testament. And near the end of his ministry, he promised to send the Holy Spirit to his original apostles so that they could write and authorize additional Scriptures, which we now have in the New Testament.

Jesus also taught his followers how to apply God’s covenant stipulations in their own day. And he motivated them to obey God’s will so that they’d receive the covenant blessings and avoid divine judgment. As Paul later wrote, all Scripture has been given to the church in order to equip us to serve and to obey our Lord.

In line with these ideas, we’ll focus on two aspects of the content of Christ’s prophetic revelation in Scripture. First, we’ll describe how a proper understanding of his office of prophet can help us interpret all of Scripture, so that we are edified regarding God’s will. And second, we’ll describe how a proper understanding of Christ’s prophetic office can guide us as we submit to Scripture, so that we receive the covenant blessing of salvation. Let’s start with the idea that Christ’s role as prophet has implications for the way we interpret Scripture.

Interpret Scripture

In the ancient Near East, people recognized their obligation to respond to the messages that suzerain kings sent through their ambassadors. The consequences for ignoring these messages were serious. And the same is true of God’s revelation. When God reveals his will to his people, he expects us to listen to his words so that we understand what he requires, and to respond to him obediently so that we receive his salvation. Seen in this light, the words of Scripture that Christ gave through the Holy Spirit are not just someone’s personal perspectives on issues, or illustrative truths. They are the covenant messages of the great king, and they require an obedient response.

As we read in Hebrews 2:2-3:

If the message spoken by angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, how shall we escape if we

ignore such a great salvation? This salvation ... was first announced by the Lord (Hebrews 2:2-3).

Those who reject Jesus' word are doomed to suffer eternal covenant curses. But those who receive his message in faith and obedience receive the covenant blessings of salvation and eternal life.

Because Christ's word in all of Scripture has always been intended to administer God's covenant with his people, the best way to interpret it is according to the structure of the covenant. As we have seen, the basic elements of this structure are God's benevolence toward us, the loyalty he requires of us, and the promised consequences of blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience.

As we saw earlier in this lesson, these elements were prominent throughout the Old Testament before Jesus was born. Christ's apostles also wrote about these themes quite frequently after Christ's ascension into heaven. And beyond this, we can see the same themes in the prophetic ministry of Christ during his earthly ministry. For instance, Jesus talked about God's benevolence in passages such as Matthew 5:45 and 6:26-33. He taught the expectation of human loyalty, as we see in Matthew 25:14-30. And he emphasized the consequences that follow human responses, as we see in Luke 13:1-8 and 12:35-38.

If we keep these covenant structures in mind as we read the Bible, it will help us understand the meaning of all Scripture. Whether we are reading historical narratives, or poetry, or wisdom literature, or epistles, or works of prophecy, we should always ask questions like: How does this passage reveal the benevolence of God toward his people? How does it reveal the loyalty he requires of his people? What does it say about the curses that come on those who refuse to be faithful? What blessings does it offer to those who hear and obey? Everything Scripture teaches relates to God's benevolence, favor and help; to the requirements and laws he expects us to fulfill in our loyalty to him; and to the consequent rewards for obedience, and punishments for disobedience.

Followers of Christ are faced with countless questions and choices in the modern world. Every day, we make decisions about ourselves, our family, our work, our relationships, our churches, even national politics. The fact is that Christ's prophetic word to us addresses all these topics and more. God's covenant covers every aspect of our lives. And when we understand that Christ has given us his word as a means to live in obedience to God within that covenant, we are better prepared to understand that word, and to live in ways that honor God and lead to his blessings.

With this understanding of how Christ's role as prophet can help us interpret Scripture, let's consider the ways it can help us submit to Scripture so that we receive the covenant blessings of salvation.

Submit to Scripture

There are many ways that we might summarize our obligation to submit to God's revealed will in Scripture, and we'll touch on several of them throughout this series. But in this lesson we want to look at these issues from the perspective of Christ's office of prophet.

We'll focus on the two ideas that prophets normally emphasized: repentance from sin to avoid the covenant curses; and faith in God to obtain the covenant blessings. Let's look first at repentance.

As you'll recall, one of the primary functions of prophets in the Old Testament was to threaten covenant curses in order to drive sinners to repentance. And this was also part of Jesus ministry in the New Testament.

Listen to how Matthew summarized Jesus' preaching in Matthew 4:17:

From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near" (Matthew 4:17).

In fact, this theme can be found throughout the Old and New Testaments. It is one of the most common themes in all of Scripture. And because every bit of Scripture reveals God's will to us, repentance from the ways we fail to live up to his will is a legitimate application of every text.

As we all know, repentance is the act of turning from rebellion against God and submitting to his will. We turn away from our sin, and in the same motion we turn toward God in faith. Initial repentance takes place when men and women first come to Christ in saving faith. We hear the word of the gospel and repent of our sins. But it's also true that repentance should occur throughout the Christian life.

The Protestant Reformer Martin Luther picked up on this idea in the first of his famous 95 Theses, written in A.D. 1517. Listen to what he said:

When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, "Repent," he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.

Luther recognized that fallen human beings constantly sin, and therefore that even believers need to make repentance a daily practice.

One way to encourage repentance is to follow the model of Jesus and the Old Testament prophets by proclaiming the terms of God's covenant. When we tell unbelievers what God requires, we can exhort them to abandon their sin in order to escape the judgment of God's curses. And when believers hear the word of God and discover their own shortcomings, we also need to repent. Of course, true believers never need to worry about falling under God's eternal curses — Jesus made sure of that when he died on the cross for us. But it's still true that God sometimes disciplines us in ways that resemble his covenant curses, as we see in passages like Hebrews 12:5-11.

By encouraging and practicing repentance in our daily lives, believers honor Christ's prophetic work and pursue the blessings of God's covenant. But as we do this, it's important to recognize that godly repentance is not a matter of wallowing in despair over our sin. While this admission of guilt may bring sorrow, it's not designed to lead to despair. Rather, it's intended to restore our relationship with God, and our joy in him.

As we read in 2 Corinthians 7:10:

Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret (2 Corinthians 7:10).

Every Christian, I think, is called to a lifestyle of regular repentance, that's confessing our sins and coming clean before the Lord. Jesus himself says we need to take up our cross daily, which is a hint surely not just that we're supposed to be prepared to suffer, but perhaps to go the way of the cross which is dying to our sins and seeking God's forgiveness, the cross is all about that. And so although, yes, there's great truth that when someone comes to the Lord for the first time and confesses their sins, yes, they are a new person and they are washed clean, and those are great truths which we need to hold on to. Yet, frankly, we all dirty our clothes on a pretty daily basis, and if we want to be washed white we need to come back for cleansing, for renewal. And the clear verses in the Old Testament which say, you know, there are great blessings for those who repent and come back to the Lord, who are not cherishing iniquity or hiding it in their heart, or Psalm 32, you know, "blessed is the person who the Lord does not account their sin," hold them accountable for their sins. And you see in that Psalm, you know, great joy as the person actually finds forgiveness. And that's an experience that Christians day by day can have, the joy of sins forgiven. So, incredible blessings as we pursue that discipline, repentance leading to new life.

— Dr. Peter Walker

With this understanding of repentance from sin in mind, let's look at the matter of faith in God.

Jesus and other biblical prophets encouraged continued faith in God and obedience to his covenant so that their audiences would receive God's blessings. And this principle applies to modern Christians, as well. If we hope to receive the blessings of salvation when his kingdom comes in all its fullness, it's important for us to persevere in faith, and to demonstrate our faith by obedience to God's covenant. We see this in many places throughout the New Testament, such as Ephesians 2:8-10, 2 Thessalonians 1:4-12, Hebrews 12:1-11, and James 2:14-18.

As just one example, listen to the words of 1 John 5:3-4:

This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith (1 John 5:3-4).

As John taught here, true Christian faith overcomes — it perseveres — both in its commitment to God, and in its expression in obedience to God's commands.

Admittedly, it's a struggle to persevere in faith and obedience as we wait for God to fulfill his promises. But this same challenge has faced God's people in every age. It was true in the Old Testament, in the New Testament, and throughout church history. But we know that God's promises are sure, and that Christ will eventually return to finish what he started.

You know, the apostle Paul is really clear in his letters about our motivation for faithfulness in Christ. It is to remember what Christ has done for us, remember our salvation. That is the most basic motivation. But, you know, Scripture is also very keen to inform us about other motivations. First of all, it's very honest about the fact that there's a day of judgment coming. We're going to give an answer for every idle word and every idle deed. Well, that ought to be a motivation to faithfulness. We also have the bigger picture which is that we will find our greatest joy in our deepest obedience. Who would not want that joy? Why would we rob ourselves of that joy knowing that our motivation is not just in order to avoid the punishment and judgment of God, but rather to receive the blessings that God gives us through obedience? Scripture's also clear about something else. We are living before a watching world, and our credibility in Christian witness has a great deal to do with whether the world can see us living faithfully in Christ. You know, that really raises the stakes, so to speak, and reminds us we have multiple motivations for faithfulness in Christ.

— Dr. R. Albert Mohler, Jr.

One day, our faith will be utterly vindicated, when Jesus returns and we receive the full blessings he has prophesied. Repentance will be a thing of the past, and our faith will be rewarded. At that time, we'll all live in God's fulfilled and perfected kingdom on earth, enjoying all the blessings of his covenant. But until then, our lives in covenant with God are to be characterized by repentance from sin, and by perseverance in faith. And as we live in fidelity to our Lord, our current discipline will be lighter, and our future blessings will increase.

CONCLUSION

In this lesson, we've seen how Jesus of Nazareth fulfills and carries out the office of prophet. We've considered the Old Testament background to the office of prophet. We've looked at the fulfillment of this office in Jesus, noting that he meets the qualifications for the office, performs the functions of the office, and is bringing to fulfillment all the Old Testament expectations for the office. And we've explored the modern application of these ideas by focusing on the extent and content of Christ's prophetic revelation in Scripture.

Understanding Christ's office of prophet is extremely useful for every believer. It helps us orient ourselves to God's kingdom and his purposes. It teaches us to listen and to submit to the teachings of Jesus throughout the Bible. It gives us a framework for understanding his revelation to us. And it assures us that God will certainly fulfill all Jesus' prophecies about his return and our eternal salvation.

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We Believe in Jesus

LESSON
THREE

The Prophet
Faculty Forum



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We Believe in Jesus

Lesson Three: The Prophet

Faculty Forum

With

Dr. Frank Barker
Dr. Stephen Chan
Dr. Peter Chow
Dr. Brandon Crowe
Dr. Dan Doriani
Dr. Mark Gignilliat
Rev. Mike Glodo
Dr. Gordon Johnston

Dr. Riad Kassis
Dr. Daniel Kim
Dr. Robert Lister
Rev. Jim Maples
Dr. Greg Perry
Dr. Vern Poythress
Dr. Richard L. Pratt, Jr.
Dr. Scott Redd

Dr. Glen Scorgie
Dr. Frank Thielman
Dr. Carl Trueman
Dr. Gideon Umukoro
Dr. Simon Vibert
Dr. Peter Walker
Dr. Guy Waters
Dr. Stephen Wellum

Question 1:

What was the primary job of biblical prophets?

As part of Jesus' role as Christ, he perfectly fulfilled the office of prophet. God had appointed prophets, along with kings and priests, as administrators of his kingdom. But what exactly was a prophet? How did prophets administer God's kingdom? Many people think of them primarily as seers that predicted the future — and prophets certainly did this at times. But what was the primary job of biblical prophets?

Rev. Mike Glodo

The main purpose of biblical prophecy can be understood if we have a sense of the prophets as, say, ambassadors or secretaries of state. They came as representatives of God, and they came to call God's people back to faithfulness to God's covenant with them. At times, it was to call them to repent and to turn away from sin, and at other times it was to give them hope in difficult circumstances. When the prophets came to call the people to turn back to God, it was to turn away from sin, from individual sin, but particularly, we see, to call people from sinning against one another, from gaining an advantage against others, from being unjust, from not being merciful, and those kinds of things. And also to call them to turn back from serving other gods that they had begun to worship, sometimes alongside the God of the Bible, and sometimes to the exclusion of him. And so, often, we speak of the prophets as those who brought a covenant lawsuit, like a lawyer would bring, to bring God's people back, to give them an opportunity to repent and to turn to him and be faithful to the covenant that he had given them at Sinai in the book of Exodus, or we see the fuller version of that in the book of Deuteronomy.

But there was not always this message of only woe. There was a message of hope often, or sometimes in alliteration we say, woe and weal. You know, good news. What was their hope? What could they look to for God to deliver them from their

circumstances, or how they could persevere in them? So the prophets came to bring a message of warning at times and of hope at other times. But the important thing to remember is that he spoke to them in those circumstances, initially. And how we read those prophecies today has to start with what they meant to those people then.

Occasionally God would predict things in the future that would confirm or seal his authority, his credibility, his faithfulness. Unfortunately, we tend to think of the Old Testament prophets as only predicting things, which is actually probably a lesser percentage of what they did than to speak words of warning and words of hope and blessing.

Dr. Greg Perry

A lot of times people think about biblical prophecy mainly in terms of prediction and the fulfillment of predictions. Many of us have heard about how Jesus fulfills these predictions from the Old Testament, and that's certainly true, but it's not the primary purpose of biblical prophecy. The prophets really were representatives of the covenant to the king and to the people of God. And so over and over again we see the prophets in the Old Testament, not predicting something, but laying out in front of God's people that if they obey on the one hand, there will be blessing. If they disobey on the other hand, there will be curses; there will be sanctions to their disobedience. That represents the shape of the covenant that we see at the end of Deuteronomy for example of these blessings and curses. So again and again we see a prophet like Jeremiah, in chapter 18 of Jeremiah, lay out these possibilities. If you obey, blessing, if you disobey, curse. What's remarkable about that is that, through the prophets, God is reminding his people that he takes their covenant responsibilities seriously. So there's this sense of historical contingencies that is allowed for in biblical prophecy because God is taking seriously the actions of his people, either their obedience or their disobedience. So it's not just about predicting the future. Biblical prophecy, more importantly, is about God's people responding in faithfulness to the covenant and experiencing blessing or suffering curse because they have disobeyed God's covenant relationship.

Dr. Mark Gignilliat

God's prophets are the means by which he communicates to his people. And it's the way in which God's Word becomes effective within the midst of Israel's life. So, listening to the word of the Lord from the prophets is a means of grace within ancient Israel; this is how God spoke. And it wasn't always a happy word. When one thinks about Isaiah, for example, Isaiah was called to the ministry, and I call this the prophetic bait and switch, where he raises his hand and says, "I'll go for you, Lord," but then, you know, when he finds out what the fine print of the contract is, his ministry is really one of failure where the prophetic Word of the Lord is the means by which God hardens the people's ears and blinds their eyes. So, the Word of the Lord could go both ways. It could harden, but it could also be the means of their life when they listened and they heeded that word. And so, when you trace the history of Israel as it corresponds to God's prophets, what you see is when the people listen to God's prophets and follow their word, then there's life in that. But when they don't, there are huge repercussions. And you see this with the fall of the northern kingdom to

Assyria, then eventually the southern kingdom to Babylon. And then the list goes on and on. So, all of that finds its root in hearing and taking heed to the prophetic word of the Lord.

Question 2: **How did the process of prophetic inspiration work?**

Prophets fulfilled their jobs as administrators of God’s kingdom in a variety of ways. But one of the main things they did was to deliver divinely inspired prophecies to God’s people. But how much control did the prophets have over these prophecies? Did God tell them precisely what to say? Did the prophets invent things to say based on their understanding of God’s covenant and the actions of his people? How did the process of prophetic inspiration work?

Dr. Riad Kassis

Many would think that God was dictating to a secretary who was just typing what God was saying, and that was the prophet. But I think God who created our personalities and gave us brains and mind, and gave us a culture to live in, has directed the prophets in the Old Testament using their personalities, their understanding, their knowledge in a way, through the Holy Spirit, to convey his message to us. So I think God did not dictate word by word, but he used the knowledge, the personality of the prophets of the Old Testament.

Dr. Simon Vibert

Well, biblical prophets clearly believed that God was guiding and directing and overruling what they wrote, but there is a sense in which — the prophet Isaiah, the prophet Jeremiah — they come through in their prophecies, so they were men moved by the Spirit, as Peter says. So, the humanity still comes through, but actually God so overruled their message that what they said was both fully words of God, but actually fully human words as well.

Dr. Peter Chow (translation)

The book of Numbers discusses different levels of revelation. Sometimes it’s through visions and dreams. But when God spoke to Moses it was face to face, or as the original wording put it, straight from the mouth. When the Bible was being written, we believe that the revelation was of the highest order, an infallible and inerrant revelation. Special revelation never contains error. When God inspired the prophets to write the Bible, he also used their personalities, their experiences, and their previous training. They were not mechanical typewriters, writing down whatever words were being dictated. The revelation happened through their entire persons, by what is called “organic revelation” in traditional theology.

Rev. Jim Maples

The question of dictation of Old Testament prophecies, or the means in which the Holy Spirit used the prophets to relay these prophecies — I think we have to look to

the Scripture. The best answer is 2 Peter 1:20-21. He says, “Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture ... ever had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” The words there that the NIV translates, “carried along,” the Greek *pheromenoi*, means, “to be borne,” not in the sense of giving birth, but to be carried. Thus, the NIV’s translation, “carried along.” The one who is carried, or who is borne on some means of transportation, has nothing to do with the actual transport. He is simply the object that is being carried. Now, this passivity, B.B. Warfield referred to in *The Biblical Idea of Revelation*. He said this passivity does not deny the use of the prophets’ intelligence in the reception of the revelation. What it does do is deny the use of the prophets’ intelligence in the production of the revelation. These are God’s words. This is the Word of God transmitted through the prophets. And when we say that, we do not mean that it was dictation that the prophets were mere secretaries who wrote down everything that God said. They are living, intelligent beings and, of course, it is in their language, in their words, in their vernacular. It is a reflection of who they are, but the words themselves are God’s. And the questions that arise in this regard are, how can the prophecies — how can Scripture be inerrant and infallible unless God actually dictates it to men?

The other question, on the other extreme, some of our liberal folks want to say, well, it’s impossible for God to send his word through men without that word being infected with error because of their personalities and their prejudices and their backgrounds. But both of these overlook one thing that Warfield also pointed out. He said, to assert that God does not control intelligent creatures, intelligent beings which he himself created, and to deny that God can, through those beings, put his word purely into them and have them transmit it without error, denies his sovereignty over that which he’s created. Also, he said that to assert that God does not have the ability to take a rational creature, a rational mind that he himself created, and put into that mind thoughts that they themselves did not produce or come up with, denies his power and his sovereignty. And I think if we look at these things in that light, we see that God really did use these men from all kinds of backgrounds and all kinds of education — from the Pharisee of the Pharisees, Paul, to, you know, a farmer like Amos. And when we see these writings, what we see is the language of the prophet. We see his expressions. We see his perspectives. We see his background. But what we see is the Word of God truly, infallibly, inerrantly preserved and transmitted to us just as Peter said.

Question 3:

What was the main purpose of biblical prophecy?

Prophets were primarily responsible for administering God’s kingdom by reminding the people of their covenant obligations to God, and of the consequences of their obedience and disobedience. But what does prophecy have to do with this? Wasn’t prophecy mostly about seeing into the future? What was the main purpose of biblical prophecy?

Dr. Scott Redd

Many people believe that the purpose of biblical prophecy is to tell something about the future. Well, of course, that's incredibly significant and important to biblical prophecy. As a matter of fact, a false prophet is one who mistells the future. It's not the main purpose of biblical prophecy. Rather, biblical prophecy was a way for God to communicate to his covenant people in a way that would either encourage them to continue on the path on which they're on, or to dissuade them and to encourage them towards repentance that they might return to a path that they should be on. So, biblical prophecy is not so much about prognostication of future events as it is about proclamation of God's words to his people, requiring them either to return to him from a path of disobedience, or to encourage them along their way in covenant faithfulness to continue seeking him and following him.

Dr. Daniel Kim

The main purpose of biblical prophecy, as far as I could tell from the books of the prophetic writings in the Old Testament, is actually not to prophesy about the future Messiah, but it is for the purpose of trying to bring God's covenant people back into the proper relationship with him. So, for example, the purpose of the prophets like Isaiah is to get the folks in Judah to come back into a right relationship with him, being faithful to their covenantal obligations. Of course they give messages of hope, and that hope is what points us to Christ. But ultimately, the main purpose is for God's prophets to speak to their own people in such a way that they would be drawn back into the proper relationship with God, turning back from their sins that they have committed over the centuries and instead living in a right, proper way, doing justice and loving God and walking alongside him.

Dr. Gordon Johnston

When we study prophecy, one of the major questions we have to ask is what's the main purpose of prophecy? In a lot of popular-level contemporary literature, it tends to focus on trying to tease out the mysterious details and get a time line as far as this event versus that event, following next, and prophecy then becomes a study more for intellectual exercise, cognitive information. But biblical prophecy itself, when Yahweh inspired the prophets, it was primarily to move the people to obedience, so it wasn't so much content and information oriented as much as functional. Yahweh was primarily calling the people to obedience, calling them to repentance, for those that are already obedient, to persevere in faith and obedience; to those that are disobedient to repent of their sins. So it's primarily to move the people. If you will, biblical prophecy — Yahweh would reveal to the people that judgment was coming, but for the purpose that this could be avoided if the people would repent. Or he would reveal to the people, this is the blessing that's in the offing. But that was with the assumption that, if they continued to persevere in faith and obedience. So it's almost if you could think of a highway with exit ramps where the prophet would tell the people that they're on a path of danger, and this is what's at the end of the road, but there's an off-ramp. And so it's not simply that this is set in stone, that there's a calendar that we have to fulfill in the future, but it's primarily giving the people a providential

edge, if you will, that this is your fate, but this is fate that can be avoided if there's repentance.

Question 4:

Why don't some prophecies in Scripture come to pass as predicted?

Sometimes, when Christians read the Bible, they're troubled by the fact that many prophecies don't seem to be fulfilled. But if prophecy is God's Word, and God's Word is always true, then how can prophecies fail to be fulfilled? Don't failed prophecies only come from false prophets? Why don't some prophecies in Scripture come to pass as predicted?

Dr. Richard L. Pratt, Jr.

It's important to understand that, for the most part, faithful followers of Christ today don't understand exactly what the main focus of prophecy was in the days of the Bible. We often have this misconception: on the one side, when we read something that's negative, we think that the prophets are condemning people irrevocably to experiencing the curse of God, and when we read something positive, we think that the prophets are promising irrevocably that people are going to receive those promises from God. Now occasionally here and there in prophecy, especially when God takes an oath either to condemn or to give good blessings to people, we do have condemnations and promises, but for the most part, that's not the case. Rather than seeing prophecy as something that's absolute and cannot be varied in any way from the time it's predicted to the time it's fulfilled, what you find is, prophets are usually offering and they're threatening rather than promising and condemning.

Dr. Scott Redd

In Jeremiah 18 where the prophet articulates that when God proclaims a blessing on a nation and that nation turns away from the Lord, then that blessing will turn to a curse. Likewise, if God declares a curse on a nation and that nation repents and turns back to him, that curse will turn to blessing. So you see, the purpose of prophecy is not so much to just tell something about the future, but it's really to change behavior, to call God's people to him, to call them to covenant faithfulness. We see this throughout the Old Testament. In the case of Jonah with the Ninevites, calling the Ninevites to repentance. Jonah is not a false prophet because his prophecy of destruction over Nineveh does not come true. Rather, he shows that he is a true prophet, because when the Ninevites repent and turn to the Lord in repentance, the destruction is mollified and put off. Likewise, we see in the story about David's son with Bathsheba, David is told that his son will die, and yet he mourns and laments and repents to the Lord saying, who knows, maybe the Lord will take this judgment, this curse, away from me. David knew that true prophecy requires repentance, requires a response of faithfulness.

This is also the case with the story of Isaiah and Hezekiah. When Hezekiah becomes ill, Isaiah tells him, put your house in order for the disease that you have is fatal. But

Hezekiah repents and he turns to the Lord, and the Lord relents and extends Hezekiah's life. You see, Hezekiah knew that Isaiah is not a false prophet because his prophecy did not come true, but rather, his prophecy had the desired effect of calling about faithfulness in God's king Hezekiah.

Dr. Robert Lister

There is an interesting class of prophecies in Scripture that apparently are not fulfilled, or don't come to pass. Now, the classic example of this is in the book of Jonah, where Jonah goes to the city of Nineveh, when he finally gets there, and says, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown," in fulfillment of God's command to him to go and warn of coming judgment, coming condemnation on Nineveh. The people of Nineveh are not told that if they repent they will be spared. The king and the people surmise that perhaps this might be the case, and they decide to call a fast and, on the hope that if they repent, that God may relent of the judgment that he intended to do to them. They find, in fact, that that is what happens. And then you're left asking the question, "Was God's prophecy of judgment on the city of Nineveh true or not?" And in this case of prophecies of threatened judgment, because of this principle that we see in Jeremiah 18 that leads some people to talk of this kind of prophecy as a conditional prophecy, what I think we actually see is that God's intention is accomplished. God intends, by way of the word of warning through Jonah, to stir up the repentance of the Ninevites so that he may treat them in kind with mercy instead of judgment.

It is interesting that in the case of the book of Jonah, God does not just rain fire from heaven. He could. They're already wicked. They're already guilty. They're already deserving of judgment. So when Jonah shows up and says, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh will be overthrown," he attaches a time period. And it's interesting to ask the question: Why is there a time period between the announcement of God's judgment and the foretold experience of God's judgment? It seems to me that that's an indicator that God's purpose here is to give them an opportunity to repent. He initiates the relationship. He initiates the contact by issuing the word of warning so that there will be an opportunity to repent, when he could have just rained fire had he so chosen. He didn't. His desire was to stir up their repentance. It's also interesting to see Jonah's response to what happens to the Ninevites in chapter 4 of the book of Jonah. After the people repent, and God relents from his fierce anger, Jonah says effectively, I knew this is what you were going to do. This is why I fled to Tarshish in the first place, because I knew what kind of God you are: slow to anger, abounding in compassion, steadfast in love. Basically, you love to forgive sinners. That's why I left in the first place. Not because God told him, "I'm sending you there to preach this message with the result that they will repent," but God told him, "Go and preach judgment," and Jonah knew the character of God. So Jonah, it seems, knows that God's intention in this instance is to stir up their repentance, which means that God's word accomplishes what it was intended to accomplish.

If I could use an analogy, when I warn my children, my young children, not to play in the street, and I threaten them with judgment, so to speak, if they disobey that

command, my purpose in issuing that warning is not done in hopes that they will disobey my command and play in the street, and then I will have the opportunity to punish them; that's not my desire. My desire in stating the warning is to establish the boundary of prohibition so that they will heed my call and not do what I have prohibited in that instance. In a similar fashion, God's taking the initiative with these people who, like all of the rest of us don't deserve it, is done so for the purpose of stirring up their repentance so he may relate to them in kind. It's not the only kind of prophecy that there is. There are prophesies of unilateral direct fulfillment by God, and prophesies where God says he's going to directly do something through this or that person, and it is unconditionally fulfilled. But there are some examples of prophesies, like this one, where it seems that the condition attaches, and the point of the threat of judgment or the promise of blessing hinges on either continued obedience on the one hand, or repentance on the other.

Question 5:

How can we be sure that Jesus will fulfill the prophecies about his return?

When some Christians realize that the prophecies of true prophets don't always come to pass as stated, they start to worry about the return of Jesus. They start to ask questions like: Is he really coming back? What if his return is conditional, and the condition isn't fulfilled? These are legitimate questions. How can we be sure that Jesus will fulfill the prophecies about his return?

Dr. Peter Chow (translation)

We have confidence because Jesus Christ is the truth. He does not lie, and he will accomplish all that he has promised. Since Jesus has promised that he will come again and take us to the place he has prepared for us, we can believe with full assurance that he will come again because he does not lie.

Rev. Jim Maples

When we look at the prophecies about Jesus' return and we wonder, or people question, can these be believed, are these reliable, I think we need to go first to the Old Testament. There are over 300 prophecies in the Old Testament concerning Christ's coming. John Gerstner, in his book *Reason for Faith*, said that someone went to the trouble to calculate the probability of those things coming to pass in the life of one person by sheer coincidence, and they determined that it was a number that was 8.4×10^{41} of 1%. In other words, it is a virtual impossibility. And yet, we know, and we see in the Scripture over and over, in the Gospels, this phrase, "this happened to fulfill that which was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah." "This happened to fulfill that which was spoken of by the prophet Malachi," and on and on, David, Zachariah, and so forth. So we see the truth of the Old Testament prophecies fulfilled in the life of Christ. When we come to the New Testament, there are over 300 references and/or prophecies concerning Christ's return. And many of those were spoken of by Christ the prophet himself. And we see, like in Luke 21, Jesus said, "Heaven and earth will

pass away, but my words will not pass away.” And this follows hard on the heels of his description of his own return. So how can we believe the prophecies of Christ’s return? One, we have historical proof and evidence that the Scripture is true and these prophecies do come to pass just as the prophets say, and secondly, we have his word on it.

Question 6:

Is Jesus the prophet like Moses that was foretold in Deuteronomy chapter 18?

As we think about the ways that Jesus fulfilled the office of prophet, one passage that helps us understand his role is Deuteronomy 18, where we’re told that God would eventually raise up another prophet like Moses from among the people. Theologians commonly recognize that this prophecy referred to the future Messiah, whom we know to be Jesus. Is Jesus the prophet like Moses that was foretold in Deuteronomy 18?

Dr. Peter Chow (translation)

In Deuteronomy 18, Moses foretold that God would raise up a prophet like himself and that the people should listen to this prophet. This is all closely related to the revival of God’s kingdom. So who could this prophet be, the one who is raised up and will be like Moses? We must understand that Moses was not just a prophet, but was the mediator of the covenant at Sinai. 1 Corinthians 10 mentions that when the Israelites crossed the Red Sea, they were baptized into Moses. So Moses was not just a prophet, but the mediator of the covenant. So, who is this prophet to be raised up that will be like Moses? Jesus Christ, the mediator of the new covenant. The prophecy in Deuteronomy 18 that predicts that God will raise up a prophet like Moses points to Jesus Christ, who will bring God’s kingdom.

Dr. Glen Scorgie

It’s very interesting that we have in the Scriptures certain parallels drawn, sometimes explicitly, between Moses and the future Jesus. The significance of that, I think, is intriguing. Because at one level, the emphasis of the New Testament as it presents Jesus is that one greater than Moses is now present. And we could list some of the significant ways that Jesus Christ is greater than Moses. But all of that relative greatness is premised on certain affinities or similarities between Moses and Jesus, always keeping in mind that eventually, if you will, Jesus trumps Moses. But Moses is the quintessential mediator of the Law of God. And in some ways, you know, the Sermon on the Mount is the upgrade on the Mount of Sinai, where Jesus says, “You have heard it said...but now I say to you” — not in a way that discredits Moses, but intensifies and deepens the wisdom that Moses was able to apprehend. Moses was the liberator, the one God used to bring a people in bondage into a promised land. And in a somewhat more spiritualized and profoundly more important way, Jesus is the new and greater Moses who delivers people from the multifaceted dimensions of bondage into the promised land of infinite grace and an eternal future. I’m sure there are many

other similarities between the two, but the way the Messiah is presented in the gospel is always a matter of comparing and then upgrading with Jesus.

Dr. Frank Barker

Well, the connection between the prophet that God would raise up who would be like Moses in connection with Christ is, of course, that prophet would be the Lord Jesus Christ. And Moses was a type of the Lord Jesus Christ in one sense. Remember when God gave the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai, the mountain thundered and shook and the people said, “Mmmm-oses, you go talk to him,” and they sensed their need of a mediator. And God, in Deuteronomy 18, says, they have well said what they said, because they do need a mediator, and I will raise up the real mediator, a prophet like you, Moses. He will come and he will be the one who will be the true mediator. So Deuteronomy 18 really points to that.

Question 7:

In the transfiguration, why did God only command the disciples to listen to Jesus?

During his transfiguration, Jesus revealed his glory to some of his disciples, and both Moses and Elijah appeared and spoke with Jesus. But when Peter suggested making shelters for Jesus, Moses and Elijah, God responded by commanding the disciples to listen to Jesus; he didn't say anything about Moses and Elijah. Why didn't God mention these heroes of the faith? In the transfiguration, why did God only command the disciples to listen to Jesus?

Dr. Stephen Wellum

One of the unique events in Christ's life is his transfiguration. At the transfiguration it's as if for a moment the veil is pulled back and we see the glory of God the Son incarnate. It's very interesting there, when we think of the prophetic ministry of Christ, that Moses and Elijah meet with him. Moses and Elijah really stand as pinnacle prophets in the Old Testament. Moses, obviously, as the one where the whole prophetic line comes from him. Deuteronomy 18 anticipates a prophet like him. Elijah also serves a unique role where, as the later prophets come, he stands head and shoulders above the other prophets. And there's anticipation of an Elijah figure picked up in John the Baptist who will come. So that those two individuals who are there with Christ on the Mount, God the Father says, as important as those prophets are, those prophets serve the role of ultimately pointing forward to the coming of the Son. And now in the revelation that has come in Jesus Christ, God the Son incarnate, the summation of the prophets has come to pass. We are to listen to him and him alone, and in listening to him we are listening to the prophets. We are listening to that which the prophets ultimately spoke of and pointed forward to.

Dr. Peter Chow (translation)

During the transfiguration God said, “This is my beloved Son, listen to him.” But he did not say that they should listen to Moses or Elijah. Why? It's because Moses

represents the Law and Elijah the prophets, and the Law and the prophets represent the revelation of God throughout the Old Testament. During the transfiguration, God's words meant that Jesus Christ is the one who fulfills all of the prophecies of the Old Testament Law and the prophets. Since Jesus is that fulfillment, Jesus is the one we are to listen to.

Question 8:

How is God's revelation through Jesus superior to his revelation through other prophets?

Throughout the Bible, prophets like Moses and Elijah revealed God's will in critically important ways. They reminded God's people of their covenant obligations, calling them to repentance, and delivering a message of hope in future redemption. The New Testament makes it clear that as a prophet, Jesus is superior to all the prophets that came before him. But in what way? If all prophets do essentially the same job, and all speak the words of God, why is Jesus better than the rest? How is God's revelation through Jesus superior to his revelation through other prophets?

Dr. Vern Poythress

How is God's revelation through Jesus superior to the prophets who came before? Hebrews 1 talks about that very superiority in saying, "Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature." What you're seeing there is that the Son's revelation is superior because of who he is, that he is God himself, that he perfectly reveals God. It's also the culmination of those foreshadowing and prophecies that were there in the Old Testament. It is a final revelation. It is the definitive revelation that is the capstone of everything that came before.

Dr. Simon Vibert

The revelation of God through his Son Jesus is described variously, particularly in Hebrews 1, as being full, sufficient and final, that Jesus is God's last word, and there is a sense in which Jesus in his incarnation not only came as a fully perfect human being, but he also came to reveal God, and therefore there is a sense which nobody else could have done what Jesus did. He's not just another prophet, he is actually coming God in the flesh to show us what God is like, and therefore we encourage the readers of the Bible to see Jesus as God's full and final revelation of himself.

Dr. Gideon Umukoro

Jesus is the prophet. We have other prophets who came to speak about him, but when he came we heard directly from the true and only prophet who has no flaw in his message. And the Scripture in Deuteronomy where Moses was talking about God raising another prophet from among us who is going to be greater than every other

prophet that lived, that really came to my mind that his words are the final, and that is the authority that we have in the Word of God today. Any other prophet that comes to speak to us outside of this true prophet of God who came in his human form, I would say this prophecy could be subjective, but the whole truth and counsel of God has been spoken to us through Jesus Christ in his prophetic office.

Dr. Glen Scorgie

As prophet, Jesus reveals more than any of the previous prophets. Particularly, he reveals, with more clarity than any one of them achieved, the plan of redemption, and he also penetrated in his prophecies, his forth-telling of God's truth, the profound ethical and spiritual dimensions of God's holy expectations. He revealed the future with greater clarity than any one of them was able to do. But I think that the distinction, the real watershed difference between Christ as the prophet "par excellence" and all the faithful prophets of the past is hinted at the outset of the epistle to the Hebrews where we're told that in many ways and in different times God spoke through the prophets. It was real prophecy, but now he has spoken to us through his Son, and it's something about the unique identify of this prophet that's key to understanding his superiority.

And I think it can be distilled to this — that of all the truth that we can acquire through investigation or through revelation, there are two kinds of knowledge that stand out as of paramount importance: knowledge of God and knowledge of who we really are. And in the God-man, Jesus Christ the prophet, we have the clearest revelation ever, before or since, of what God is like. We look upon the face of Jesus and there we see God through a window like no other. Ever. And the great mystery is that in his full and complete identification with us, we also see in Jesus Christ what true restored humanity looks like. Not only is Jesus Christ the supreme and quintessential window of revelation into the true nature of God, but he is also, precisely because he has taken upon himself our complete and full humanity, he is the revelation to us of what we are destined to become. He is the prototype of the new humanity. He is in the present what we are destined to become when this defaced image of God in us is fully restored to its untarnished splendor. He points to our future through the grace of God. And so in the incarnate Christ, we have both the most profound insight into the true nature of God, and we see also in the face of Jesus our own destiny and future through the redeeming and glorifying grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Dr. Carl Trueman

God's revelation through Jesus is superior to his revelation through other prophets I think in two major ways. First of all, Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophets. As he tells the disciples on the Emmaus road that these prophecies spoke of him and were fulfilled in him. Secondly, there is the fact that Jesus is God manifest in the flesh. Other prophecies pointed towards God. Jesus himself was the manifestation, the very revelation of God's inner being in the flesh.

Dr. Brandon Crowe

God's revelation to us through Jesus is superior to any other revelation that has come through the prophets in a number of ways. First, we see that Jesus teaches with an unparalleled authority. One of the remarkable things as you read through the Gospels is not just that the people were amazed at his authority when he healed someone or cast out a demon, but they were even amazed at the authority of his teaching. It was an authority that was unmediated; it was an authority that came from Jesus himself in a way that was unique among those who came before him. But we also see, secondly, that Jesus is superior in revelation because he's not simply teaching God's law; he's actually fulfilling God's law. He was born in the fullness of time and came to fulfill all righteousness. So, as Jesus is teaching about who God is, he is also fulfilling what God has been requiring of his people. A third way is Jesus is God incarnate. He is the one who has made God known in a way that no one before him could ever make God known in the same way, because as John tells us, he is himself in the Father's bosom and is himself the only begotten God. This Son of God, the only begotten God, is making God known in a way that no one else ever could in the same way that he gave us grace and truth in his teaching, in a way that not even Moses could do.

Question 9:**Has Jesus made the Old Testament prophets irrelevant for Christians?**

Scripture and theology ensure us that God's revelation through Jesus is superior to his revelation through other prophets. But does that make the other prophets obsolete? Is there any benefit to reading their writings? Has Jesus made the Old Testament prophets irrelevant for Christians?

Dr. Glen Scorgie

One of the roles that Jesus fulfilled in his incarnation, the Son fulfilled in his incarnation, was a prophetic role, and some people ask in what ways was Jesus as prophet superior to the Old Testament prophets? First of all, it's important to clarify that he did not refute the antecedent prophets. His superiority was not a superiority of contradiction but of standing on their shoulders and going beyond what they had been able to perceive and faithfully communicate to the people of God.

Dr. Guy Waters

Well, it becomes clear in reading Hebrews and in the rest of the New Testament that Jesus has not displaced the prophets; Jesus is not coming along saying something different from what the prophets have said. Rather, the point that Hebrews is making, the point the New Testament writers make of the Old Testament is that Jesus is, on the one hand, the final word. He is the last in the succession of prophets, but he's not simply one prophet among many. He is that prophet who brings all to fulfillment that to which all earlier prophecy, all earlier prophets were looking and anticipating, and he is God's final and complete Word. So what that does is it enables us to go back and read those prophets rightly because we understand the trajectory, we understand the goal to which all of those prophets and their revelation was moving. And if you

read on in the epistle to the Hebrews, you see in chapter after chapter examples of just that, how it was that God's old covenant prophets were looking to Jesus Christ and their prophetic word was anticipating the final consummate word in Jesus Christ.

Question 10:

Can we have a true appreciation for Jesus' teachings without also appreciating the rest of Scripture?

Even unbelievers recognize that Jesus was an important teacher. In fact, there are many people throughout the world that say they're happy with Jesus, but that they have problems accepting the rest of the Bible. Is this a legitimate approach to take? Can we have a true appreciation for Jesus' teachings without also appreciating the rest of Scripture?

Dr. Peter Walker

The words of Jesus Christ are so precious, and it's absolutely vital that we should listen to those words. There are some Bibles who actually print the words of Jesus in red for that reason, to try and give them an extra level of importance. And in one sense, that's good; the words of the Master are vital. But Jesus himself would say that there's more teaching that we need to receive, and that the rest of the Scripture is vitally important. And he says this, actually, both about the Old Testament and about what will become, after him, the New Testament. With regard to the Old Testament, Jesus himself in Luke 24, the risen Jesus, takes the disciples there on the Emmaus road back through a Bible study of the Old Testament, and he shows them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. Now, that must mean that Jesus saw the Old Testament as important, as pointing to him. And it's almost as if he's saying, "Look, you may have the resurrection, my resurrection, that's marvelous, but don't think because you've now got me, you don't need the text, you don't need the background book. On the contrary, you need it all the more to understand me and to understand God's purposes for the world." So, we see Jesus affirming the Old Testament then and in many other instances — I mean, when he's tempted, he just keeps repeating, "It is written... It is written... It is written..." — this is the Master showing us that if he was submitted to Scripture, how much more do we his followers need to be? So that's the Old Testament.

And as for the New, well, obviously it isn't written at the time when Jesus is speaking, but in John's gospel, for example, he says, you know, the Spirit is given to lead you "into all truth." And he says, now look, I haven't been able to tell you everything you need to know, and there's more truth that needs to come, and that you need to receive and then pass on. So, I take it that that's actually effectively Jesus' commissioning his disciples, his apostles, to write truths about him, things which he couldn't convey at the time, and which wouldn't have been understood at the time. And if that's the case, then we do need the New Testament, because it's not just the words of Christ that are important, it's the words about Christ, and we need someone

else other than Jesus to tell us who Jesus is. And that's what we have in the New Testament. The answer is, yes, we need the whole Scripture.

Dr. Frank Thielman

We know that Christ is the ultimate fulfillment of God's purposes. He's the very Word of God according to John 1, the explanation to us of who God is. And so it's understandable why people on a first glance might think that, well, the Old Testament now has been fulfilled. It's a big thick book. It's sort of complicated. Do we really need to pay attention to it? But it's absolutely critical that we read the whole Bible. Not just the New Testament and not just the words of Jesus. Because the whole Bible is God's revelation of himself to us, and there are many wonderful elements of God's character that are revealed to us in the Old Testament. We can't really even understand who Jesus is apart from the Old Testament because Jesus is the Christ; he is Jesus Christ. And we can't understand what it means for him to be Christ, or the anointed King, unless we read the Old Testament. Psalm 2 is a very good example of that where God's anointed King is said to be given victory by God, and we know from what the New Testament says that that Psalm is fulfilled in Christ.

Another really important reason, which would be enough apart from anything else, is that what we call the Old Testament was the Bible of the first Christians. What we call the Old Testament was Jesus's own Bible. He considered it God's authoritative Word and God's Scriptures. Paul considers the Old Testament to be God's Word. And so in the very well-known verse, 1 Timothy 3:16, where Paul tells Timothy that all Scripture is inspired by God, since there was at that time no written New Testament, he was referring to the Old Testament. Now we correctly believe that that principle in that verse can be extended to cover the New Testament and that it, too, is inspired by God and is the fulfillment of the Old, but its very first reference is to the Old Testament itself. So, if we want to be New Testament Christians, we've got to read, understand, explain, exegete, and preach the Old Testament.

Dr. Simon Vibert

Obviously when we read the New Testament accounts they take us straight to Jesus and his full and final work, but in the anticipation of Christ's coming, we learn much about the sacrificial system, the way in which God's design for kingship in the kingdom brought about in anticipation of Christ's coming, and so Christians are now able to go back now and read the Old Testament through the eyes of Christ's coming and to gain greater understanding of the way in which God was preparing for his Son to come into the world and to do the work that he did. And, therefore, Christians are encouraged to read the whole of the Bible, but to actually to see Christ as the key for unlocking the meaning not only of the New Testament but also the Old as well.

Question 11:**What is the relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament?**

In his role as prophet, Jesus commissioned his apostles and prophets to write additional Scriptures, which we call the New Testament. So, now that we have the New Testament, how are we supposed to use the Old Testament? Is it just a historical record? Does it still apply to our lives? Does it work together with the New Testament in some way? What is the relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament?

Dr. Peter Chow (translation)

The whole Bible is the revelation of God. Without the Old Testament it's very difficult for us to understand the New Testament. The New Testament is the fulfillment of the Old Testament, but the Old Testament forms the premise of the New. Without the Old Testament, we'd be hard-pressed to know what the New Testament is talking about when it discusses fulfillment. We can put it this way: the Bible is very long, and not every phrase can be applied in the same way. Some passages of the New Testament may have more direct application to our lives today than those in the Old Testament, but we can't go without it, because without the Old Testament we can't fully understand the New Testament.

Dr. Frank Thielman

The Old Testament tells a story that is incomplete without the New Testament. And the New Testament tells a story that cannot be fully understood without what we read in the Old Testament. The story begins with God's creation of humanity, and the story continues with human sin and rebellion against God. And then the story continues with Israel and God's work through Israel to, among his people, to give them his laws and to have them be a witness for who he is to all of creation. Israel wasn't faithful in that task, but the record of how God gave them that task is a very important element in understanding who Jesus is. Well then, Jesus comes, and the New Testament shows us how he fulfilled the task that Israel really failed to fulfill. And in fulfilling that task, he not only called Israel to repentance, but all of humanity. And so, in the end of the story — and we're not there yet, but we're told what it's going to be — in the end of the story, God restores humanity to what he intended for it to be in the beginning. We can't really understand that whole story, and Christ's absolutely central and critical role in it, apart from knowing the Old Testament as well. So, the Law, the prophets, the writings, they're all important.

Question 12:**Why did Jesus' gospel message focus on repentance and the kingdom of God?**

When modern Christians proclaim the gospel, we often emphasize things like Jesus' identity, the forgiveness of sins, and God's free offer of eternal life. But in his role as prophet, Jesus tended to summarize the gospel by saying things like "Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand." Why did Jesus' gospel message focus on repentance and the kingdom of God?

Dr. Stephen Wellum

A lot wrestle with the relationship between the gospel. We have a summary of it maybe, say in 1 Corinthians 15 that Christ has come; he has died according to the Scriptures for our sins; he was buried; he was raised again for our salvation — and then the announcement of the kingdom. Sometimes people set these over against each other, as if there's a kingdom message and a kind of gospel message, even so much where they would say that the announcement of the kingdom and Jesus' earthly life doesn't really give us a message of the cross, a message of his atonement, and atoning work for our salvation. This is not a correct way of putting it together. The message of the kingdom is intimately tied to the gospel message of death, burial and resurrection. The kingdom must be understood in terms of the Old Testament. All the way back with Adam's fall into sin, plunging the human race into depravity, affecting all of creation, you have the promise of God that he will bring his saving rule and reign to this world. That's worked out in a whole host of ways in the Old Testament, primarily in the coming of the Lord himself through the Davidic king, these great messianic themes. Christ is the one who is the Lord, who is the King. He is the one who ushers in that saving reign. He ushers in that saving reign by not only his incarnation and his life, and putting to flight his enemies, you think of Satan and his powers, but he does so ultimately in consummation on the cross, in his resurrection. The problem of sin is a relationship with God, and all of its effects upon the human race. Sin has to be dealt with before God. And so the inauguration of the kingdom takes us to the cross, demonstrated then that he has won victory over sin, he has paid our price before God's righteous requirements, resurrection now has taken place, and the gospel message of death, burial, and resurrection is the very inauguration of that kingdom that is here and then will be consummated in the end. So the relationship between the two is intimately put together in the Scriptures.

Dr. Stephen Chan (translation)

"The kingdom of heaven is near. Repent and believe the good news!" This kingdom is the authority of God. When the authority of God comes, the only attitude people should have is that of repentance, turning their hearts around completely from that of self-centered treason and rebellion against God to being God-centered and obedient to him. Repentance is not just a feeling of remorse for one's sins, but a positive turning towards God, living a new life through God's grace, a complete turnaround, renewal, and changing of the will that produces a holy, sanctified life. Repentance isn't just remorse or regret, but a renewal.

Question 13:

Should Christians regularly confess and repent of our sins?

The 16th-century Reformer Martin Luther famously taught that repentance isn't just necessary as a means of obtaining salvation when we first come to faith. He insisted that repentance is also necessary because it helps us live continually in our restored relationship with God. But was he right? Do we really need to keep repenting of our sins if we've already trusted in Christ? Should Christians regularly confess and repent of our sins?

Dr. Stephen Wellum

Yes, the question of repentance and confession of our sin is very, very important for us, especially in relation to Christ's work as prophet. We normally think of these things in terms of his priestly work, but when we think of it in terms of his prophetic work — from the Old Testament God speaks of his coming salvation as well as coming judgment — so that we are to align ourselves with his kingdom, to align ourselves with what he is doing in the world. Repentance at its heart is changing our mind. Confession, sometimes we think of it as agreeing with God, that what he is doing is exactly right. So that when we think of his prophetic work — Christ has come, he has fulfilled the prophecies, he has brought his kingdom to pass yet it still awaits its culmination. We as Christians, we enter into that kingdom but we need to constantly be reevaluating in terms of our priorities, repenting of not following him as we ought, making sure that we are faithfully seeking to live out our lives in conformity to his will, agreeing with him in terms of his values, what the kingdom is all about. So, there's a constant need for repentance, confession, coming to him as our prophet, as well as priest, as well as King, the one that we then seek to follow and serve in such a way where we carry out his purposes for us in this world.

Dr. Peter Chow (translation)

Repentance and confession are very important because we need to keep a clean conscience before God. We must become clean vessels, suitable for God. Not only that, but when we have guilty consciences, God will discipline us, and that can be difficult and painful. So, don't ask for trouble, but hurry before the cross. Confess and repent of your sins so that you can be covered by the precious blood of the Lord. That way we can experience the peace and joy of life and become precious vessels, useful to the Lord.

Dr. Simon Vibert

In our worship services we're encouraged to begin by repenting of our sins, and that's not because we think we need to become Christians all over again, but there is a sense in which in becoming a Christian, you believe for the first time, the direction of your life changes, but repentance means change of mind leading to change of conduct, and in a sense we regularly need to do that because all of us continue to be sinful and all of us need to continue to repent of our sins. So, ongoingly we say sorry to God for our sins as we repent daily of the things that we do wrong.

Question 14:**How can believers stay motivated to be faithful to God and avoid sin?**

Jesus, God's ultimate prophet, calls us to repentance and continuing obedience, so that we can enjoy the benefits of his kingdom. But sometimes being faithful to God actually makes life more difficult. And that can make it hard to get excited about living in ways that please our Lord. So, practically speaking, how can believers stay motivated to be faithful to God and avoid sin?

Dr. Dan Doriani

God says that we should be motivated by love and fear. Not quivering, quailing, servile fear, fear of a beating and punishment. But there is a godly fear, you know, fear the Lord and do what is right. We should have an awe, a reverence of God that doesn't want to let down someone whom we greatly respect. We would not want to let down a beloved father, or grandfather, or leader of our people. We'd be afraid of letting them down. There's a godly fear of failing or disappointing God whom we love. But then that's the main motive, isn't it? That we should do what is right out of love for God, out of the conviction that he is a worthy object of our service, and that when we love him, by obeying him, we'll also love our neighbor. After all, what does the law command? What's the essence of the law? Love the Lord your God, heart, soul, mind and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself.

If I press a little bit further, let me imagine a scenario in which three people are standing in front of a crowd, and they're all runners and they're being interviewed, and the interviewer says, "Tell me, sir, why do you run?" The first person says, "I run because my father had a heart attack at the age of 53, and I'm currently 52, and you know, I want to live a good, ripe life, I want to see my children get married, I want to see my grandchildren get married. That's why I run." Okay, number two, "Sir, why do you run?" The second man says, "I run because I like to eat sweets, and if I run enough I can eat whatever I want. And besides that, I sleep better at night if I run just about every day." A third person: "Why do you run?" He says, "I run because when I run I feel alive. I run because I love to feel my heart pounding in my chest like slow heavy thunder. I run because I want to feel the ground soaring under my feet, the wind blowing through my hair. That's why I run." Now I ask you, which one of these three men loves to run? The second man loves to eat whatever he wants. The first man loves his own life. The third man really loves running. He loves it for its own sake. And I think that's what God wants. I mean, there are benefits from obeying God, to be sure. We do live a longer life, life is better, but ideally we obey God because we love him. And that's what keeps us going even when those benefits aren't so obvious.

Dr. Simon Vibert

The motivation to live the Christian life and to avoid sin is spoken of in various ways in the New Testament. I think primarily, the motivation is that heaven is ahead, and that heaven will be perfect. We will no longer struggle with sin. We will look forward to seeing our Lord face to face. And there is a sense in which each one of us has a

sense of homesickness for heaven because that's our true home and where we belong. And the motivation for living the Christian life is partly out of sheer gratitude for all that Christ has done for us on the cross, but there is also a forward look, an expectation, that God will provide all the resources that we need to live lives that are pleasing to God and that are honoring, and we continue to draw upon those resources until he finally takes us home.

Dr. Peter Chow (translation)

Traditionally, the so-called "means of grace" are useful: God's Word, which we are to read often; Communion, so we remember the Lord; we also need to pray often and have fellowship in the Lord. Besides the means of grace, I'd also like to emphasize that we must have a heart of thankfulness. The Gospel of Luke speaks of a woman who came to Jesus when he was a guest at the house of a Pharisee. When her tears wet Jesus' feet, she used her hair to wipe them, and then anointed them with oil. She did this because Jesus told her that her sins were forgiven. And because she had been forgiven much, she loved much. So, for us to be able to serve the Lord wholeheartedly, we need to love him, and we need a thankful heart. We need to see how serious our sins are, and see how dark and frightening our hearts are, and how much we need the Holy Spirit's illumination. When we see the depths of our depravity, we can then understand and comprehend how great God's grace is, and because we have been forgiven much, love much. This heart of thankfulness should be the motivation for our lifelong service.

Throughout the Bible, God's prophets were his ambassadors. Their ministries were designed to maintain God's relationship with his people, so that the people would receive God's blessings. And in his office of prophet, Jesus fulfills this same function. He came as the greatest revelation of God's being and of God's will. He brought God's kingdom message of judgment and salvation. And he has continued to minister to the church in these same ways – exhorting us to faithfulness, so that we can enjoy abundant life in this world, and everlasting rewards in the world to come.

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We Believe in Jesus

LESSON
FOUR

THE PRIEST



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We Believe in Jesus

Lesson Four

The Priest

INTRODUCTION

Most of us can barely imagine being invited to meet someone very famous and powerful. But we all know how we might react. We'd say to ourselves, "Will someone introduce me? What should I wear? What should I do? What should I say? Who can show me how to act when I'm there?"

Imagine that you were invited into the glorious throne room of God. The one who created all things. You might have a similar reaction, actually one vastly stronger. "Is there anyone to introduce me to God? What should I do? What should I say? Who can show me how to act in God's presence?"

Happily, there is someone who can prepare us to meet with God, who can introduce us to him, and can cause God to look favorably on us so that we don't need to fear his judgment. And of course, this person is Jesus Christ, and he is our Great High Priest.

This is the fourth lesson in our series *We Believe in Jesus*, and we have entitled it "The Priest." In this lesson, we'll explore the ways that Jesus fulfills the biblical office of priest, mediating the covenant between God and his people.

As we've seen in prior lessons, in the Old Testament God instituted three offices through which he administered his kingdom: the offices of prophet, priest and king. And in the final stage of God's kingdom, which we commonly call the New Testament age, all three of these offices find their ultimate fulfillment in Jesus.

For this reason, studying the importance and function of these offices throughout history can help us understand Jesus' present administration of God's kingdom, as well as the blessings and obligations of his faithful followers. In this lesson, we'll focus on Jesus' office of priest. We'll define a priest as:

A person who mediates between God and his people so that God will receive them into his special holy presence to grant them his blessing.

We all know that God is invisibly present everywhere all the time. But at certain times and places, he also manifests himself in special, visible ways. For example, he does this in the radiant splendor of his heavenly throne room. And he sometimes does this on earth, too. And whenever creatures come near this kind of manifestation of God, we have to be properly prepared, represented and led, so that we can receive God's approval and blessings. In the Bible, this kind of preparation, representation and leading was the job of the priests.

Like our lesson on Jesus' office of prophet, this lesson on Jesus' office of priest will cover three main topics. First, we'll examine the Old Testament background to the priestly office. Second, we'll explore the fulfillment of this office in the person and work

of Jesus. And third, we'll consider the modern application of Jesus' priestly work. Let's look first at the Old Testament background to Jesus' priestly office.

OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND

When most Christians think about priesthood in the Old Testament, their minds go immediately to Aaron and his descendants, who were ordained as priests during the days of Moses, as we read in Leviticus 8–9.

But it's important to recognize that even before the days of Moses, there were already priests who served God. In a very broad sense, even before the fall into sin God ordained Adam, the father of the human race to be his priest. And following Adam, all of humanity was originally called to be God's priests in this general sense.

In a more technical sense, we find men like Melchizedek in Abraham's day, who is mentioned in Genesis 14. He was both the king and priest of Salem. Job 1 indicates that Job himself acted as a priest for his family. And according to Exodus 3, Moses' own father-in-law Jethro was God's priest in Midian.

Eventually, God established an official and exclusive priesthood in which Aaron and his descendants replaced all other forms of priesthood. But all these different types of men were true priests of the Lord. And each is part of the Old Testament background of Jesus' priesthood.

We'll explore the Old Testament background of the priestly office in three ways. First, we'll look at the qualifications of priests. Second, we'll consider their function. And third, we'll explore the expectations the Old Testament created for the future of the priestly ministry. Let's look first at the qualifications that priests had to meet in the Old Testament.

QUALIFICATIONS

Ancient priests had to meet a variety of qualifications, but we'll mention just two that Scripture emphasizes. First, we'll see that priests were appointed by God. And second, we'll highlight their obligation to be loyal to God. Let's begin with the fact that priests were appointed by God to serve him in their office.

Appointed by God

In the Old Testament, only God could appoint a priest. Priests were never self-appointed. They couldn't be voted into office. They couldn't be appointed by kings or other rulers. And even the priests themselves couldn't select additional people to serve in their ranks. Listen to Exodus 28:1, where God gave this command to Moses:

Have Aaron your brother brought to you ... along with his sons ... so they may serve me as priests (Exodus 28:1).

The detailed instructions that follow in Exodus 28 show that God's appointment was an indispensable part of Aaron's ordination as high priest. And Numbers 18:22-23 goes so far as to say that if any Israelite from another tribe presumed to do the work of a priest, that person would die. Hebrews 5:1, 4 confirms this idea with these words:

Every high priest is selected from among men and is appointed to represent them in matters related to God... No one takes this honor upon himself; he must be called by God, just as Aaron was (Hebrews 5:1, 4).

This same principle also applied not just to the high priest, but to all priests in the Old Testament.

Besides being appointed by God, priests also had to be loyal to God in order to qualify for their office.

Loyal to God

Because priests often served near the special presence of God in the tabernacle and the temple, they had to demonstrate special loyalty to God by worshiping and serving him alone, and by carefully carrying out their duties. They also had to do these things in order to ensure that God's people were loyal to God, so that they would be received into his holy presence.

We learn from the Old Testament priests that there were very particular rules they had to follow, and there was a very particular way they had to even offer the fire of the sacrifice, and there was a certain way they had to investigate the animals brought to sacrifice to make sure that they were perfect, that they indeed were unblemished. God required that. And the priest had certain garments that he had to wear, and he had certain washings that he needed to go through, and the book of Hebrews emphasizes that the details of all of this, including the tabernacle and all the things in the tabernacle, were given because they represent what he called the "heavenly tabernacle," where — which is the very presence of God. The priests, therefore, are representing the Lord Jesus Christ. The priests are representing the kind of holiness and the kind of satisfaction that must be given to God if we are to be forgiven. And so, everything in the priestly arrangements, in the priestly laws, is given to show us the perfection of who Christ is, and that he actually would bear the sins of his people. The garments that they wore and the names of the tribes written on them and the perfection of the sacrifices, all of these things are to show us how serious God takes this, how holy he is, and that

when you come to the end of it there is really going to be only one way in which salvation can come. If there's any compromise of that one way, then we're done for and there is no satisfaction. So, the priestly rules are very important to establish within our minds the seriousness of God's holiness and righteousness and the singularity of the sacrifice of Christ.

— Dr. Thomas Nettles

One of the most dramatic examples of the need for priests to be holy appears in Leviticus 10:1-2. There, God killed the priests Nadab and Abihu because of their unholy offering. And in 1 Samuel 4, the priests Hophni and Phineas died because of their disregard for the Lord.

In addition to these examples, Scriptures like Psalm 132:9 and Lamentations 4:11-13 make it clear that the priests themselves had to be faithful to God if they were to have any hope of preparing and leading his people into his special presence in order to receive his blessings. Otherwise, drawing near to God would result in severe judgment.

Having seen the qualifications for priests in the Old Testament, let's look at their function.

FUNCTION

We'll consider three aspects of the function of priests. First, we'll look at the leadership they provided. Second, we'll explore the ceremonies they performed. And third, we'll consider their intercession on behalf of others. Let's begin with the leadership priests provided.

Leadership

Old Testament priests provided leadership for God's people in various ways. But for our purposes we'll summarize these under three headings. First, worship was one of the more prominent areas in which priests provided leadership.

Worship was an important part of preparing and leading God's people into his special holy presence. In Israel, priests and Levites presided over all the national worship events, such as the annual feasts of Israel. They also conducted worship in the tabernacle and temple on a daily basis, as well as special services on the weekly Sabbath. And they led participants in praise and singing. We find these kinds of details in places like 1 Chronicles 15; 2 Chronicles 7, 8, 29 and 30; and Nehemiah 12.

Second, priests provided special guidance in the form of civil and ritual judgments. They did this primarily by applying God's law to the circumstances they faced. This fact is mentioned in many places, such as Exodus 28:29-30, Numbers 21:27, Deuteronomy 21:5 and Ezekiel 44:24.

For example, listen to the way Moses described the civil judgments priests could render in Deuteronomy 17:8-9:

If cases come before your courts that are too difficult for you to judge — whether bloodshed, lawsuits or assaults ... Go to the priests, who are Levites, and to the judge who is in office at that time. Inquire of them and they will give you the verdict (Deuteronomy 17:8-9).

As this passage indicates, legal matters were normally solved in local courts. But in particularly difficult cases, the people could go to priests or special judges who would render judgments. In fact, in Exodus 18 Jethro the Midianite priest told Moses himself how to organize the courts and judges of Israel. Jethro's priesthood had made him an authority in such matters.

Priestly decisions and guidance also included investigating, interpreting and judging matters related to health and holiness. Priests inspected the presence of mildew in houses, diagnosed diseases, and declared individuals or objects clean or unclean according to God's laws. These kinds of priestly duties are listed in passages like Leviticus 11–15.

These were priestly matters because personal and public health problems entered the world as part of God's curse against Adam's sin, in which Adam was excluded from the special presence of God in the Garden of Eden. The universal curse of death was instituted in Genesis 3:19. And this general judgment incorporated other judgments related to health, as we see in passages like Leviticus 26:16 and Deuteronomy 28:21-28. For this reason, health issues played an important role in preparing the Israelites for approaching God for his blessings.

A third way priests demonstrated leadership was by teaching God's word to the people, as we read in 2 Chronicles 35:3, Nehemiah 8 and Malachi 2.

As just one example, listen to the Lord's words in Malachi 2:7:

For the lips of a priest ought to preserve knowledge, and from his mouth men should seek instruction — because he is the messenger of the Lord Almighty (Malachi 2:7).

False teaching was a result of sin in the world, and violations of God's word made people unfit to enter his special presence. So, the priests were given the job of teaching God's word in order to prepare and lead his people into his special holy presence in a way that would result in his blessing.

Having considered the leadership priests provided, let's look next at the ceremonies they conducted for their people.

Ceremonies

In the lives of Old Testament believers, the various festivals, the Sabbath observances, sacrificial offerings that were made, they played

a very important role. First of all, they were to remind Israel that its life as the people of God was a gift to them. For instance, the Passover was meant to remind them that they were once slaves in Egypt, and God and God alone has set them free. But not just to remind them that they were set free, because they set free from Egypt to be taken to Sinai where God would establish his covenant with them. So the festival life of Israel was meant to be a reminder to them that God and God alone has called them to be his people, to remember the mighty works of God to save them. The Sabbaths were meant to remind them of two things, that the world is Yahweh's and that they didn't create themselves, and they didn't free themselves from slavery. In Exodus, Moses says, "Keep the Sabbath, for on the Sabbath day God rests." In the book of Deuteronomy, Moses says keep the Sabbath because not only did God rest on the Sabbath day, but remember that you were once slaves in Egypt. So, all of these festivals were meant to remind them of what God has done to redeem them and to remind them that they are alone the people of God because of God's gracious goodness toward them, and out of those practices have their lives shaped, their self-understanding shaped, so that they would begin and continue to respond faithfully to God in lives of obedience, trust, love and service.

— Dr. Steve Blakemore

In the days of Moses, and later in David's day, priests conducted a wide variety of ceremonies that were designed to prepare God's people to enter his special presence. These ceremonies involved holy times, events and objects, as we see in places like Leviticus 1–7 and 23; Numbers 18–19; 1 Chronicles 23; and 2 Chronicles 8.

Often, these ceremonies centered around holy locations — places where God's special presence would appear and his people would worship him. For example, it was the priests' responsibility to make sure that the tabernacle and temple areas were as beautiful and perfect as possible, so that it would be appropriate for God to reside there in his special visible glory. We read about this in passages like Leviticus 24:1-9; Numbers 3–4; and 1 Chronicles 24:25-32.

But perhaps the most well-known ceremonial feature of priestly service was the presentation of offerings. Offerings ranged from expressions of thanksgiving, to experiences of fellowship, to atonement for sin. Some were presented at regularly appointed intervals, such as the daily morning and evening sacrifices, and the annual Day of Atonement. Others were presented when special conditions were met, like being convicted of sin. And other offerings were brought according to the volition of the worshiper, such as freewill offerings. A wide range of prescribed offerings is listed in places like Leviticus 1–7 and 16.

Of all the ceremonial functions of priests, the one that was most prominent in Jesus' own ministry was the presentation of offerings — especially offerings of atonement. So we'll focus most of our attention on those.

Today we often speak of sacrifice as giving up something that is valuable, to gain us something that is even more valuable. What makes a gift a sacrifice is that the giving

costs us something that we value. In the Old Testament, people did not offer things to God because he needed them. Offerings allowed God's people to give something they valued to gain what was much more valuable — such as the forgiveness of sins.

Offerings allowed believers to worship God, express their submissiveness to him, and even convey their thankfulness to him for his provision. Of course, offerings were always supposed to be an expression of faith, done with proper motives. God even rejected sacrifices that were not offered with a sincere heart. The efficacy of offerings was always dependent upon the sincerity of the one offering the sacrifice to God.

Atoning offerings were an important part of priestly ministry even before the extensive ritual laws given through Moses. For instance, in Job 1, Job sacrificed animals on behalf of his children in case they had carelessly sinned during their celebrations together. In fact, atoning offerings are as old as humanity's fall into sin. When Adam and Eve first sinned, God instituted offerings of atonement through which he forgave sins and reconciled himself to his people. This type of offering is described in places like Leviticus 4–6, and Numbers 15:25-28.

The general idea behind atonement is fairly straightforward: Because of our sin, all human beings deserve to be punished. So, in order to avoid this just punishment, worshipers offer sacrifices that receive God's punishment on their behalf. Theologians often refer to this as “substitutionary atonement” because the offering substitutes for the worshiper in the ceremony of atonement.

In all cases throughout the Old Testament, atoning offerings were symbolic. God applied forgiveness to his people by means of atoning offerings, but not on the basis of the value or merit of the offering itself. Rather, Old Testament offerings were effective only because they pointed forward to the substance and merit of the sacrifice of Jesus in the New Testament.

The New Testament explains that God's people were never permanently forgiven of sin on the basis of the Old Testament offerings themselves. Sin offerings only delayed God's judgment, and needed to be renewed over and over. Christ's death on the cross was the only sacrifice that God ever accepted as full, permanent payment for sins. God provided the Old Testament sacrificial system as a tool through which he graciously applied the merits of Christ's death to Old Testament believers.

When atoning offerings were performed on behalf of faithful believers, they produced at least two important results, both of which relied on the future sacrifice of Christ for their effectiveness. The first result we'll mention is expiation.

Expiation refers to the effect of the offering on the worshiper. It's the removal of the guilt of sin from worshippers. This protects them from the wrath that God would otherwise pour out on them. Through expiation, the punishment for the worshippers' sin is laid on the substitute, so that they are protected from the Lord's judgment.

Expiation is mentioned in places where sin is spoken of as being “covered” or “hidden,” such as Job 14:17, and Psalm 32:1, 5. It's also apparent in passages that speak of sin or guilt being “removed,” such as Leviticus 10:17, Psalm 25:18, and Isaiah 6:7; and we see it in passages that speak of sin being “transferred” to a substitute, such as Isaiah 53:6.

A second result atoning offerings produced for believers was propitiation. Propitiation refers to the effect the offering has on God. Propitiation is the satisfaction of God's justice and wrath against sin. Propitiation indicates that God's wrath has found a

place of expression and has been satisfied. Because of it, God is able to express kindness and love toward the worshipper without bypassing his justice.

Propitiation is indicated by passages that speak of God's anger being satisfied or turned aside, such as Numbers 25:11-13 and Deuteronomy 13:16-17.

The Old Testament sacrificial system is a great demonstration of a whole number of truths about God, but especially his mercy. We think of it often in terms of the provision of the animals as substitutes for the people in order to satisfy God's displeasure, his condemnation, his wrath. But we have to also remember that the entire motivation of this is driven by his love, his mercy — when we think of mercy, his pity towards us — tied to even his grace where we have that which we do not deserve. Leviticus 17:11 is very, very important here where the sacrificial system should not be viewed as the nation of Israel sort of making up this system in order to keep God on their side. No, this is God taking the initiative, in love, so that there would be a means by which he would be able to dwell with the nation. They would be able to dwell in his presence. They would be his people; he would be their God. All of that is demonstration of his mercy, of his love, of his grace. And all of it eventually points forward to his provision in Jesus Christ who is the fulfillment of this. So that in him what these sacrifices typified now have come to reality so that we now know God in a New Covenant sense. We now have direct access to him through our great sacrifice, our Lord Jesus Christ.

— Dr. Stephen Wellum

Well, the Old Testament sacrificial system indicated it in a number of ways, it demonstrated God's mercy, but one of the classic ways was on the Day of Atonement, when you had your tabernacle or temple, and the innermost part of that was called the holiest of all, and in there you had the Ark of the Covenant with the Ten Commandments in it, and the top of that box was called the mercy seat. And on the Day of Atonement, the high priest would take the blood of the lamb and offer the lamb at the altar outside the temple or tabernacle, then come through the veil into that holiest of all part and sprinkle the blood on the top of the box. And the idea was that God would be merciful when the blood of the lamb covered the law that was broken. Of course, that pointed to the fact of Jesus Christ was going to be the true Lamb whose blood would cover our having broken the law. But, notice, God's mercy founded on that blood covering our having broken the law.

— Dr. Frank Barker

With this understanding of the priestly leadership and ceremonies in mind, we're ready to turn to the work of intercession that they performed on behalf of the people they represented.

Intercession

We may define intercession as mediation; or petitioning for favor on another's behalf. An intercessor is someone who takes your side and pleads your case when you are in trouble, or who tries to reconcile disputes between you and another party.

Old Testament priests often interceded by means of their leadership and guidance, as well as through the ceremonies that God had assigned to them. For instance, they interceded between individuals when they settled legal disputes, and between the people and God when they presented offerings for atonement. But priests also performed other types of intercession.

One common form of intercession was petition for help. Priests often offered prayers that God would heal, rescue or otherwise aid his people. We find examples of this in 1 Samuel 1:17 and 1 Chronicles 16:4. As just one example, listen to the record of Job's intercession for his children in Job 1:5:

When a period of feasting had run its course, Job would send and have [his sons and daughters] purified. Early in the morning he would sacrifice a burnt offering for each of them, thinking, "Perhaps my children have sinned and cursed God in their hearts" (Job 1:5).

As the priest over his household, Job interceded for his children to protect them from the consequences of their sin.

Another common form of intercession was the pronouncement of blessing. When priests blessed people they asked God to show favor to the people. We see this in the way Melchizedek blessed Abraham in Genesis 14:19-20, and in the blessing that the priests were taught to pronounce on the people in Numbers 6:22-27. For instance, listen to this account from 2 Chronicles 30:27:

The priests and the Levites stood to bless the people, and God heard them, for their prayer reached heaven, his holy dwelling place (2 Chronicles 30:27).

When the text says that God heard them, it means that he honored the priestly intercession by favoring the people they blessed. This aspect of priestly ministry is often echoed in our day during the benedictions offered by ministers at the conclusion of gathered worship. Many churches even repeat the same blessing first given to Aaron in Numbers 6.

As we've seen, the functions of priests were rather varied. They provided leadership, conducted ceremonies, and offered intercession. But as varied as these activities were, they were united by a constant purpose. They were all designed to make

God's people fit to live in his special presence, in order that they might receive all the blessings of his covenant.

Now that we've looked at the qualifications and function of priests, let's turn our attention to the expectations the Old Testament created for future priestly ministries.

EXPECTATIONS

In the days of the Old Testament, the office of priest was dynamic and changing. Its specific duties and responsibilities changed throughout time. Melchizedek's priesthood was not precisely the same as Job's. Job's differed from Jethro's. And Jethro's differed from that of Aaron and his descendants. And the Old Testament also pointed toward further changes that would take place in the future.

To understand the expectations that the Old Testament priesthoods created for the future, we'll look in two directions. First, we'll examine the historical development of the office throughout the Old Testament. And second, we'll focus on some specific prophecies about the future of the priestly office. Let's begin with the historical development of the office of priest.

Historical Development

Because there has always been a need for human beings to have access to the special, holy presence of God, there has always been a need for priestly functions. In fact, priests have always been critical to God's long-term strategy for humanity and creation. But historically, the role of priests has sometimes shifted in response to the changing circumstances of God's people.

We'll consider the changing roles of priests during four different stages of history, beginning with the time of creation.

Creation. This is the time that corresponds to God's covenant with Adam. The Garden of Eden, in which humanity was placed, was itself a sanctuary where God walked and talked with his people. In this context, Adam and Eve served God in ways that resembled the service of the Aaronic priests in the tabernacle and temple. For this reason, we can say that the office of priest is as old as humanity itself. Listen to what Moses wrote in Genesis 2:15:

The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it (Genesis 2:15).

In this passage, Moses described the work of Adam and Eve in the garden with the Hebrew words "*avad*," translated "work," and "*shamar*," translated "take care." In Numbers 3:7-8, Moses used this same combination of words to describe the work of the Levites in the Tabernacle. And we see other verbal parallels in places like Genesis 3:8 and 2 Samuel 7:6.

By using the same language to describe the work of humanity in the Garden of Eden and the work of the priests in the tabernacle, Moses indicated that Adam and Eve were the original priests, and that places like the tabernacle and temple were intended to fulfill the same function as the Garden of Eden. In fact, many scholars have suggested that the furnishings and decorations of the tabernacle and temple were specifically designed to recall the Garden of Eden.

In all events, humanity's priesthood in Eden consisted of ministering to God in his garden sanctuary, taking care of his holy things, and ensuring that the place was fit for him to inhabit. Moreover, God commanded Adam, Eve, and their descendants to become a kingdom of priests, expanding their work to the rest of the world, as well.

Listen to God's words to humanity in Genesis 1:28:

Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it (Genesis 1:28).

God's command to fill and subdue the earth is often called the "cultural mandate," because it obligates humanity to cultivate and develop the whole world, in order to make it resemble the Garden of Eden. From a priestly perspective, humanity's job is to turn the entire world into God's sanctuary and to minister to him forever.

When God created human beings in his image, he didn't do so for no reason at all. He gave us what is often called the "creation cultural mandate." It's helpful to look at that, not only in terms of our dominion over the earth, often what we associate with a kind of rule, kingly kind of role, but also priests. Even though sin had not entered the world, there's pictures in Genesis 2 of Eden as a kind of temple, garden sanctuary, so that our role in creation was to push the borders of Eden to the furthest extent of the earth. Ultimately, that comes in Christ, in the new heavens and new earth. At the heart of that priestly work as well is worship, so that all that we do is for God's glory, doing that creation mandate. Service — and those two ideas are there associated with a priestly work as well as a kind of kingly work. So, our creation cultural mandate is to be stewards, is to be God's creatures in relationship to him, to expand the borders of that garden sanctuary, to do so in worship, devotion, obedience, exploring all the resources of his creation, and that, of course, will be picked up ultimately in the new heavens and the new earth as well.

— Dr. Stephen Wellum

In the book of Genesis we learn of the cultural mandate. It's a very important part of human vocation, what we are in God's eyes to be about as we live out the gift of life. We, of course, do not think in any way that the cultural mandate should trump, or lead us to neglect, the evangelism mandate. Both are from God, both are legitimate, both are

important. Essentially, the cultural mandate is a great gift and privilege. It's essentially the God of providence inviting his people created in his image, to have delegated responsibility, to care for, to steward, and to develop the rich potential of the created order, as faithful ambassadors or delegated representatives of the providential God himself. And so, just as we are to be creative people in the image of a creator, we are to be gracious, generous, and responsibly providing people in fulfilling the creation mandate.

— Dr. Glen Scorgie

The first *changes* to the office of priest happened at humanity's fall into sin, when they ate the forbidden fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in Genesis 3.

Fall. At this point, Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden and had to begin presenting offerings of atonement for sin. We find potential references to this practice as early as Genesis 3:21, where the Lord covered Adam and Eve in the skins of animals. And we find a more explicit reference to this practice in Genesis 4:4, in Abel's animal sacrifice to the Lord.

Other references can also be found throughout this time period, such as: the sacrifices Noah offered after the flood in Genesis 8:20; the ram Abraham sacrificed in Genesis 22:13; and the sacrifices Jacob offered in Genesis 31:54. During this time, family heads tended to serve as priests over their descendants, and only a few priests were called to minister more broadly than that.

Another change that occurred at this time was the *location* of priestly ministry. Before the Fall, this had taken place exclusively in God's garden sanctuary in Eden. But when humanity was expelled from the Garden of Eden in Genesis 3, God directed his priests to set aside other places to worship him, and to create memorial stones to mark places where he had met with them. Unlike the period of creation, at this point in history no single location could be described as God's dwelling place on earth.

The next major set of changes took place in the days of Israel's exodus from their slavery in Egypt.

Exodus. After the nation of Israel had been enslaved by the Egyptian Pharaoh for over 400 years, they cried out to God and he released them in a powerful display of miracles. This event is described in the second book of the Bible, entitled Exodus.

During this time, God narrowed his priestly call from all humanity to the nation of Israel. As he said in Exodus 19:6, Israel was to be to him a kingdom of priests. He also set aside the tribe of Levi as his special servants. Most of the tribe served in roles that supported the smaller number of Levites who acted as priests for the nation. Within the Levites, only Aaron and his descendants were selected to be priests, with one man at a time serving as high priest. We find God's instructions regarding the new duties of the Aaronic priesthood throughout the book of Leviticus, as well as in some parts of the book of Numbers.

God also dictated the creation of the tabernacle during this period. The tabernacle was a large, ornate tent that the Israelites were able to carry with them during their

travels. It served essentially the same function that the Garden of Eden had served at the time of creation; it was God's earthly sanctuary, the place where he walked and talked with his people. After the Fall, God had met with people in various places from time to time. But with the creation of the tabernacle, God once again focused his worship in one location. And this place of worship was to be attended and maintained by God's chosen servants, the priests. The instructions for the tabernacle, and the record of its creation, can be found in Exodus 25–40.

God intended the changes in the priesthood during the Exodus to be steps toward fulfilling his original plan for humanity. His plan was to use the priests of Aaron's family first to change Israel into a kingdom of priests, and then through the fidelity and service of this special nation, to expand his kingdom to encompass the world.

The final changes to the office of priest in the Old Testament occurred during Israel's monarchy, when the nation of Israel had settled the Promised Land and was living under the rule of a king.

Monarchy. The monarchical period had a false start with Saul, Israel's first king. But it began in earnest with Saul's successor David and his descendants.

When the kings of Israel reigned, they were closely involved with priestly service. For instance, David made plans for the temple. He made sure that the priestly services were performed. He also organized the priestly families and assigned specific tasks for them. These developments can be found in passages such as 1 Chronicles 15 and 16 and 23–28.

David also assigned duties to the other Levitical families, especially as gatekeepers and musicians. He even offered sacrifices and pronounced blessings on the people, joining with the priests from time to time, as seen in 2 Samuel 6:17–18. At one point, he even exchanged his royal garb for the Levite's linen ephod, as recorded in 1 Chronicles 15:27. These developments were maintained even past David's day, as we see in Ezra 8:20.

In David's day, the families allowed to serve as high priest narrowed to just two: those of Aaron's descendants Zadok and Abiathar. This information is recorded in 1 Chronicles 18:16.

After David, his son Solomon reigned as king over God's kingdom, and he involved himself in priestly services even more than David had. Solomon presided over the building of the temple. He supervised countless sacrifices. He led the people in prayer at the temple and pronounced blessings upon them, as his father had. These details are mentioned in 1 Chronicles 21:28; 2 Chronicles 3–6, and 1 Kings 8–9. They are also assumed in many of the psalms David wrote, including Psalms 5, 11, 18, 27, 65, 66 and 68.

Solomon also narrowed the high priestly line once more. Because Abiathar committed treason, Solomon excluded him and his family from priestly service, as we see in 1 Kings 2:26, 27, 35. This fulfilled the judgment passed upon the house of Eli, an earlier unfaithful priest in the days of the judges recorded in 1 Samuel 2:27–36.

While some specific services in the temple were reserved for priests alone, the kings of Judah often followed the examples of David and Solomon by involving themselves in priestly types of service. They were, in effect, royal priests in Solomon's temple.

The period of the monarchy eventually ended when the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and Solomon's temple in 587 or 586 B.C., and carried the people into exile. But around 515 B.C., during the restoration efforts after the exile, a second temple was built by the returning Israelites. At this time, the prophets Ezekiel and Zechariah announced that God had appointed Jeshua, a descendent of Zadok, as the high priest. They also announced that Jeshua would serve alongside Zerubbabel, a descendent of David, who would lead the restoration. Sadly, the efforts of Zerubbabel and Jeshua did not continue for long. In time, most priests and Levites turned away from God, and so did most of the nation. Israel's worship was corrupted, and God's judgment rested on the nation for hundreds of years.

Even so, during this time the people of Israel continued to look back to the days of David and Solomon. The faithful among them remembered what it was like when kings and priests served God as they should. And they hoped for a new day when royal and priestly duties would be performed more magnificently than ever before and God would welcome his repentant people into the blessings of his special presence.

Now that we've considered the expectations that were created by the historical development of the priestly office, we're ready to see how specific Old Testament prophecies also created expectations for future priests.

Specific Prophecies

In this section, we'll focus on three specific Old Testament prophecies about the office of priest. The first expectation we'll consider is that there would eventually be a great high priest whose service would never end.

In various ways, the Old Testament indicated that one day the priesthood would culminate in a single high priest who would serve forever. God had appointed Aaron to be the high priest in the time of Moses, but the Old Testament also looked forward to a time when his priesthood would be surpassed. So Aaron's priesthood was temporary to last until the day when the Great High Priest would come. In fact, the hope of the Old Testament was that both offices would be united into one office under the Great High Priest and messianic King.

Perhaps the clearest statement of this idea can be found in Psalm 110:4, where we read these words:

The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind: "You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek" (Psalm 110:4).

In the context of this psalm, God promised that the Messiah's service as priest would never end. It would last forever.

Hebrews 7 picks up on this idea and relates it directly to Jesus in his office of high priest over God's people. The same chapter also indicates that Christ's permanent priesthood is implied by the fact that it corresponds to the new covenant, which Jeremiah prophesied in Jeremiah 31:31. In that passage, Jeremiah indicated that life in the new covenant would be perfect and wonderful. And corresponding to this, the author of

Hebrews argued that this better covenant would require a better priesthood — one that would last forever.

Quoting Psalm 110:4, the author of Hebrews put it this way in Hebrews 7:21-22:

The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind: “You are a priest forever.” Because of this oath, Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant (Hebrews 7:21-22).

In conclusion, then, the Old Testament specifically prophesied that in the new covenant, God would appoint a great high priest whose service would never end.

A second expectation for the office of priest that was specifically prophesied in the Old Testament was that the Great High Priest would rule as king.

As we saw earlier, humanity served as both priests and kings in the Garden of Eden. And Melchizedek himself also served in both capacities. And although these offices were divided later in history, the Old Testament also prophesied that they would ultimately be reunited in the person of the Messiah.

Let’s look once more at Psalm 110, this time at verses 2-4, where the Lord made this promise about the future Messiah:

The Lord will extend your mighty scepter from Zion; you will rule in the midst of your enemies... The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind: “You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek” (Psalm 110:2-4).

Here, God promised that the Messiah would be a descendant of David who would both rule as king and serve as priest.

This same idea is also in Zechariah 6:13, where we find this prophecy about the future Messiah:

He will be a priest on his throne (Zechariah 6:13).

According to the Old Testament, one expectation for the office of priest was that the Messiah would reunite it with the office of king.

The third specifically prophesied expectation for the office of priest was that God’s people themselves would become a kingdom of priests.

As we saw in Genesis 2:15, humanity began in the Garden of Eden by serving in a priestly capacity. So, it shouldn’t be surprising that in our restoration after the fall into sin, redeemed humanity would once again serve as God’s priests. And in fact, this is specifically prophesied in places like Exodus 19:6 and Isaiah 61:6.

Both of these passages indicate that when the Messiah reigns as king, all God’s people will serve as faithful priests, and be united as a single nation or kingdom of priests. Theologians often refer to this as the priesthood of all believers. And the apostle Peter indicated that this was already coming to pass in his own day. Listen to what he wrote in 1 Peter 2:5:

You also ... are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ (1 Peter 2:5).

As covenant reconcilers, the priests in the Old Testament continually reminded their people of the importance of their covenant relationship with God. And given the devastation that sin had brought into the creation, the priestly office was vital and necessary for the continued progress of God's kingdom and for the fulfillment of his purposes. But these purposes could not be fulfilled without the pivotal priestly figure of all history — the Messiah that the entire Old Testament anticipated.

Having looked at the Old Testament background to the office of priest, we're ready to turn to our second main topic: the fulfillment of the office of priest in Jesus.

FULFILLMENT IN JESUS

We should begin by noting that the Gospels and the New Testament epistles explicitly state that Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament expectations of the priestly office. For instance, in Hebrews 3:1, we read this clear affirmation of Jesus' priestly ministry:

Fix your thoughts on Jesus, the ... high priest whom we confess (Hebrews 3:1).

And Hebrews 4:14 puts it this way:

We have a great high priest ... Jesus the Son of God (Hebrews 4:14).

As our Great High Priest, Jesus is the one that mediates between God and us, so that we can be accepted into God's special, holy presence. He is the one that ensures that we are holy and sanctified to God, so that we can live in God's presence and receive his covenant blessings.

We'll explore the fulfillment of the priestly office in Jesus by looking at the same categories we used to discuss its Old Testament background. First, we will see how Jesus fulfilled the qualifications of the office. Second, we'll look at how he performed its functions. And third, we'll see how he met the expectations for the office of priest. Let's look first at how Jesus meets the qualifications for the office of priest.

QUALIFICATIONS

Many people have pointed out that Jesus never served in the temple or led liturgies, and he was not a descendant of Aaron. So, why did the New Testament writers say that Jesus performed priestly functions and ministries? And how was he even qualified to hold the office of priest? Simply put, Jesus was ultimately qualified for the

office because he is the fulfillment of the Old Testament hope for a royal priest whom God himself would appoint over all priestly services.

We'll look at Jesus' qualifications as priest in terms of the same qualifications we highlighted in the Old Testament background of the priestly office. First, we'll note that Jesus was appointed to his priesthood by God. And second, we'll see that he was also loyal to God. Let's look first at the fact that Jesus was appointed by God.

Appointed by God

Hebrews 5:4-10 explicitly says that God appointed Jesus as high priest. Listen to what it says:

No one takes this honor upon himself; he must be called by God, just as Aaron was. So Christ also did not take upon himself the glory of becoming a high priest... [but] was designated by God to be high priest (Hebrews 5:4-10).

Since God appointed him, Jesus certainly met this qualification. At the same time, we should admit that this appointment was somewhat unusual because Jesus did not have a Levitical priestly genealogy. You'll recall that in the beginning of the Old Testament, God had allowed many different types of people to be priests. But by the end of the Old Testament, he had given the priesthood only to the descendants of Zadok. Even so, the appointment of Jesus is not as unusual as it might first appear.

In the Garden of Eden, Adam was assigned to rule over the earth as God's vassal king. But his rule was also a priestly service, designed to turn the entire world into a place that would be suitable for God's glorious presence. And the offices of priest and king were also closely related in the kings of the monarchical period.

In much the same way, Christ is a royal priest. He rules as God's perfect vassal king. But his rule is also a priestly service preparing us and the earth for the glorious special presence of God. In this way, Christ actually fulfills what Adam and the rest of his descendants failed to do.

Listen once again to the way David spoke of the great Messiah in Psalm 110:1-4:

The Lord says to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet." The Lord will extend your mighty scepter from Zion; you will rule in the midst of your enemies... The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind: "You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek" (Psalm 110:1-4).

In this passage, the Messiah — whom David called "my Lord" — is described both with the royal imagery of his mighty scepter and rule, and as a priest.

David's prophecy looked forward to the day when one of his descendants would rise to such imperial majesty that he would fulfill not only royal service, but all priestly service as well, just as Melchizedek had done. This is why Hebrews 7:14 emphasizes the fact that Jesus is from the royal tribe of Judah, and not from the priestly tribe of Levi. The

fact that Jesus was both a Judahite king and the Great High Priest is proof that he is the long-awaited son of David, the Messiah.

Probably a lot of it goes back to Genesis 14 and Melchizedek, who is described both as a king and as a priest because Abraham makes sacrifices and Melchizedek receives those as a priest would. But at the same time, he's clearly king of Salem. So there's a lot that spins off of that in the rest of the biblical narrative where kings and priests are one in the same sometimes. It's the 110th Psalm where a king is referred to as the "overseer of righteousness." Well, that's obviously got governmental aspects connected to it, but if you're overseeing righteousness, you're also sharing in a priestly function, because God's righteousness is God's will for the whole world to be righteous. And so as the king participates in that, even if there are designated priests, the king is still functioning in a priestly way. Then, of course, when you get to Jesus, you've got these streams converging, so that we refer to him as prophet, priest, and king. It's almost, well, it is — in the book of Hebrews, he's the new Melchizedek. He's the personification in the new covenant of what God really was about in the old covenant.

— Dr. Steve Harper

Having seen that Jesus was appointed by God, we're ready to look at the fact that he also met the requirement of being loyal to God.

Loyal to God

As we mentioned previously, priests were required to demonstrate a special measure of loyalty to God by worshiping and serving him alone, and by carefully carrying out the duties that God assigned to them. And one of the primary reasons for their duties was to ensure that God's people were also loyal to God, both morally and ceremonially, so that they could enter God's special presence without fear. This was one of the main services that priests provided.

Jesus met these same requirements with absolute perfection. He always worshiped and served God and God only. And he always obeyed the Father's commands. And through this priestly ministry, Jesus is able to prepare us to enter God's special holy presence.

In a general sense, we could look at the full content of all four gospels as proof of Jesus' loyalty to God. He followed the commission given to him by his Father; he spoke only what his Father gave him to say; and he did only those things that he saw his father doing. But there are also many particular passages in the New Testament that summarize these ideas explicitly, such as Matthew 26:42; John 5:19, 14:31, and 17:4; and Hebrews 7:5-7.

Jesus' perfect loyalty to God is a critical aspect of his success as our Great High Priest. Only by being completely loyal to God can he make his followers perfectly holy, and enable us to dwell in God's special holy presence for eternity. And we find many examples of this in Scripture.

For instance, he prayed specifically for our holiness in his high priestly prayer in John 17:19. And according to passages like Romans 15:16 and 1 Corinthians 6:11, God has already answered that prayer by making us holy in his sight.

Having seen that Jesus met the qualifications for priesthood, we're ready to turn to the way he fulfilled the functions of a priest.

FUNCTIONS

We'll explore Jesus' function as priest by looking at the same priestly roles we identified in the Old Testament: first, priestly leadership over God's people; second, priestly ceremonies; and third, priestly intercession. Let's look first at how Jesus fulfilled the function of priestly leadership.

Leadership

Although there are many aspects of Jesus' leadership we could highlight, we'll focus on the same three we mentioned in our survey of the Old Testament background of Jesus' priestly office, beginning with the leadership he offered in worship.

As the one who would be exalted as the Great High Priest, Jesus did many things to promote true and spiritual worship in the nation of Israel and among his followers. For instance, in Matthew 21:12-13, he drove the merchants and money changers from the temple because they were turning God's house of prayer into a den of robbers.

But most importantly, he made it possible for his people to approach God in the Holy Place of the heavenly temple. In the Old Testament, the tabernacle and later the temple were places that heaven and earth intersected. They were special locations where worshipers were simultaneously present on earth and in God's heavenly court. But in the New Testament, Jesus himself has taken over this function. So, instead of going to a special building to enter God's heavenly court, Jesus personally takes us there. Through him, we have been accepted into God's special, holy presence, where we receive the blessing of his fellowship.

Listen to the way Hebrews 10:19-22 talks about this:

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith (Hebrews 10:19-22).

Jesus also offered priestly leadership in the form of special guidance in civil and ritual judgments.

For example, in Matthew 12:1-8, Jesus provided priestly judgment when his disciples were accused of violating the Sabbath. In Mark 7:19, he pronounced judgments about the ritual cleanness of food. And after healing the leper in Matthew 8, he provided the priestly declaration that the man was ceremonially clean, and commanded him to take the appropriate sacrifice to the temple. Although Jesus commanded the man to show himself to the priests, this was not for the purpose of asking them to judge his condition. Rather, according to Matthew 8:4, it was to be a testimony of Jesus' power and authority.

The third type of priestly leadership we have mentioned is teaching. And Jesus performed this function as well.

Now, it's true that Israel had many different types of teachers. Prophets were teachers who proclaimed God's covenant and will. Parents taught their children. Rabbis and elders taught their communities. Priests, however, were particularly concerned with teaching repentance and fidelity so that God's people would be welcomed into his special presence. We see an example of this in Nehemiah 8. And Jesus' teaching often served this priestly function, too.

For instance, in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7, Jesus explained the true intention and application of God's law in order to lead those who heard him into covenant fidelity. And both repentance and faithfulness were regular refrains in his teaching, as we can see in passages like Matthew 4:17, Luke 5:32, and John 14:15-24.

Now that we've seen that Jesus filled the priestly role of leadership, let's take a look at the way he also fulfilled priestly functions with regard to ceremonies.

Ceremonies

Without a doubt, Jesus' death on the cross was the greatest ceremonial aspect of his priestly ministry.

Jesus himself participated in the ceremonies of Israel. In fact, many of them are mentioned in John's gospel. But none of these ceremonies accomplished redemption for God's people except Jesus sacrifice on the cross. Without a doubt, Jesus' crucifixion was the greatest ceremonial aspect of his priestly ministry. The Law of Moses required obedience from Israel, but because God knew Israel would continue to disobey, God also commanded Israel to offer sacrifices to God to atone for these sins. But as important as these sacrifices were, they had to be offered repeatedly year after year — none of them fully took away Israel's sin. So Jesus came and offered himself as the perfect sacrifice for sin. His atoning sacrifice accomplished redemption in a way that the sacrifices of Israel could never do. And so Jesus fulfilled Israel's priestly expectations in his once-for-all sacrifice for sin.

Well, the Old Testament sacrifices anticipated a day when there would be a sacrifice that would take away sin once and for all. And Jesus's role at the cross is described by the Bible as being both a sacrifice for sin, but also himself as a priest offering that sacrifice. In a sense he fulfills both of those functions. He provides the Lamb of God

who will take away the sins of the world. But Jesus also is the priest who is in a sense making that offering of himself to provide the sacrifice that will end all other sacrifices.

— Dr. Simon Vibert

The relationship between Jesus' death and Old Testament sacrifices could be developed in a whole host of ways. At the heart, the Old Testament sacrifices must be placed within the old covenant that God gave to the nation of Israel. The sacrificial system was the means by which the people's sin was removed; God's wrath was turned back; there was relationship between God and his people. Those sacrifices, we say, are types; they're patterns; they point forward to something greater. Even in the Old Testament there's plenty of hints that just by the offering of an animal will never be enough to take away sin. It was never intended to be ultimately in terms of that which would remove sin. They were patterns of something greater. But they point forward to the sacrifice of Christ in that he is the one who, like that sacrifice, is our substitute. He is the one who takes our place. He is one who does so in a far greater way because he is human. He takes on our humanity. Those animal sacrifices didn't. Yet, he is also God the Son, God the Son incarnate, so that he now fulfills his own righteous requirements putting away our sin, standing as our representative, as our substitute, as our priest. And fulfills all of what those sacrifices pointed forward to, restores us to relationship with God, and brings us back to what God made us to be in the first place — his people, living for him, serving him, carrying out our role and duty as his image bearers in this world.

— Dr. Stephen Wellum

As we saw earlier, the Old Testament priests were responsible for a variety of offerings, including offerings for sin, thanksgiving and fellowship. And in his death on the cross, Jesus offered the single sacrifice that formed the meritorious basis for every sacrifice that had ever been offered throughout history. Every prior offering for atonement merely foreshadowed the offering that Jesus rendered when he died on the cross. This truth is taught in passages like Romans 3:25 and 8:3, and 1 John 2:2 and 4:10.

As just one example, listen to the words of Hebrews 10:1-4:

The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming — not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship... But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins, because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins (Hebrews 10:1-4).

Old Testament sacrifices benefited the worshipers not on the basis of the sacrifices themselves, but in the ways they anticipated the special sacrifice that Christ would eventually render on the cross. Moreover, the benefit they provided would never be complete until Jesus offered the one sacrifice to which all the others pointed. This is why the sacrifices of the Old Testament were not able to remove sin permanently. They were merely the means by which God postponed his wrath and exercised patience until the time when Jesus died on the cross.

In this regard, Jesus was not just the substance to which all previous atoning offerings had pointed. He was also the final atonement. Now that the fullness of atoning offerings has been realized in Jesus, there is no longer any reason to offer the shadows. This is why Christians do not present the atoning offerings described in the Old Testament. It's not because we believe atoning sacrifices are unnecessary. On the contrary, we know atonement is absolutely necessary. The reason we don't present offerings for atonement is that we believe Jesus' singular sacrifice has completely fulfilled the need for atonement for all God's faithful people for all time. And by this one act, he has secured our holiness, making us able to dwell in God's special, holy presence.

As we read in Hebrews 10:10:

We have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all (Hebrews 10:10).

Jesus' sacrifice ushered in the new age of the kingdom of God; it was the beginning of the end of the exile and judgment of God's people. This one sacrifice made God's forgiveness directly accessible in every nation on earth. But it also signaled the end of God's patience and forbearance toward many unbelievers.

As we read in Acts 17:30, prior to Christ's sacrifice God had been slow to bring judgment against those who were ignorant of the truth. But Christ's sacrifice announced the truth in a way that made ignorance far less excusable. As a result, God began to bring judgment against sinners with greater frequency and severity when they failed to repent at the preaching of the gospel.

Some skeptics view the death of Jesus as nothing more than the tragic end to a misguided career. But for believers, the death of Christ was intentional, and significant, and redemptive. And part of how we understand the mysterious dynamics of the cross, part of how we understand that, is that it is a fulfillment of the type, or antecedent motif, of Old Testament sacrifice. Now once again there are many people today who are very uncomfortable about any requirement of blood. It seems so primitive, it seems so unacceptable to a more enlightened and civilized people. I think it's important for us to realize that God is not some cosmic vampire who requires blood to assuage his needs. The Old Testament sacrifice, the Old Testament sacrificial system, was bold, brutal, and bracing, all of this to underscore the seriousness of the sin that it addresses. The Old Testament sacrificial system was a reminder to ancient peoples that

sin must be addressed in order to restore, if you will, the moral symmetry of God's universe. And Jesus Christ comes as the fulfillment of that need in such a way that the requirements of God's justice and the moral symmetry of the universe are satisfied by an unprecedented act of self-giving love. The Old Testament points to, and is fulfilled in Christ right down to the details of the ancient sacrificial system.

— Dr. Glen Scorgie

Having seen how Jesus fulfilled his priestly role through leadership and ceremonies, we should look at how he fulfilled the related priestly function of intercession.

Intercession

Earlier in this lesson, we said that intercession is mediation or petitioning for favor on another's behalf. This is something that characterized Jesus' earthly ministry, and that continues to characterize his ministry in heaven.

I've a friend who has asked me, "Well, if Jesus gets us to God, why do we still need Jesus? Why don't we just dispense with him now that he's gotten us to God and just pray to the Father? We don't really need Jesus anymore." Well, that misses the ongoing role of Jesus. Because the New Testament says that Jesus is the one mediator between God and man, present tense, the man Jesus, and that he lives forever to intercede for us. It doesn't mean in the least that Jesus' atoning work on the cross was insufficient in some way. To be sure, Jesus' atoning work is once-for-all, it's complete; nothing ever needs to be added to it again. But Jesus still has an ongoing, personal, relational role that he plays in our lives as our advocate, our mediator, our representation. He's our lawyer that daily, continually goes before the great judge and pleads our case. The great news is because of his atoning work he never loses a case. He's always appealing to his perfect, completed work on our behalf in his intercessory role as our Great High Priest, and it's always successful, it's always effective. But it's ongoing, and relational, and dynamic. And so Jesus, based on his finished atoning work, continues as our mediator, and our intercessor, as our Great High Priest.

— Dr. K. Erik Thoennes

One of the most explicit examples of Jesus' intercessory work in the Bible is his prayer for his disciples on the night of his arrest and trial, recorded in John 17. In fact, this prayer is typically called his "High Priestly Prayer." In this prayer, Jesus included

many petitions for the apostles. And in John 17:20-21, he also prayed on behalf of those who would become his disciples through their evangelistic ministry.

Jesus continued his intercessory work in the action of his death on the cross, where he mediated between God and humanity in the most effective way possible. And now that he has ascended into heaven, we're told that he continues to intercede for us in the heavenly temple by presenting his own blood on the altar and pleading before the Father on our behalf. As we read in Hebrews 7:24-25:

Because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them (Hebrews 7:24-25).

Our salvation is permanently secure because Jesus, our Great High Priest, is perpetually interceding on our behalf, asking the Father to accept the merit of the Son's death in payment for every sin we commit.

Jesus perfectly fulfilled the function of the Old Testament priesthood. He provided leadership, performed ceremonies — including the most important ceremony of all time, his sacrifice on the cross — and he offered intercession for his people. In fact, he continues to perform these basic functions today, through his church and through his high priestly work in the heavenly courts. So, as his followers, it's our responsibility to acknowledge and to rely on Jesus as our only access to the Father, and submit to his ministry as he prepares us to enter God's special holy presence.

With Jesus' qualifications and functions as a priest in mind, let's look at how he met the Old Testament expectations for the priestly office.

EXPECTATIONS

As we saw earlier in this lesson, the historical development of the priestly office created the expectation that in the future, the office of priest would continue to mediate between God and his people so that the people could be accepted into God's special, holy presence. And we've already seen that Jesus fulfilled these expectations by performing the functions of the office of priest. So, in this section of our lesson, we'll focus our attention on the way Jesus fulfilled specific Old Testament prophecies about the future of the priestly office.

Our discussion will divide into three parts. First, we'll look at the prophecy regarding the Great High Priest. Second, we'll explore the prophecy about this great priest serving as king. And third, we'll look at the prophecy that God's people would become a kingdom of priests. Let's start by seeing how Jesus fulfilled the prophecy of the Great High Priest.

Great High Priest

In various ways, sometimes explicitly, the Old Testament foretold that there would be a future Great High Priest who would usher in the messianic age, and who

would in fact be the Messiah himself. According to Psalm 110, this Great High Priest would be of the “order of Melchizedek,” meaning that he would not descend from Aaron. He would also serve in his office forever, meaning that death could not stop him from fulfilling his function. And according to the author of Hebrews, all these prophecies came true in Jesus.

Hebrews 7:21-22 quotes Psalm 110:4, and comments on it this way:

The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind: “You are a priest forever.” Because of this oath, Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant (Hebrews 7:21-22).

The author of Hebrews said that when God swore that the Messiah would be a priest forever, he rendered it certain that the future Great High Priest would be the Messiah that would bring in the new covenant. And according to this same passage in Hebrews, Jesus is that Great High Priest.

In fact, Hebrews mentions Jesus’ role as this prophesied Great High Priest at least ten different times. It also regularly refers to Jesus as “Christ” or “Messiah,” and it explicitly says that he is the one who brings the new covenant in chapters 8, 9, and 12. More than any other book of the New Testament, the letter to the Hebrews proves beyond any doubt that Jesus fulfills the Old Testament expectation of the Great High Priest.

The second Old Testament expectation that Jesus fulfilled was that the Great High Priest would also rule as king.

Priest as King

We’ve seen that from the time of Adam to the time of Abraham, the offices of priest and king were often united in the same person. And although they were separated in the days of Israel’s monarchy, the Old Testament prophesied that they would ultimately be reunited in the person of the Messiah. This point was made in both Psalm 110:2-4, and Zechariah 6:13.

And as we have seen in this and earlier lessons, when Jesus came as Messiah, he took on both the office of king and the office of high priest. This is stated in passages such as Mark 8:29; Luke 23:3; and Hebrews 8–9.

Before Jesus came, the Aaronic priesthood had served God’s people for well over 1,000 years. But their ministry had always pointed beyond itself to the coming Messiah who would be both priest and king. And in fact, according to Acts 6:7, many of the priests in Jerusalem and Israel recognized Jesus as the Messiah and became his followers.

Since Jesus neither established an independent priesthood nor confirmed the perpetual ministry of the temple and the Aaronic priesthood, the support he received from Israelite priests indicates that these priests understood the Old Testament teaching that when the Messiah came, he would reunite the offices of high priest and king in his person. And as we’ve seen, this is exactly what Jesus did.

The third specifically prophesied expectation that Jesus’ priesthood fulfilled was that the Great High Priest would lead God’s people to become a kingdom of priests.

Kingdom of Priests

We've already seen that Exodus 19:6 and Isaiah 61:6 both foretell a time when God's people would become a nation or kingdom of priests. They would all serve in God's holy presence by doing the work he assigned them, offering sacrifices of praise and obedience, and performing other priestly functions. And significantly, in Jesus' sermon recorded in Luke 4, the Lord quoted from Isaiah 61 and claimed to be fulfilling it. In this way, Jesus implied that he himself would turn God's people into a kingdom of priests. And according to other portions of the New Testament, this is precisely what he did.

For instance, in 1 Peter 2:5, Peter referred to the church as a "holy priesthood." And in verse 9, he called it a "royal priesthood." And we find the same idea in Revelation 1:6, 5:10, and 20:6.

As just one example, listen to these words about Jesus from Revelation 1:6:

[He] has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father (Revelation 1:6).

As Messiah, Jesus is the Great High Priest who rules as king, and who appoints all his followers to serve as priests in his kingdom.

One of the things we learn from the Old Testament is that the key religious figures were priests. We find in the New Testament that not a subset of Christians, but all believers are now priests. This truth is often articulated in the familiar phrase, "the priesthood of all believers." The point being underscored there is that all Christians are called and empowered to minister, to be the hands, the heart, the legs of Jesus, the body of Christ. Now, this is a tremendously empowering truth. One of the historically dramatic consequences of getting a hold of this wonderful truth is that no one need any longer to consider another human being a necessary conduit, or mediator between them and God. Any structure that puts a middleman between you and God is fraught with opportunities for abuse and social control and bondage. So this is a tremendously empowering dignifying and liberating truth, and yet, it's a truth that does not undermine in any way the complimentary truth that God has gifted his body with a diversity of gifts, and that among those gifts, one of the ones that I have come to appreciate in others who have ministered to me, is the pastoral gift. The pastoral gift requires a special heart. It requires the heart and the skills to shepherd, to guide, to encourage, to comfort. This is not to stand between anyone and their God. This is not to undermine their right to interpret the Scriptures as God enlightens their own mind as they do their good work and discipline themselves for this task. But it is a grace that is provided to us, to help

us in the journey in which every one of us is a priest, and every one of these priests values and treasures pastoral care.

— Dr. Glen Scorgie

Jesus' fulfillment of the priestly office reminds us of something very important. God's original purposes in creation have been complicated by sin, but never overwhelmed by sin. Jesus' own arrival and exact fulfillment of the priestly requirements show his fidelity to the goodness of God's plan. His consolidation of the office and its ultimate meaning shows his centrality in the advance of God's plan. And as the Great High Priest who rules as king, Jesus fulfills the original and expected aspects of priestly ministry. So, as his people, we have great reason to honor and worship and trust Jesus, and to serve him loyally as his kingdom of priests.

So far, we've explored the Old Testament background to the office of priest, and its fulfillment in Jesus. So, at this point, we're ready to consider the modern application of Jesus' priesthood. What implications does Jesus' role as our Great High Priest have for our lives today?

MODERN APPLICATION

One convenient way to approach the modern application of Christ's priestly work can be found in the *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, answer number 25, which says:

Christ executeth the office of a priest, in his once offering up of himself a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice, and reconcile us to God, and in making continual intercession for us.

In this answer, the *Catechism* summarizes Christ's priestly work in terms of his ministry to believers. And it mentions at least three aspects of this work. First, it speaks of Christ's ministry of self-sacrifice. Second, it says that his once-for-all-time sacrificial ministry effected reconciliation between believers and God. And third, it lists his continual intercession between believers and God.

Our consideration of the modern application of Jesus' office of priest will follow the emphases of the *Westminster Shorter Catechism*. First, we'll look at Christ's sacrifice. Second, we'll focus on his work of reconciliation. And third, we'll consider the application of Christ's intercession. Let's turn first to sacrifice.

SACRIFICE

We'll examine the application of Christ's sacrifice by looking at three responses we should have to it: trust in him for salvation; faithful service to him and those he loves; and worship. Let's start by looking at the matter of trust.

Trust

Scripture teaches that Jesus' sacrifice on the cross is the only effective basis for God's gift of salvation. Christ died on the cross to save sinners. To use the vocabulary we learned earlier in this lesson, he propitiated God, satisfying God's justice and wrath, in order to expiate, or take away, the guilt of everyone that has faith in him.

And that faith is critical. In order to receive the forgiveness of sins that Christ offers, we have to trust him, and him *alone*. We have to believe that he is the Son of God who died for our sins, and that we are forgiven only because of the sacrifice he offered for us. Scripture speaks of this trust in places like John 20:31, Romans 10:9-10, and 1 John 4:14-16.

Followers of Christ must trust that our salvation is based on Jesus' sacrifice, and that it's effective only because of his work. No one else can save us.

As Peter preached in Acts 4:12:

Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12).

We can't earn salvation. No church or saint can give it to us. We must trust only in the merits of Christ and his sacrifice to save us.

When we put our trust in Jesus alone, we can have confidence and joy before God. Jesus faithfully did everything the Father commanded. And we can be assured that he will faithfully do everything he has promised to us as well.

As we read in Hebrews 10:19-22:

We have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus ... since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith (Hebrews 10:19-22).

The confidence mentioned here could also be called trust. It's the firm belief that Jesus' sacrifice is sufficient to atone for our sin, and that there is no way it can fail to save us.

One of the signs that we are saved is that we have a sense of being saved. We have a sense of being part of God's family. The Bible says that the Holy Spirit testifies with our spirit that we're children of God. And so, true children of God have a sense of that adoption. But that doesn't mean we can't have fluctuations in the degree of certainty or assurance that we do have about our salvation. We do want to be growing in that assurance, but it certainly can come and go over time. We need to seek to understand the gospel, to preach it to ourselves everyday so that we understand what Jesus has done for us when he took our place, and help one another. That's what we do in fellowship, we help one another be more sure of our adoption, of our salvation, of

our forgiveness, that the Holy Spirit presses this home to us as we sit under the preaching of the word and we grow in our confidence in Christ and what he's done for us. So, the assurance of salvation every believer has comes and goes from day to day, but there should be in general, a continual growth in it over time.

— Dr. K. Erik Thoennes

Can true believers doubt their salvation? Absolutely. And one sees examples of it in Scripture. I think you see in the cases of Elijah sitting underneath the juniper tree; you see David in some of his psalms of enormous lament asking questions with regard to his relationship with God. I think you see in the biography of Peter, perhaps immediately after the denial episode, when he goes out and weeps. Sure. True believers may doubt their salvation. You know, our salvation is not, "I'm saved by the amount of assurance I have." Sometimes in evangelical circles, we tend to go in that direction. We ask people to give their testimony — I have a testimony; I have a Paul-like conversion in that it was sudden and dramatic. I can give you an hour and a minute if you press me. There was one day when I didn't believe Jesus existed nor did I care, and within 24 hours, I believed he was the Son of God and my Savior. But I am saved by grace through faith in the finished work and accomplishment of Christ alone and not on the amount of assurance I have. There are all kinds of things that can rob you of your assurance. Sudden dark providences, when the Lord takes away the woman or man that you love most in all the world, that can shake you. Sometimes there are physical, psychosomatic reasons. Some people are prone to seeing the glass half empty. They are constitutionally questioners. We all know the "Eeyores" of the world, and I think I'm probably one of them, that tends to ask questions of that nature. There are factors, divine factors, the *Westminster Confession*, for example, in the 17th century suggested that God sometimes withdraws the light of his countenance from us, distancing himself in order to make us want him more, that the very act of missing him grows us and ultimately affirms our faith. That's never a pleasant thing to experience. But parents will sometimes do that. They will withdraw their hands from a child who is just beginning to walk. They are there, ready to catch them if they fall, but they're on their own for a second. And something like that, God does with us, making us yearn for him and causing us to grow as a consequence.

— Dr. Derek W.H. Thomas

Now that we've considered trust as a response to Christ's sacrifice, let's turn to the service his sacrifice should inspire us to render.

Service

The Bible teaches that Jesus' sacrifice on our behalf should inspire us to serve him faithfully. Throughout Romans 6, Paul made it clear that because Jesus died to save us, we are obligated to love and to obey him. He died to give us new life — life that is free from the mastery of sin. And one way we should express our thanks for this salvation is to fight against sin in our lives, to refuse to submit ourselves to it again.

As Paul wrote in Romans 6:2-4:

We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? ... We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life (Romans 6:2-4).

Jesus died in part so that we could be free from sin's mastery. And the only appropriate response to that sacrifice is to live in ways that please him.

Scripture also mentions many other ways that we can serve Christ in light of his sacrifice. Obviously, we should follow the example of Christ by being willing to suffer and even to die for his purposes. In fact, passages like Acts 5:41 and Philippians 1:29 indicate that it's a great honor and blessing when we suffer for the sake of Christ.

And the Bible also encourages us to serve Christ by sacrificing ourselves for the same people that Jesus died to save. It teaches us to be patient and compassionate with each other in Ephesians 4:32–5:2. It instructs us to give up our freedoms for the sake of those who are weaker in faith in Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 8. And it even commands us to lay down our lives, just as Christ did, for the sake of other believers. As John wrote in 1 John 3:16:

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers (1 John 3:16).

Jesus' once-for-all-time sacrifice of atonement on the cross was completely sufficient for its intended purpose, namely, taking on himself God's just punishment for sins. We could never atone for ourselves, let alone for another human being. But we *can* follow Jesus' example by laying down our lives for the sake of others.

And if we should be willing to die for them, then we should also be willing to make lesser sacrifices for them, parting with our time, our money, our comfort, and our possessions in order to serve them.

It's easy to talk about how important it is to love others, and to sacrifice for them. But sometimes it's hard for us to follow through with these ideas. To love people well, we have to sacrifice things we often hold very dear to us — our time, our finances, and our comfort. These are just a few of the sacrifices necessary to love others. It's so

difficult for us to value the kingdom of God and his righteousness, more than our own comforts. But when we don't, we miss out on one important truth: we gain more in offering these sacrifices than the sacrifices themselves. We gain the opportunity to worship God and see his reign extend in this world by the way we give of our lives for the sake of others.

Now that we've considered trust and service as two modern applications of Christ's sacrifice, let's turn our attention to worship.

Worship

As Christians, we often find ourselves motivated to worship Jesus when we think about what he did for us on the cross. His selfless sacrifice rightly inspires our hearts to praise him for the great love he showed to us. And it moves us to thank him again and again for the incredible blessings of salvation that he purchased for us.

And Jesus' sacrifice should also motivate us to worship the Father and the Spirit. After all, according to passages like John 14:31, Jesus' sacrifice was the plan of the Father. And Hebrews 9:14 teaches us that Jesus offered his sacrifice through the power of the Holy Spirit. So, the Father and the Spirit deserve the same praise and worship that we give to Jesus.

And besides *motivating* us to worship, Jesus' sacrifice also serves as a *model* for worship. Listen to what Paul wrote in Romans 12:1:

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God — this is your spiritual act of worship (Romans 12:1).

This passage naturally raises two questions. First, how was Jesus' death on the cross an act of worship? And second, how can we pattern our own worship after it?

In answer to the first question, Jesus' death on the cross was an act of worship because it fulfilled the Old Testament types and foreshadows set by the sacrifices in the Old Testament. In the Old Testament, God's worship centered around sacrifice. And Hebrews 9 teaches us that Jesus' sacrifice was the substance to which all these Old Testament sacrifices pointed. It also says that Jesus was not passively sacrificed for us. Rather, he actively sacrificed himself. He was the high priest that followed the worship regulations of the old covenant, and presented himself to God as an act of sacrificial worship. And for this reason, our sacrificial acts also constitute worship.

But how can we pattern our worship after Jesus' sacrifice? What kind of sacrificial acts should we offer? Well, Scripture indicates many things we can do that God counts as sacrifice. As we've already seen, Romans 12:1 says that one way we imitate Christ's sacrifice is by offering our bodies to God. But verse 2 goes on to explain the meaning of this: We are not to conform ourselves to the behavior of the world; rather, we are to let our renewed minds in Christ lead us into new patterns of behavior. We are to abstain from sinful uses of our bodies, and to behave in new ways that honor God.

Ephesians 5:1-2 teaches that a second way we imitate Christ's sacrifice is by living a life of love. Jesus' death on the cross was the ultimate act of love. So, when we are kind and compassionate to each other, we're patterning our own lives after Christ's loving sacrifice.

And Philippians 4:18 suggests a third way we can worship God through sacrifice: by giving our money, resources and time to help other believers. Paul said that the Philippians' gifts to him were offerings and sacrifices to God because they were costly to the Philippians and because they benefited those that God loves.

Now, of course, these suggestions don't exhaust the possibilities of worshiping God through sacrifice. But they're a good starting point for us as we follow in Christ's footsteps of worshiping God through loving sacrifice.

Now that we've looked at some ways we should draw practical applications from Jesus' sacrifice, we're ready to see how his priestly reconciliation should impact our lives.

RECONCILIATION

We'll look at the modern application of Jesus' work of priestly reconciliation in three ways. First we'll see that it brings us peace with God. Second, we'll look at the unity it fosters. And third, we'll consider the mission it assigns to us. Let's look first at our peace with God.

Peace

When Jesus reconciles us to God, he makes peace between us and God. Before this reconciliation, our rebellion against God had made us his enemies, as we read in places like Romans 5:10 and Ephesians 2:2. At that time, we deserved God's justice and wrath. But by reconciling us to God, Jesus put an end to this enmity. He quenched God's wrath, and made peace between us.

Now, instead of being God's enemies, we are the children he loves, and faithful citizens in his kingdom. And this means that we never need to fear God in the way we fear enemies. We never need to think that he wants to destroy us. Our lives are hidden in Christ, so that the same peace that exists between God the Father and God the Son also exists between us and God. And this kind of peace ought to move our hearts to praise, our hands to act, and our minds to know more and more about our great God.

Listen to the way Paul talked about this in Colossians 1:19-22:

God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in [Jesus], and through him to reconcile to himself all things ... by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you

**holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation
(Colossians 1:19-22).**

The question of, "We have peace with God," I mean that's very, very clear. Why then the discipline of his children, of believers? I think the simple answer is because he loves us. To have peace with God means that we are brought back into relationship with him. We were created to know God, to serve him, to love him, to obey him, to know him in an intimate way. And our sin cuts us off from that. Salvation brings us back — peace, reconciliation, other images that convey what salvation is — so that we are now in relationship with him. When we sin, he loves us that he doesn't let us go our own way. He pulls us back. He disciplines us. I mean, the imagery that's used in Scripture as of a parent to a child. So that with my children, I am not caring for them, loving them, if I let them do things that hurt them, do things that turn away from what I've commanded them. Our Father in heaven, through our Lord Jesus Christ, disciplines us so that we are now conformed to the image of Christ. That is for our good. So that if we do not experience the discipline of God, that should be a concern to us. Discipline is not a bad thing; it's a good thing, and it demonstrates God's love for his children.

— Dr. Stephen Wellum

The peace we have with God should move our hearts to praise God by proclaiming and thanking him for his great kindness to us. It should inspire us to speak words to and about God and his character in prayer. It should motivate us to meditate on the great things he has done in our lives, to consider new ways that we can love and obey him. And it should give us the desire to encourage those around us by reminding them of the peace that believers already have with God, and that unbelievers can also have if they are reconciled to him.

Our peace with God should also move our hands to act. We should make peace with other human beings. We should demonstrate the blessings of God's peaceful kingdom in the form of moral and social justice, and care for the needy. And we should comfort and counsel those whose hearts are broken by the lack of peace and blessing in their own lives.

And the peace we have with God should also motivate us to know and understand more and more about our great God and Savior. His word tells us to be conformed in our minds to God's way of thinking by thinking his thoughts after him. And to rest peacefully in his sufficiency, not worrying that God might abandon us to the world, but remaining confident in the knowledge that he loves us and takes care of us.

A second way Jesus' priestly ministry of reconciliation applies to our lives is in manifestations of unity among the people of God.

Unity

One theme that frequently appears in the New Testament is that those who love God will also love the people God loves. As we read in 1 John 4:21:

Whoever loves God must also love his brother (1 John 4:21).

When God is reconciled to a person, we should be reconciled to that person too.

This is why the apostle Paul urged his readers to recognize the great gift of reconciliation they had received from God, and to express it in unity with other believers. In the early church, he often applied this idea to the tense relationships between Jews and Gentiles in the church.

Listen to what he said in Ephesians 2:13-16:

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ... His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of [Jews and Gentiles], thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility (Ephesians 2:13-16).

We find a similar emphasis on unity in places like John 17:23, Romans 15:5, and Ephesians 4:3-13.

The modern church is rarely faced with the specific issue of right relationships between Jews and Gentiles. But we have many problems that are similar to this. We struggle with racial, ethnic, and national animosities among believers. And Jesus' ministry of reconciliation can help us pursue unity in these areas. We have all been reconciled to God and to each other through our union with Christ. And this unity should be expressed in our relationships in the church. It should make us cherish and pursue God's goal of a unified church, even though that sometimes means laying aside the things that distinguish us from each other.

Besides peace and unity, a third application we can draw from Christ's priestly ministry of reconciliation is the mission we have been assigned of fulfilling our own ministry of reconciliation in the world.

Mission

Jesus' ministry of priestly reconciliation is not yet complete. His sacrifice purchased and guaranteed reconciliation. But that reconciliation has not yet been applied to the entire world. So, at this stage of history, Jesus has appointed the church to further his ministry of reconciliation. We are his ambassadors of reconciliation. And it's our job to proclaim the gospel that reconciles sinners to God. Listen to how Paul described our mission in 2 Corinthians 5:18-20:

God ... reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God (2 Corinthians 5:18-20).

The offer of reconciliation to God continues to be a vital ministry of the church. Paul told the Corinthians that God has reconciled us to himself through Christ, and that he is continuing to reconcile the whole world to himself. And it's our responsibility as Christ's followers to proclaim this message to others, so that they can also be reconciled to God through him. We do this primarily by announcing the good news that through Christ's life, death, resurrection and ascension, sinners can find peace with God.

Now that we've looked at Jesus' priestly ministry in terms of sacrifice and reconciliation, we should turn to the modern application of Jesus' priestly intercession.

INTERCESSION

We'll examine the modern application of Jesus' priestly intercession under two headings. First, we'll see that it enables us to appeal to God for ourselves. And second, we'll see that Christ's intercession obligates us to advocate for other people. Let's look first at how it enables us to appeal to God for our own needs.

Appeal

As we've seen, Jesus intercedes for us by reminding God the Father of his sacrifice on our behalf, and by asking the Father to forgive and to bless us on the basis of this sacrifice. And because the Father loves the Son and values his sacrifice, he responds positively to the Son's intercession for us. He hears and answers Christ's priestly petitions, so that forgiveness, sanctification, life, and all the other blessings of salvation can continually be applied to us.

And one implication of this is that we can approach the Father every day with our needs, knowing that he listens to our prayers because our Great High Priest is praying for us. We see this in Ephesians 3:12, Hebrews 10:19, and many other places.

As just one example, listen to Hebrews 4:14-16:

Since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are — yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of

grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need (Hebrews 4:14-16).

As the author of Hebrews pointed out, Jesus has “gone through the heavens.” That is, he has entered the heavenly sanctuary with his own blood in order to make intercession for us. And because of his intercession, we can have confidence that God favors us, and is inclined to give us mercy and grace when we pray to him.

We can appeal to the creator of all things for all of our needs, whether they are needs as deep as for forgiveness and salvation, or as common as prayers for daily food, clothing and shelter. No need is so small that it falls outside the scope of Christ’s intercession on our behalf. And no need is so great that the value of his sacrifice does not cover it. And for this reason, we should be encouraged to be bold and confident in our prayers, appealing to our loving heavenly Father for all our needs and righteous desires.

With this understanding of how Christ’s intercession gives us the right and confidence to appeal to God for ourselves, let’s look at how it encourages us to advocate for others.

Advocate

With Jesus already interceding, why would we bother to pray for other people? I think the main reason is two words — “Follow Me.” If Jesus is interceding, he says, I want you to follow me and I want you to intercede as well. I also believe that our prayers do have impact. I also believe, and I think Scripture teaches, not only do they have impact, but there’s going to be times when you don’t pray and some things don’t get done because you didn’t pray. So, do we believe in prayer? Yes. But why? It’s because Jesus said, “Follow me,” and he prayed.

— Dr. Matt Friedeman

One of the important lessons of Christ’s heavenly intercession is that we should follow his example by advocating for others in prayer. Our love and concern for others should motivate us to talk to God on their behalf, asking him to show his mercy and love to them in whatever circumstances they’re facing.

Listen to what Paul wrote in Ephesians 6:18:

Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints (Ephesians 6:18).

Here, Paul instructed all believers to approach God on behalf of others. And of course, whenever we do this, our advocacy is based on Christ’s sacrifice on their behalf, just like Jesus’ own advocacy for us.

So when I ask myself, why does Jesus pray, he knows my needs, he understands my needs, why would he have to intercede for me? There must be something at the base of intercession that is an example of the heart of God, and that is that he bears, he carries. In the Lord's incarnate life, in the triune life, there's a bearing, a love that receives the needs of humanity. That's the foundation of the cross, the foundation of my walking with Jesus. And so the Lord says to me in a command form because he wants me to understand reality, but he's also offering me the chance to bear somebody else in my heart. If I can say it this way, the answer to every person's need is found in somebody else. Now the answer to all of our needs of course is found in the heart of Jesus. But he, making us in his image and calling us to be his disciples, has said I want you to also bear. I want you to be priests like the Israelite priests. I want you to bear in your heart like Aaron. I want you to bear in your heart like I did, the needs of the world. And so intercession is an expression of the very heart of God.

— Dr. Bill Ury

Intercessory prayers of advocacy can apply to any aspect of life. For example, we are encouraged to pray for the success of Christian ministries in places like Romans 15:30; Ephesians 6:20; Colossians 4:4; 1 Thessalonians 5:25; and Hebrews 13:19.

We're taught to pray for those in spiritual danger or sin, as we see in 1 John 5:16. We should pray for others to receive protection from temptation, following Jesus' teaching in Matthew 6:13, and his model in Luke 22:32. And we should pray for their health, asking God to heal injuries of both body and mind. Listen to these instructions from James in James 5:14-16:

Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective (James 5:14-16).

James taught that when we advocate for others in the name of the Lord, that is, when we intercede for them by reminding the Lord they belong to Christ, the Lord is inclined to receive our advocacy favorably, and to grant our petitions. And for this reason, we should take full advantage of this privilege, regularly advocating for those in need.

I have an unshakable confidence in the sovereignty of God. I have an absolute confidence that Jesus Christ right now is interceding for me and for all believers before the Father's throne. I have absolute confidence that all that I need is in Christ. So, would it hurt anything

if I didn't pray intercessory prayers for those I know are in need? Let me tell you, no one asks that question when he or she is in need. I've been in a situation of great need. I've been in a situation where my life, medically speaking, was very much on the line. I knew that the prayers of the faithful were important. I knew that my brothers and sisters in Christ praying for me were doing something that was important to my life. My ultimate faith and trust is in a sovereign God and the glorious Christ, but our faithfulness to Christ requires us to do what Christ commands, and that means to pray for the faithful. I know one reason it's important. I'm a much more faithful Christian when I'm praying for those I know are in need.

— Dr. R. Albert Mohler, Jr.

And of course, we should also advocate on behalf of others for the matters of daily life. For example, just as we ask for bread for ourselves, we should also advocate for others, asking God to meet their daily needs too. We should ask him to grant all sorts of blessings to his people, including things like health, provision for work, and success in their relationships. Whenever situations in our own lives weigh on our hearts, we should appeal to God to help us. And in the same way, we should be moved to pray for the needs of others, whether those needs are big or small.

People often wonder about the mystery of prayer. Why do we need to pray? If God already knows all things, and if Jesus is already interceding, why do we need to pray? Is anything missed, or does it hurt anything if we don't pray and intercede for the world and for others? Well I think the answer to the question is yes, something is hurt, and here's why. First of all, if we don't intercede, we are disobeying God, for God has commanded us to pray. On one level, that's all we need to know. We don't need to understand the mystery of how it works. God has commanded us to pray. And if we trust him and love him, we will pray. But secondly, God not only has commanded us to pray, but somehow in the mystery of all of this, he includes the prayers of the saints in the very intercession of Jesus. I'm struck by this image in the book of the Revelation in which there is this incense that burns and rises to God which is described as the prayers of the saints. It's as though if we don't pray, we also hurt our own relationship with God in that God wants us to be engaged with him in what he is doing in the world. So he calls us into a deeper and fuller relationship with him by seeing ourselves as his co-laborers, as Paul describes himself and others, co-laborers with God in this work of redemption through our intercession. So our relationship with God is hurt. But thirdly, here's the greatest mystery of all. Somehow God has decided to redeem the world not by acting on it from without, but the creating of power of his grace within. And so as we intercede with Jesus, it's not so much that we should think of ourselves as trying to

convince God to do something that he doesn't want to do, or try to add something to the prayers of Jesus. We ought to see our intercession for the world or for others more like this. We are trying to take the world or others and pull them by our prayers to the place where God wants them to be so his blessing and his grace can be poured out upon them. And so, yes, in God's mysterious design, something is lacking if we don't pray, because from within his creation, he has left his redeemed children to be not only those who are waiting on their final salvation, but working now, pulling and drawing by prayer, the world and others to the place where God can save them.

— Dr. Steve Blakemore

CONCLUSION

In this lesson on Jesus the Priest, we've looked at the Old Testament background to Jesus office, seeing that God ordained priests to prepare and lead God's people into his special, holy presence in order that they would receive his blessing. We've also seen how Jesus fulfilled this office in the New Testament by becoming our Great High Priest. And we've considered some of the ways we can apply the principles of Jesus' priestly ministry to our lives in the modern world.

Jesus is the ultimate fulfillment of the biblical office of priest. As our Great High Priest, he is preparing us to live in God's holy presence, and to be blessed by God in astounding ways. And those blessings are not reserved entirely for the future. Through Jesus sacrifice and intercession, the Father is willing to give us a foretaste of our eternal life right now, in the present world. For this reason, followers of Christ should rejoice in Jesus' priestly ministry and long for the day when we will be welcomed into the special presence of God in the new heavens and new earth by Jesus himself. We should also rely on and benefit from Christ's present ministry as our Great High Priest, who even now is interceding for us in the courts of heaven.

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We Believe in Jesus

LESSON
FOUR

The Priest
Faculty Forum



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We Believe in Jesus

Lesson Four: The Priest

Faculty Forum

With

Dr. Frank Barker
Dr. J. Ligon Duncan
Dr. Mark Gignilliat
Dr. Steve Harper
Rev. Thad James, Jr.
Dr. Dennis Johnson
Dr. Riad Kassis

Dr. Thomas Nettles
Dr. Wai-yee Ng
Dr. Greg Perry
Dr. Richard L. Pratt, Jr.
Dr. Glen Scorgie
Dr. Mark Strauss
Dr. K. Erik Thoennes

Dr. Carl Trueman
Dr. Gideon Umukoro
Dr. William Ury
Dr. Simon Vibert
Dr. Peter Walker
Dr. Stephen Wellum
Dr. Ben Witherington III

Question 1:

How did Jesus fulfill the office of priest?

In his role as Christ, Jesus fulfilled three human offices that God had used to administer his kingdom in the Old Testament: the offices of prophet, priest and king. In Jesus' day, the most prominent role of Levitical priests was to serve God in the temple and its grounds. But this wasn't what Jesus did. How did Jesus fulfill the office of priest?

Dr. Glen Scorgie

One of the very important functions that Jesus Christ fulfilled was the function, or the office of a priest. We mean by priest, someone who mediates, who brings together estranged parties, who stands in the middle with an arm to each side uniting. That's the function of a priest. And there's a very real sense in which the incarnation itself, inasmuch as it was the arrival amongst us of the eternal Son, was a uniting and priestly act. It was our "rapprochement." It was Emmanuel, God with us. And then, as we move through the stages of his life to that final drama on the cross, we see in the death of Christ, not the tragic end to a misguided career, but a purposeful event in which all the sacrificial and substitutionary image of the Old Testament sacrificial system is fulfilled and completed in the one who is both the priest before God on behalf of the people with whom he has identified and himself the sacrifice, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. But then, as priest, his work is not fully complete for he ascends to the Father, sits at the Father's right hand, and at this very moment he continues ever to intercede for us. In the existential realities of ongoing time, he continues to function as priest, eternally applying to our accounts the infinite merits of what has been, historically been, achieved so that as the Father looks at us stumbling and blundering along, we are in Christ forever.

Dr. K. Erik Thoennes

A prophet represents God before people, speaks the truth of God representing God in front of people. Well, a priest does the opposite. He represents people before God.

Jesus came as a priest, and there were two primary ways he fulfilled that priestly office. The first was to make atonement. His life and death served as an atoning sacrifice so that we could be friends with God again when we were just enemies. The second function of Jesus as priest is that he has an intercessory role. He has an ongoing role of interceding for the saints before the throne based on his perfect atoning work, but he has an ongoing relationship with us as our intercessory priest.

Dr. Gideon Umukoro

Jesus is our priest. When we talk about the priesthood of Jesus, almost every African understands what a priest means, because we still have the different kinds of priests, idol priest, and all kinds of priests. In short, a priest is one who stands between you, the offender, and gods that you have offended. He is the one that brings the sacrifices on behalf of you to the gods. That is a picture of what Jesus Christ came to do for us as the priest. He is the final sacrifice. Before he came, we have other sacrifices that we used to atone for our sins: the blood of bulls, rams, turtle doves. But Jesus Christ came, and he gave the utmost sacrifice once and for all, entered into the Holy of Holies with his blood, put it on the mercy seat, and henceforth we don't need another priest or another sacrifice. And right now, as we talk, he is before God bringing our intercession, bringing our requests as the high priest before the presence of the Almighty God. So it gladdens my heart because I understand this by our own culture where I am coming from in Africa, the importance of priesthood. So we give God the praise who had made this done for us once and for all, and today we have a great mediator, a great priest who daily brings us before God, and it gladdens my heart.

Dr. Carl Trueman

Jesus Christ is our priest. He performs that function in his life, his death, his resurrection, and now in his ascension to the right hand of the Father. He performs the function of a priest by interceding on behalf of his people and making a sacrificial offering for them. On earth, of course, he was interceding for his people in the High Priestly Prayer in John where he talks to the Father about the people that the Father has given him. He offers himself as a sacrifice upon the cross at Calvary, and now, ascended at the right hand of the Father, he offers himself continually in intercession to the Father on our behalf, fulfilling the great Old Testament role of the priest.

Question 2:

How did the incarnation make God the Son a more effective high priest?

God the Son has always existed in Trinity with God the Father and the Spirit. But to save humanity from sin, the Son chose to take on a full human nature, partly in order to become our high priest. But how was this helpful? Wouldn't it have been easier for him to stay in heaven and intercede for us without taking on a human nature? How did the incarnation make God the Son a more effective high priest?

Dr. K. Erik Thoennes

The Bible tells us that Jesus had to be made like his brothers in every way so he could become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God and make atonement for the sins of the people. Jesus' being fully man enables him to sympathize with our weaknesses because he's been tempted in all ways like us, yet was without sin.

Dr. Mark Strauss

Jesus' incarnation made him a more effective high priest because he could sympathize, he could empathize. He could understand exactly what we are going through. Hebrews 4:15 says that we do not have a high priest who cannot empathize with us, but one who has been tested, one who has been tempted in every way as we have been tempted and tested as human beings. Sometimes, we as conservative, as evangelical Christians, so emphasize the deity of Christ that we forget that it's really his humanity that saves us. Because Jesus became a true human being, he could suffer and die for us, for our sins. So, Jesus' humanity is essential to our salvation, it's essential to his high priesthood, because only as a human being could Jesus pay the penalty for our sins.

Dr. J. Ligon Duncan

The Bible tells us that Jesus' incarnation made him a high priest who is able to be touched with the feeling of our infirmities. And that means that he is a more effective high priest than he would have been or could have been had he not known the fullness of what it is to be human and experience that with and for us. There are a variety of ways that that's manifested. One is that Jesus in his own life and experience had dealt with and encountered the same range of human problems in the fallen world that we do, that God in the flesh knows the same kind of heartaches and sorrows and disappointments and betrayals and wounds that anyone who lives in this fallen world experiences. This is not something theoretical to him, this is not something that he stood off in the deep bowels of space, in the dusty past of eternity and speculated about. It's something that he came into the world in our poor flesh, in our poor blood, and experienced himself. He's not, as C.H. Spurgeon would have said, a "dry-land sailor." He's not someone who's an expert on sailing who's never been in a boat. He himself has been in our own flesh and blood and has experienced this whole same range of problems in a fallen world that we experience.

But, it's even better than that, I think. It's better than that because the Lord Jesus not only experienced that common range of problems in a fallen world, but he experienced them in an extreme degree. The Bible makes it clear that Jesus' humiliation is not something that was confined to the cross. Nor was it something that was confined to the opposition that he experienced in his earthly ministry, but that it was something that he began to experience from the moment that he was born. His humiliation for instance begins in his birth in that he's born to a very common family without substantial political power or financial means. He's laid in the feeding trough of animals for his manger. I don't think there is a mother in the world who would want to put her newborn child in a feeding trough for animals. And his whole course

of life, he tells us himself, is operated in the extremes of lack. He tells us that “the foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.” So, the Lord Jesus is saying that to those who are the most deprived of material comforts in this life, I am able to relate to you, because I was not born in a palace. I did not grow up in a family that afforded me fine clothes and the best of worldly enjoyments. I experienced the same kind of lack that about 80% of the world’s population has over the duration of the time that there have been human beings on this planet. And so the Lord Jesus is able as a high priest to sympathize with those who endure those kinds of lacks and wants.

But I think even more than that, the Lord Jesus’ sympathy for us as high priest is found at a point not of commonality with us in our human nature, but a point of difference. I think that a lot of people think that Jesus can’t relate to them because he was sinless and they’re sinners. The idea is, unless you’ve been down in my sin, you really don’t understand me. And I think the opposite is actually true. Think of it. What if you lived in a world and you had perfect pitch and you could hear everyone around you singing off key? Would that make it easier for you or harder for you at a concert? Well, I happen to know some people who have perfect pitch. And I happen to know that it’s sometimes very difficult for them to hear a tenor almost hit the right note or a soprano almost hit the right note. It’s almost torture for them to have to listen to that. Well, Jesus lived in a world filled with sin and he was perfect. And he not only lived in a world filled with sin and was perfect, but he had to live his entire life in consciousness that he himself was going to bear that sin which he had not committed.

Now, none of us know what the future holds for us. Jesus did. Every conscious moment of his ministry he knew that he had come to die and to bear sins that he had not himself committed. The idea of contracting sin, and bearing sin, and “bearing shame and scoffing rude” is something that weighed on him. The Gospels record these events in the final week of Jesus’ life. John tells us that his heart was deeply troubled and he cried out for God and begged God to be glorified in him because he was so overwhelmed at the prospect of what was going to happen at the end of Passover week. Well, Jesus as our high priest lived sinlessly in a world surrounded by sinners, which must have been a vexation to his soul. Have you ever been in a situation where you’re one person trying to resist the predominant sin in a community around you while loving those sinners and not engaging in the same kind of activity that they engage in? This is how Jesus lived every conscious moment of his life. It must have been enormously, psychologically burdensome. And then to know that he was going to die the death that they deserved, bearing their sin in their place. This he did for us.

So when you look at Jesus, you can’t say “Jesus you just don’t understand me.” Because it’s not only that Jesus made you, and he knows what’s in you. It’s not only that Jesus, because he is the God-man, in his divinity knows every thought of what we are. John can put it this way: he himself knew what was in them — speaking of Jesus knowing the hearts of men. But it is that Jesus in our flesh has lived sinlessly in

the midst of sinners, knowing that he was going to bear the penalty due to sinners though in him there was no sin. And that built in the Lord Jesus Christ a sympathy whereby he is able to be down in the dust with us. And I think that that truth ought to be enormously encouraging to all Christians that we don't have a high priest that doesn't understand what it's like to be human. And even in those sins, which we have committed, that he has not, he knows things about the psychological burden of that sin that we ourselves do not know.

Dr. Dennis Johnson

It's a great question to ask how the incarnation made the Son of God a more effective high priest for us. We know that as the Son of God he has divine omniscience; he knows everything. And yet again, the writer to the Hebrews emphasizes that this God who knows all things, who sustains all things, who is eternal, became in the Son a human being, so that we would have a brother who was a high priest. Hebrews begins to pick up that theme at the end of chapter 2 when it quotes from Psalm 22 — He is not ashamed to call us his brothers. He will confess the Father's name before his brothers — and immediately moves on into that reality that Jesus comes to share our human nature, become our brother, to be a merciful and faithful high priest. He picks that up at the end of chapter 4 and the beginning of chapter 5 talking about the fact that our high priest is one who can be touched with the feeling of our weakness. And then connects in to Aaron, the Old Testament high priest, and Aaron's sons. Aaron was taken from among the brothers — that is the Israelites — and therefore could represent them before God and his holiness. Now Aaron and his sons were all sinners, and so Hebrews also points out that Aaron and his sons needed to offer an atoning sacrifice for their own sins first of all before they offered atoning sacrifices for the sins of Israel.

Jesus, of course, doesn't need an atoning sacrifice for his own sins; he has none. But he can intercede for us from the perspective of one who, as a human being, has endured all the tests and the trials that are lodged against our faith and our faithfulness by the evil one. And, of course, Jesus endured them all with perfection. So his incarnation qualifies him in a particular way that perhaps we can't fully grasp because we're dealing with mystery here, to intercede for us, to pray for us. But, of course, the other crucial thing is that we need not only a priest who knows us; we also need a sacrifice that is sinless. And Hebrews also speaks of that, especially Hebrews 10. The preacher to the Hebrews quotes from Psalm 40 and references the fact that in Psalm 40 the speaker there, who is the psalmist, but the psalmist speaking for Christ as he enters the word, is coming to take up the body prepared for him, to offer that body as the final sacrifice. Jesus became a human being in order to provide the sacrifice that we needed. The blood of bulls and goats Hebrews says, testified to our need for cleansing but could only cleanse externally and not get to the conscience. But the blood of Christ shed for us in his humanity, in his perfect humanity, atones for our sin and cleanses our conscience so that we can draw near to God in confidence.

Question 3:

How did Jesus fulfill the function and significance of the temple?

God's temple in Jerusalem was his holy house on earth. And when Jesus came as our Great High Priest, he made several statements that tied him directly to the temple, not just as priest, but as the fulfillment and replacement of the temple itself. How did Jesus fulfill the function and significance of the temple?

Dr. Stephen Wellum

The relation of the temple to Jesus is very, very important, and Jesus comes as the fulfillment of the temple. Now, how does he do this? Well, it's very clear that he sees himself as the fulfillment of the temple — John 2. You think of it when he's dealing with the religious leaders, he'll say, "Destroy this temple in three days and I will rebuild it." And they say, well, you know, "How is this possible? How can you build this temple in three days?" And John adds that sort of parentheses there, "Well, after his resurrection we understood that he was referring to himself." So, Jesus sees himself as the new temple, as the fulfillment of the temple. It's important to realize that the temple in the Old Testament is really the meeting place between God and his people. You think of that "Holy of Holies" where, even though God is all-present, he uniquely dwells with his people. It's the place where sacrifice would take place. It's where the priest would go into the presence representing the people. All of that symbolized God's presence with his people, the means of atonement, the means of provision by which he could be their God and they could be his people. Jesus as the fulfillment of this is the one who in his very person, and in his very work is the one who is the mediator. He is our priest. He is the one who brings God's presence to pass. He is, into very self, Emmanuel, God with us. He is the fulfillment of the temple in that he is the one who brings what it points forward to, to its end. He brings the sacrifices to an end. He now opens up access. You think of the New Testament, the new covenant reality that we have direct access, quite contrast with the Old Testament people of God where they could only, through one priest once a year have access. He is now the one who is the mediator; he gives us access to the Father. Through him, we now can come directly to God, and through him, we then by extension are temples where the Spirit of God dwells with us. We are now in intimate relationship. The barriers are removed. So he is the fulfillment of the temple in that he is the one to which the temple pointed.

Dr. Wai-yee Ng (translation)

John's gospel indicates that Jesus fulfilled the function of the temple. In the Old Testament, the holy temple was the place where God can be with his people, and where the people of God could worship him and be near to him. So in John 4, in the discussion about the place of worship, the Jewish people said that the proper place was the temple, but Jesus has brought this temple into a perfect state. He has become the mediator through whom human beings can approach God. Only by relying on Jesus Christ can we be with God. Jesus died for us and completed salvation so that we can receive the true life that he gives. Because of Christ, we are allowed to be with

God and to live in him. In this way, Jesus replaces, or completes, the function typified by the Old Testament temple.

Dr. Mark Gignilliat

The temple in the Old Testament was God's special presence among his people. It was lifted; it was raised in the community; it was life in the midst of death; it was the Garden of Eden in the midst of a fallen world. And there's a sense in which, as Jonah learned the hard way, that God is everywhere. He's omnipresent; he can't be avoided. But there's another sense from an Old Testament, and a New Testament perspective, that God is specially present in particular places. And the temple was God's special presence on earth; it was the way in which he encountered his people. Again, to use language that's familiar in our tradition: the temple is God's "sacramental presence" — a physical reality that exhibits God's presence among his people. So, when the New Testament begins to pick up on this theme — in John 1, for example, Jesus "tabernacles" among his people — he is the actual presence in the temple of God, there for his people. It's his salvific presence, his life-giving presence. And then you also have that kind of enigmatic, cryptic statement that Jesus says when he passes by the temple, and he says, "Tear this down, this temple down, and in three days I'll build it up again." And they laughed at Jesus because they knew the second temple took years to construct under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah and subsequent generations, but they didn't know that Jesus was talking about himself. He's the temple. He is God's presence among his people. And that presence among his people is our salvation. It's our redemption. He is God's temple.

Dr. Peter Walker

One of the fascinating things in John's gospel is just how much of it is set in the temple in Jerusalem. And it's obviously very important for John to convey some kind of connection between Jesus and the temple. I think what's going on here is that for Jewish people, the temple was the place where they believed that God's Shekinah glory had once upon dwelt, and there's a bit of a dispute as to whether it still dwelt there at the time of Jesus, but that's what it was really meant to be. And so John portrays Jesus as now being a similar divine presence on earth, just like the temple was so now Jesus is God's presence. And then you notice that this goes all through his gospel, he begins in John 1:14 with this phrase "the Word of God tabernacled" or "dwelt" amongst us; it's the temple word again. Then in John chapter 2 you have Jesus going into the temple and the cleansing of the temple, and in that conversation, Jesus says, "destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days." And John makes a little comment; he was talking about the temple of his body. What's John doing there? He's saying just as the temple was, so now Jesus is; Jesus is God's presence, and we don't need the old Jerusalem temple, we now need Jesus, we've been given Jesus, and that's great. And then through the rest of these opening sections of John's gospel, it's uncanny how much relates to the temple still.

I think it's just helpful to remember that there were three or four main festivals, which were associated with the temple, but the three, which are most important in John's gospel, are Passover — Passover lamb being sacrificed. Well, in John's gospel we're

going to discover that Jesus is the Passover Lamb way back in chapter 1: “Behold, the Lamb of God,” says John the Baptist. And at the end of the gospel, it’s uncanny how Jesus is crucified at the same time as the Passover lambs are being slaughtered in the temple. So that’s one temple motif, which is being fulfilled in Jesus. There was another festival called the Dedication, Hanukkah — John 10. We discover that Jesus is walking around in the winter, and that’s the time of Hanukkah, Dedication. And just in that chapter you have the interesting phrase, Jesus himself saying, “I am dedicated to the Father.” So, that’s another in which Jesus is fulfilling this temple festival. But perhaps the third and most interesting one is the Feast of Tabernacles, which took place in the autumn, September or October, and we have Jesus then in the Feast of Tabernacles in John 7–8, and at this festival there was a great light, a great flame put up in the middle of the temple — Josephus says you could see it all around Jerusalem — and also there was a great ceremony of water as it was brought up from the Pool of Siloam and brought to the temple. And it’s very interesting how Jesus picks up both of those things saying, you know, “out of your heart will flow streams of living water,” picking up the water theme, and then in chapter 8, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness.” So we see here John deliberately showing how Jesus has fulfilled three major festivals — Passover, Dedication, and Tabernacles. It’s fascinating.

Question 4:

Why were the Old Testament priestly ceremonies so important?

One of the functions Levitical priests performed was conducting ceremonies. The Old Testament law makes it clear that the ceremonial aspects of the priesthood were very important. But Christians sometimes have a hard time understanding how ceremonies could be so valuable. Why were the Old Testament priestly ceremonies so important?

Dr. Frank Barker

Those Old Testament festivals and sacrifices and all pointed back to things that had happened and pointed to things that were going to happen. For instance, the Passover that they would observe, that pointed back to when they were delivered from Egypt through the blood of the lamb being put over their doorpost, and all the firstborn sons in Egypt were killed that didn’t have that blood over it, and that’s what led Pharaoh to say, let them go, and so on. And they were delivered from that. But, of course, that also pictured the deliverance that we would get from our “Egypt,” from bondage. And our “Pharaoh” would be Satan. And we are delivered when we put the blood over our lives, in a sense. That has to be applied. It wasn’t enough that the blood be shed; it had to be applied. And that happens when we put our faith in Christ, of course. So they sort of pointed back, and they pointed forward. For instance, one of the ceremonies, they would live in tents for a week or so, and that pointed back to when they were in the desert. And God wanted them to remember those days and to keep it before them and before their children. This was a good way of instructing in the history of God and the deliverance of the nation and his relation to them. Also, it

pointed forward to things like Christ coming, his death, and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, which was one of the festivals that they were to observe, the Feast of Weeks, and that last day of that would be when the Spirit would come, and there would be a great harvest, in a sense, of souls. So, all of those were pointing back and pointed forward, and very important.

Dr. Riad Kassis

There were many special occasions in the Old Testament, in Old Testament times like festivals, the Sabbath and other occasions. And I think there were two aspects of these special occasions. There was the religious aspect. These were occasions where people celebrated God's goodness, God's grace. But there was also another social aspect. I think in these special occasions people came together to strengthen their relationships, to enjoy their life as a community — something which is very much needed in our own days, in addition to that religious aspect. Sabbath was a day for worship, but it was also a day of rest. It was a day to enjoy God's creation and to enjoy fellowship with other fellow men and women.

Question 5:

How did the Old Testament sacrificial system demonstrate God's mercy?

The most frequent task performed by Levitical priests at the temple was the offering and presenting of sacrifices to God. These included sacrifices for atonement, thanksgiving, fellowship, and other purposes. Sadly, Christians often think that the sacrificial system focused entirely on God's anger with human sin. But Scripture repeatedly points to the sacrificial system as evidence of God's kindness and compassion. How did the Old Testament sacrificial system demonstrate God's mercy?

Dr. Mark Gignilliat

The God of the Old Testament is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and I think that within the life of the church there can often be this understanding, a bad understanding, of the God of the Old Testament, he's sort of law, and he's mean and then the God of the New Testament is where we find grace and mercy. And that actually is a very poor schema when one recognizes that even built into the Old Testament itself is the gracious character of God. God does take sin seriously, and we see this through the life of Israel's history; we see it in their sacrificial system as well. But we see, I think, in the Old Testament, in the prophetic tradition, and in Israel's cultic worshipping life, is that God's "no" of judgment is never his final word; his "yes" of grace is. So, even though there was sin and there was breaking of the Law in the Old Testament, God had built into the Old Testament a sacrificial system so that grace was even present there. And we know that all of that ultimately witnessed and anticipated the coming One who would be the final sacrifice for all humanity and for all time.

Dr. Riad Kassis

The sacrificial system of the Old Testament shows that God is merciful and compassionate to his people. I think God wanted the people to have a tangible, concrete sign of being forgiven. In addition to this, I think the sacrificial system in the Old Testament shows God's mercy, because that system was the shadow for what was going to happen in the New Testament when Jesus Christ offered himself as God's greatest sacrifice. And by doing that, he showed God's greatest mercy to mankind.

Question 6:**How was Jesus' death on the cross related to the Old Testament sacrifices?**

In a number of places, the New Testament teaches that Jesus' work on the cross was anticipated by the priestly sacrifices outlined in the Old Testament. But what's the connection between the two? How was Jesus' death on the cross related to the Old Testament sacrifices?

Dr. Frank Barker

Well, the way Christ's death on the cross was related to the Old Testament sacrifice is all of those blood sacrifices, like the lamb, pointed to the fact of Jesus Christ would be the true Lamb of God. John the Baptist pointed to Jesus and said, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." And the Passover, which the lamb's blood was put over the doorpost of your house, that was the very day Jesus would die on. But also, when you had the temple and that innermost part of the temple was the holiest of all, and the priest one day a year would take the blood of the lamb all the way into that and place it on the top of that Ark of the Covenant that had the Ten Commandments in it, and that was called the Mercy Seat. Then the people—he would come out and tell the people their sins were forgiven. He would confess their sins over the lamb and then take the lamb's blood in. But also, the day that Jesus died on the cross, when he died, that veil that separated that innermost part of the temple was rent in twain, and that pointed to the fact that now Jesus has died and we don't have to offer any more lambs; the Lamb has died, and we don't need to offer any more lambs.

Dr. Ben Witherington III

Old Testament sacrifice is about the offering of animals or grain or fruits or one or another thing to God. So when we're dealing with the death of Jesus, there are ways that are similar and there are ways it's different from Old Testament sacrifices. The kinds of sacrifices that the New Testament writers interpret Jesus' death as being like are atoning sacrifices, sacrifices of atonement of various kinds, and also the use of the scapegoat practice in antiquity. For example, in the Gospel of John, when we hear the proclamation of John, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world," this is actually combining two different traditions. The sacrificial lamb of Passover, which is not an atoning sacrifice; it's an apotropaic sacrifice, that is a

sacrifice that avoids judgment. And then the scapegoat tradition in the Old Testament, where you lay hands on a goat, your sins are ceremonially passed on to the goat, and the goat is sent off into the wilderness, indicating that God has removed from you your sort of offense against God. Well, there are various ways that the atonement is imaged, and there are various metaphors used in the atoning death of Jesus, but these are the two principle ones, and what they are dealing with at the heart of the matter is that sin is an obstacle in your relationship with God, and that's true of various Old Testament sacrifices as well. Perhaps the most important tradition that sort of presages what happens in the Gospels is in Isaiah, of course — Isaiah 52 and 53 — where we hear about the death of some suffering servant figure who's providing, if you will, the substitute for God's people, who provides, if you will, an atoning death, a ransom for the many, which is actually what Jesus says about his own coming death.

Question 7:

If we have peace with God, why does he still discipline us?

Part of Jesus' job as priest was to atone for our sins, and reconcile us to God. And the New Testament makes it clear that because Jesus succeeded in this work, we have peace with God. But the Bible also teaches that God disciplines believers when we sin. Are these two ideas in conflict with each other? If we have peace with God, why does he still discipline us?

Dr. Thomas Nettles

We have peace with God because we recognize that our sin is forgiven. Paul says, "There's therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus." On several occasions he calls God "the God of peace," which is an amazing thing because he could be represented as the God who is our enemy, God who is wrathful, God who hates wicked-doers, God who abhors those who disobey him. But he calls him the God of peace, so we rejoice in the peace that he has given us. Peace means that we have been reconciled, that God is our friend now in Christ. And he continues to be our friend in that he knows that the corruption that has come upon us is one of the elements of the punishment that has come because we are fallen under condemnation. We are filled with envy, and we are filled with rivalry, and we are filled with jealousy and lust. The flesh continues to lust against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh. Well, those are the very things that actually constitute a large element of hell. When people are in hell, then we are going to see all of these things unleashed with their full fury. There will be no mercy that represses any of these things in humanity. And so, a part of the suffering of hell will be the unleashing of envy and rivalry and hatred toward one another. It will be horrific when added to that active wrath that God has. So, what God is doing when he disciplines us is he is removing from us those seeds of hell — as James talks about, the tongue as set on fire of hell. And God is removing that from us. He is sanctifying us. He is removing those things that are bad for us. He is showing us that we need to ask more for the fullness of the Holy Spirit. We need to mortify the flesh more. We need to make sure that

those elements that are a part of the manifestation of hell are being removed from us. And so, God is chastising us. He's chastening us as children because he is making life filled with joy and is giving us more and more of those portions of heaven even while we are here. And so God's chastening of us is not his punishing us; it is his fatherly kindness toward us in taking us away from those elements that will constitute a large part of the horror of hell for those who experience it in the future.

Dr. Dennis Johnson

I think of Psalm 103, which speaks of the fact that "as a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him." "He knows our frame. He remembers that we are dust." Another crucial dimension of a father's care that is — when a father's caring for his children as the Father, God the Father, cares for us — is loving discipline. I think of Hebrews 12, for example, where the writer to the Hebrews, quoting from Proverbs 3, calls us to be patient in enduring the discipline of the Lord and then really unpacks that analogy, talks about the way that our human fathers disciplined us by their best lights, didn't always know fully how to do it, but they did their best, for a time. But our heavenly Father always is disciplining us for our good, and that though discipline in the present may be painful, afterward it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness. The Father loves us too much to leave us in our childish selfishness. It's a discipline. It's a calling of us to live out the life of faith and to grow in our faith.

Question 8:

Can true believers lack confidence and doubt their salvation?

The salvation Jesus has brought us as our priest is a blessing too great to measure. But for a variety of reasons, sometimes Christians worry about their own salvation. We wonder if our faith is real, or if we've personally received the salvation Scripture describes. When we have doubts like this, does it mean we haven't been saved? Can true believers lack confidence and doubt their salvation?

Dr. Stephen Wellum

It is possible for true believers to lack confidence and even doubt their salvation. It's very, very clear that given what our Lord Jesus Christ has accomplished, his finished work; there's nothing to be added to it. When we come to saving faith in him, we are brought into faith union with him. We are to have confidence. We do not have to despair that our sins have not been dealt with, that somehow God will bring up something in the future that Christ has not already paid for in full. Yet, for a variety of reasons, sometimes we lack confidence, and there can be a variety of reasons for it. It may be that we are not trusting God's promises. We are not taking him at his word. When he says, all those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, sins are forgiven — "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just" — sometimes we doubt that. And the solution to that lack of confidence is believing the promises of God, being reminded again of what the Lord Jesus Christ has done, taking God's Word to heart.

Sometimes, though, we lack confidence because of our own sin. We wander from the Lord. We act in ways that are not faithful to him. The Spirit of God convicts us of our sin. We then have to make sure that we make our calling and election sure, that we are those who, if we are walking out of relationship with God, that confidence is not there. It's not just sort of automatic. It's there because we trust in the finished work of Christ, yet we have to also walk with him. And as we do, as we look to him day by day, as we walk to him, with him, faithfully, that confidence should be there. It will be there. God will testify to us by his Spirit that we are his children — think of the great chapter of assurance, Romans 8 — and bear witness to us that truly we are the children of God.

Dr. Glen Scorgie

True believers can sometimes lack confidence and doubt their salvation. I think that it is a very cruel doctrine that would suggest that when our inner, subjective awareness of our full salvation in Christ falters, that we are in peril of losing our salvation. It's very important to understand that the basis of our salvation is that God holds us, not how emotively or affectively that we are apprehending that truth. And yet, there is a ministry of the Holy Spirit, which is the assuring work of the Holy Spirit, who comes — and this is one of his most exquisite gifts — and supernaturally presses in upon our insecure consciousness, that it is well with our souls, and underneath are the everlasting arms. We evangelicals have as one of our most precious old hymns, “Blessed Assurance.” This is the legitimate and rightful heritage of every truly born-again redeemed Christian. But there are moments that, even the greatest saints attest, when you go through a dark night of the soul. And to strengthen the muscles of resilient faith you must go for a period alone without the comforting, affective, subjective feelings of your adoption. But the characteristic experience, the general and typical experience of the Christian, is that they should enjoy and be comforted and empowered by the Holy Spirit's real work of assurance. If a Christian is, for a period of time, in a slough of despond, or a period of doubt, they should know that they are still not alone, they are not abandoned, and in the mysteries of God some deeper work of grace is going on and their resolve to press forward in trust glorifies God in that tunnel of darkness. But take heart, this too will pass.

A couple of weeks ago I was invited to lecture, to respond to questions in a secular university class in religion. One of the students asked me, “Do you ever doubt? Do you wonder if this stuff you believe is really true?” I answered, “Of course I do. There are moments when I wonder if the entire thing might be a scam.” The students were amazed at my answer, and afterward I understood that it was the most memorable moment in the entire time. They had assumed that believers never have a whisper of doubt afterward. Sometimes I think that doubt is a function of how rigorously you are engaging the principalities and powers and the contrary worldviews of our time. If you're not at times thrown by the power of adversity and contrary plausibility structures, you're just not paying attention. And so, I think it's also important as we seek to be, not only faithful believers, but authentic believers, that we can freely acknowledge that there are times when faith wavers and doubt is real. But we can also attest to the fact that, without becoming fideistic, just choosing

to believe without any basis, we can weather these storms, and our faith can be reestablished and equipoise returned. But a healthy, a willing acknowledgement that periodic moments of doubt in the contests of life are a natural and legitimate part of our experience for which there is no shame.

Question 9:

What was the main point of Jesus' High Priestly Prayer?

Jesus understood that his people would face trials, temptations, doubts, adversities, and all sorts of other challenges. And in his role as our priest, he helps us through these times partly by praying and interceding for us. Perhaps the greatest example of this in Scripture is found in what Christians know as Jesus' High Priestly Prayer, recorded in John 17. What was the main point of Jesus' High Priestly Prayer?

Dr. Steve Harper

When Jesus prays in John 17, it's an extension and sort of a climax to the upper room discourse. Maybe he prayed in the upper room, maybe he was praying as they walked toward the Garden of Gethsemane. But it's definitely the bridge between 14, 15, 16 and 18. And I see it as Jesus' prayerful way of asking the Father to enable those apostles to overcome the world. Later, after he's raised from the dead, that's what he says to them: "Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." And he uses that phrase, uses the term "world," 19 times in that prayer. So I think the main point of the High Priestly Prayer is it's the prayerful request to the Father that God will so empower and indwell — John 15, "abide in me and I in you" — so indwell those apostles that they'll be able to overcome the world. Now, there are some clues in the prayer of how he hopes that they'll do that. The first way is we overcome the world by glorifying God instead of glorifying the world. Whenever we live in a way that honors God and pleases God, we've overcome the world in one sense of the word. Another way that he prays for them is that they will keep the Word. He talks about how he has given them the Word. He's been their teacher. He's been their rabbi. He has instructed them. Now he's praying that what's gotten into them will now become part of the way that they live. And what's interesting to me in that prayer is that at verse 9, the thing pivots into the apostles, but then when you get to verse 20, it's to those who will believe. So he's not just praying that the original twelve will overcome the world, he's praying that we'll overcome the world, too. And I think that's a great encouragement, that the same power that was available to those original apostles to do that is also available to us.

And as he works his way through that prayer about overcoming the world, he says several neat things, I think. One is if we do that we'll experience joy. Like Stanley Jones used to say, "For this I was made." There'll just be that inner sense that I'm doing what I was put on the earth to do, and there's great joy in that. He says also that we'll dwell in unity, because when you see other, you know, believers doing that, you find a oneness in that prayer. And he prays for that. "I pray that they may be one, Father, even as we are one." There's a kind of an ecumenism that happens in this

experience of living out our faith. We find other believers all around the world who are doing that same thing, and that's a wonderful thing. And then, of course, he prays that we'll live in love. But all of that is pointing to, I think, the main idea, and that is that by doing these things, we'll be overcomers; we will overcome the world.

Rev. Thad James, Jr.

Jesus knows that his time is short, that it's time for him, as he says, to go back to be with the Father when they were one before the beginning of the world. And in this time, Jesus says that I've kept all that you have given me except one, the son of perdition, so that Scripture may be fulfilled. So Jesus is really praying to the Father about the disciples, that he is going to leave them, they are going to be left behind, and now what's going to happen to them? As Jesus says, they're in the world as I was in the world, but not of the world, and now, Father, please keep them from the evil one. Protect them from this cosmos, from this evil age, and the things that are happening here. He says, I worked with them for 3, 3 ½, years to sanctify them, to bring them to this point. But now, I'm not going to be here with them, so Father, please keep them, continue this sanctification process because they're going to be facing great trials and great persecutions, and now how are they going to get through this? So, again, it's a prayer to God to take care of his disciples in preparation for the work and the trials, the persecutions, the martyrdom that is going to come before them, the things they're going to have to sacrifice to spread the gospel message of Jesus Christ.

Question 10:

How do modern Christians serve as a kingdom of priests?

When we speak about Jesus being our Great High Priest, one of the things we need to remember is that Jesus has also called us to be priests in his service. Part of our role as Christians is to extend Jesus' priestly ministry throughout the world. In fact, the apostle Peter said that, just like ancient Israel, the church is a kingdom of priests. But practically speaking, what does that mean? How do modern Christians serve as a kingdom of priests?

Dr. Dennis Johnson

In Genesis 12, God promises Abraham, not only that Abraham, who at that point of course was childless, that he would have a seed that could not be counted, but that through Abraham the nations would be blessed. And we see that working its way out through the Old Testament. Israel is called to be a people who are distinctive to the Lord and yet also a people who represent the Lord and his reign among the nations. They are called the "kingdom of priests" as they gather at Mount Sinai — Exodus 19. And priests stand in the presence of God and serve him, but they also have a role of standing on behalf of others and interceding for others. As Aaron and his sons did for Israel, so Israel is to do for the nations. Of course we know that Israel in so many ways failed, as we would have failed, to be that kingdom of priests, to be that avenue through which blessing would flow from God through Israel to all the nations.

But Jesus is the ultimate seed of Abraham, and now in Christ, the new covenant church is both the recipient of blessing through Jesus, the seed of Abraham, and the avenue of blessing among the nations.

So we stand as Israel stood in the presence of God to bring him glory, to adore him, to admire him, to speak of his marvelous deeds. And God speaks of Israel's calling in Isaiah 43 as the people whom he formed for himself to declare his praises. Peter picks up that very terminology in 1 Peter 2 and talks about our being called out of darkness into light that we might speak the excellences of the one who called us in Christ. Israel, we read, is called to be the Lord's witnesses among the nations, to declare what he's done, that he alone is the Savior and the God, the true and the living God. And we read now in the New Testament, in the book of Acts, that the apostles, and really in their ministry, the church, is called to be witnesses to the mighty deeds of God among the nations. So there is a great deal of continuity of purpose as we move from what Israel was called to be, sadly too often failed to be, what Christ has been perfectly, as the perfect worshiper of the Father on our behalf and the perfect witness to the nations on our behalf and now what he's making us. We're still imperfect, but by the grace of the Holy Spirit we can worship in the presence of the Father, and we can bear witness to the nations so the blessing promised to Abraham is flowing to the nations through Christ, from Christ, through the witness and the worship of his church.

Question 11:

If Jesus is our high priest, and the church is a kingdom of priests, what is the role of pastors?

It's common for Christians to see strong parallels between the modern pastor and the Old Testament office of Levitical priest. But we know that Jesus has replaced the Levites, and is now our Great High Priest. The New Testament also teaches that the entire church is a kingdom of priests. So, do we even need pastors? If Jesus is our high priest, and the church is a kingdom of priests, what is the role of pastors?

Dr. Peter Walker

The book of 1 Peter in the New Testament describes all believers as being priests, or it talks about the priesthood of all believers. It's a great phrase, and it's picking up a phrase from Exodus 19 where the ancient nation of Israel is described as, "You shall be," says God, "a nation of priests." I think that what that's saying is that, just as Israel was meant to be the place which if you looked at Israel you saw something of the character of God, priests were meant to, kind of, reflect the character of God. So now, all Christian believers are those who, if you look at them, you're meant to see some of the character of God. It's in that sense that we're all priests; we are part of the priesthood of believers reflecting God's glory to the wider world. But it is also true that the New Testament is quite clear that there is actually only one priest, in one sense, one high priest, and that's the language of Hebrews describing Jesus as our Great High Priest. Why is he our Great High Priest? Because he's given his life as the

one sacrifice for sins, and we can never do that, and it's very important that we do not think that we are somehow priests who are able to offer sacrifice or offer the sacrifice of Jesus again. No, one sacrifice, one priest.

What does that mean, then, for those that are called into church leadership? Well, it does mean to say that they are not priests, in that narrow sense of the word, offering sacrifices again. No, that is completely ruled out. But there is a need, as indeed any organization, to have people who are in charge, and God is not a God who encourages sheer chaos, and any community needs to have good order. And therefore it is appropriate — and we see this in the New Testament — for people to be elevated, if that's the right word, to positions of authority, that we're called to be submissive to those who are in authority. If that's true in the pagan world, how much more in the Christian church, we should be submissive to those that have leadership or who are over us in the Lord, to use a phrase from the New Testament. What, therefore, is the role of these people? Well, to serve their people, we're called to be servant leaders, but also to be, well, teachers. I think that's a key role. If actually Christ rules his church by his Word, then those who are called to be leaders in his church must, as it were, exercise Christ's rule of his church by the same means, which is, by his Word, which then shows you the importance in the New Testament of people being called to be teachers. It's those who have an ability to teach who are meant to be those who lead. There's also a role obviously for pastoral care, for being nice to people and caring for the flock, those who are Jesus' sheep. I would put the primary role as that of being a teacher, ruling God's people by his Word.

Dr. Simon Vibert

Well, the role of priest is described by the New Testament as being — applying to all believers — not so much the role of a sacrificer, but actually the role of an intercessor and one who ongoingly is able to approach God with confidence. And most Protestants have rejected the priestly language as being exclusively applied to the pastor. The pastor is a priest in the way every other Christian was, but the pastor is not there to make a sacrifice for sin. The pastor is there to teach people in the word, to encourage them in the faith and to lead them faithfully. So the word “priest” really is best described to all Christians rather than particularly to the person who leads the local congregation.

Dr. Stephen Wellum

It's important to think through the relationship between the entire church as a priesthood of all believers, and then what would be the point of having pastors? I mean, if we're all priests, why do we need them? As we work from the Old Testament to the New — the old covenant to the new — the nation of Israel was viewed as a priesthood. They had priests who represented them, but they were to also represent God to the entire world. As you work to the New Testament, the fulfillment of the priesthood is Christ as our Great High Priest. He is the one who offers himself for us. He is the one who takes our place. He is the one who intercedes for us. He then, by virtue of his work, makes us now priests. He brings us back to God. We then intercede for the world; we carry out our priestly work in terms of our restoration of

what it was meant to be as his image bearers, of carrying out the cultural mandate before us. The whole body of Christ are priests, yet that doesn't mean, then, that we don't have teachers, leaders in the church. All of us are priests; all of us know God, yet there are certain gifts that are given out to the church that are not all the same. Christ, as he ascends, pours out gifts of leaders, pastors, teachers, even though all of us know God directly, intercede directly before him, through our Lord Jesus Christ's priestly work. Yet there are those who in the body serve different purposes, and pastors have that unique role of leading and teaching and equipping the people of God and they're gifted in that way as fellow priests, but given a special role and a unique leadership role in the church.

Question 12:

How do Christians minister to God in his heavenly temple?

There are many implications of the fact that Christians are a kingdom of priests. Some of these have to do with the ways we relate to and serve other human beings. And others have to do with ministering to God himself, even in his heavenly temple. But how can mere creatures provide any benefit to our infinite, self-sufficient, omnipotent God? How do Christians minister to God in his heavenly temple?

Dr. Richard L. Pratt, Jr.

One of the most important things to know about the Bible's view of human beings is this: human beings were made to serve or to minister to God. I know we talk a lot about serving each other and ministering to each other, but from the beginning all the way to the end, the primary purpose of human beings is to minister or serve God. You can go all the way back to Genesis 2:15 where God said about Adam in the Garden that he was to work it and to take care of it. "To work it and to take care of it" was language that's used in the book of Numbers to refer to what priests and Levites do within the tabernacle. And so from the very beginning when God put humanity in his temple garden, the Garden of Eden, he commanded them to function as priests, in fact, royal priests. And as you go through the Bible, you discover that that's always been the case, that this is always the ideal for human beings, but that in the Old Testament, and then all the way up until the second coming of Christ, this activity takes place in relatively small areas, small pieces here and there.

I mean, for example, it started off with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, which was just one little piece of the earth, and you go on with Israel when they establish a tabernacle and they establish the temple in Jerusalem. Still, the ministering and serving of God by priests is something that takes place in a "holy" place or a "sanctified" place, but nevertheless, this is what human beings were supposed to do. It's why they were designed, why they were put on the planet. But the picture of the new world, when God has sanctified the entire earth and made it all his temple, made it all his holy presence, then this is going to be the job, a priestly job, a royal priestly job for every single human being that lives in that new world. You know, God told Israel in Exodus 19 that God had chosen them to be a royal priesthood, an imperial

priesthood, as it were. And that language in Exodus 19 is used by Peter in the New Testament to refer to the church. And so, this is the perspective that we're to have, not only on ancient Israel as a whole, but also on Christians as a whole, that we are a royal priesthood, a chosen people, a royal imperial priesthood.

Now, I know in many respects that sounds strange, because when we think of priests, what we normally think of is that priests do just a very limited number of things; they offer sacrifices, they pray, occasionally they sing, maybe they blow trumpets and are in choirs and things like that. But in reality, what the Bible is saying is that every legitimate, God-ordained activity on the earth, from the beginning to the end, has been an act of royal priesthood for those who serve God, and they do it in limited ways in the Old Testament, and even in the life of Jesus and in the Christian church today. But in the end, all of it will be such. And in fact, the Bible portrays the creation in many respects, in many places, as if it is God's temple. And, if you can imagine it, God's throne, Isaiah says, is in heaven and his footstool is on the earth, and around his footstool — of course this is talking about the Ark of the Covenant — around his footstool is a holy place where the high priest and the Levites, the special priests of the nation of Israel, serve him. And they do this by decorating, they do this by making sure sacrifices are ready, that plants are grown in the right way, that it's a beautiful place, a wondrous place for God's environment, and keeping evil and unclean things out. This is the kinds of things they do, so all their activity is like that.

But the Bible says that the whole floor of the earth, the whole earth is the floor of God's temple, and what God is doing is he's spreading out his influence, spreading out his holiness from that one little spot, the Garden of Eden in the beginning, later on the tabernacle as it moved, but then finally the temple as it was established. He's now moving out and cleaning the whole floor of his great palace, which is the earth. And this takes place through Israel to some extent. Of course, they failed and misery came from that. And Christ comes, and now he has set us on this task of cleaning the entire floor, and the way we do that is by serving God in every single area of life as an act of worship to him. It's not as if we have just some things that we do that are ministries to God, service of worship to him, and then other things that we do for ourselves or for no good reason at all. Rather, every single thing that we do as Christians is to be done heartily as unto the Lord because it is unto the Lord; whether it's your six days of work, whether it's sleeping, whether it's raising your children. Whatever it is, it is an activity of a royal priest because our job is to move the holiness of God throughout the world in anticipation of the new world to come when everyone who is left will live in this wondrously cleaned, holy, sanctified earth, and they will serve God forever as his royal priests.

Dr. K. Erik Thoennes

It may seem strange to talk about ministering to God, or blessing God, when we realize that he's independent, he has no unmet needs, he's completely self-sufficient. But in his relationship with us, we can bring him joy in the way we obey him or worship him, or live out our faithfulness. And so daily faithfulness, daily obedience and worship of God actually blesses God and brings delight to his heart. And that's

really the primary motivation for living as a Christian. It's not so we don't have bad things happen to us or that God will get mad at us, but that we are able to bring delight to the heart of our Creator in the way we live.

Dr. Greg Perry

What we see in the ministry of Christians on the earth in their worship and in their witness in society is bringing honor and acclamation to the true King, to the true Creator, the true Savior who has brought blessings to our cities and to our lives and honoring him with their life, not only with their worship but with their witness and with their wealth, and the ways that they would benefit the city themselves, to bring this sort of honor to Jesus as the Lord, the *Kurios*, instead of falsely attributing it to others is to bring him true honor as the one who has created us and who has redeemed us.

Dr. William Ury

The activities of Christians this side of heaven minister to God in his temple in the reality of heaven, I think, in some unique ways. The first thing is, it's a beautiful thing as a Christian to realize there is not a dualism in our theology, that what we do on earth is directly connected to that which is spiritual, that which is heavenly. We can't see that world yet. We don't know it like we will know it someday, but it's no less real. So the way we live, the way we act, is a profound statement about our view of reality, that what is not seen is, in many ways, more real than what we do see; in fact, it is the most real. So, our worship life, our obedience to the Lord's commandments, doing what we know is right from the Scripture, is not something that we're doing to earn his love. It's a response to his grace that is pouring over our lives at every point. So everything we do ought to be seen as ministry unto God and connected to that reality. And for many Christians, including myself, it's a difficult thing because we live in time, we don't understand an eternal reality, and so we think about days and weeks and months and don't connect that to the future; whereas, the Christian doctrine of hope connects everything we do with the future so that in a sense — and it's hard to comprehend — the future is already present in Christ. He's already offered to us the future. We're going to access that more and more realistically as we move into the *eschaton*, the last things, but right now we can live in the reality of that beauty. So it produces a massive amount of hope in the Christian life, and joy, and peace, because his victory can be known to us in the now. We'll experience it more fully one day, but it makes a difference in everything we do in the present.

Human beings were made to serve God. And we need his special, holy presence in our lives. But because we're sinful, we can't enter God's presence on our own. We need a mediator to intercede for us. We need a priest; we need Jesus. As our Great High Priest, Jesus brings us into God's presence and even anoints us as his fellow priests. As a result, we now have the privilege of serving God's people on earth, and of ministering to him in his heavenly temple. And that's a ministry we'll continue forever, even in the new heavens and new earth.

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We Believe in Jesus

LESSON
FIVE

THE KING



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We Believe in Jesus

Lesson Five

The King

INTRODUCTION

The history of humanity is often written according to the reigns of powerful kings. We've all heard of kings who ruled large portions of Asia, Europe, Africa and Latin America. Some of them conquered so many enemies that their empires seemed to stretch to the far corners of the earth. And they all have at least one thing in common. They're gone; they're dead; they don't rule any more. Their mighty armies have disappeared, and their power has vanished.

There's only been one exception to this rule. There's one king whose power has never faded, and whose kingdom will never end. And that king, of course, is Jesus.

This is the fifth lesson in our series, *We Believe in Jesus*, and we have entitled it "The King." In this lesson, we'll see how Jesus fulfills the Old Testament office of king, ruling as God's faithful servant and Son. As we've seen in prior lessons, at various stages of Old Testament history God instituted three offices through which he administered his kingdom: the offices of prophet, priest and king. And in the final stage of God's kingdom, which we commonly call the New Testament age, all three of these offices find their ultimate fulfillment in Jesus. In this lesson, we'll focus on Jesus' office of king.

For our purposes, we'll define a king as:

A human being established by God to exercise rule on God's behalf over his kingdom.

As this definition indicates, God always has been and always will be the ultimate ruler over all creation. But he has also appointed human beings to serve as his vice-regents. These human kings serve under him, and further his purposes and goals for his kingdom. As we keep this basic definition in mind, we will be able to gain many insights into the biblical office of king, and into how Jesus fulfills this office.

This lesson will follow the same format as our lessons on Jesus' offices of prophet and priest. First, we will examine the Old Testament background to the office of king. Second, we will explore the fulfillment of the office of king, in Jesus. And third, we will explore the modern application of Jesus' kingship to our own lives. Let's look first at the Old Testament background to Jesus' office of king.

OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND

In his book *The Republic*, the Greek philosopher Plato argued that the best of all possible governments was the rule of a philosopher king. In his view, kings that truly loved wisdom, instead of wealth and power, would direct their nations toward countless

benefits. In a similar way, Scripture shows that when Israel's kings feared God and followed his precepts, their nations thrived under God's blessings. But the opposite was also true: When they rebelled against God, the entire nation suffered under God's judgment. In this sense, Israel's kings were central to the well-being of God's kingdom on earth.

We'll examine the Old Testament background to the office of king by looking at three topics: first, the qualifications for the office of king; second, the function of kings; and third, the expectations the Old Testament created for the future of kingship in Israel. Let's begin with the qualifications for the office of king.

QUALIFICATIONS

In the Old Testament, God revealed the qualifications for kings in two stages. First, in the Law of Moses, God revealed the standards for kingship even before Israel had a king. And second, God's covenant with David provided an important additional qualification once the monarchy was in place. Let's look first at the principles of kingship listed in the Law of Moses.

Law of Moses

It's interesting when you read the Old Testament, particularly the first five books, the Pentateuch, that already there you have anticipation of the coming of a king. You have what the king should be like and should do long before there's ever kings. Why is this the case? Well, I think we need to put those kind of passages, Deuteronomy 17 particularly, where you have the anticipation of the king and what the king should do, in light of God's plan. You really have to go back to Adam. Adam functions as kind of prophet, priest, king. His dominion over this earth, that rule and kingship, in some sense is lost. It's picked up in the nation of Israel through the Abrahamic covenant. Even in Genesis 17 there's promises that through Abraham's line kings will come. That then begins to be realized in Israel and uniquely the king. The king in the Old Testament, even though it's announced many, many years ahead of time in say, Deuteronomy 17 with Moses, is setting us up for the return of the effects of sin upon this world, the restoration that will come through the kings, the Davidic kings. But even more than that, the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ who now takes these roles, fulfills the Davidic role, fulfills Israel's role, fulfills ultimately Adam's role, and restores us back to what we were made to be, so that all of this is in anticipation. All of this is setting us up for more in terms of God's plan as it unfolds, leading us to the messianic theme of "This is what will come. This is who will take place. This is how the king will fulfill

those roles.” All of that, I think, is the reason why Moses is giving us this before there’s ever kings.

— Dr. Stephen Wellum

As Moses prepared the nation of Israel to enter and conquer the Promised Land, he explained that God would eventually appoint a king over them. And he listed four principles that were to guide the king that God appointed. Listen to what Moses wrote in Deuteronomy 17:14-19:

When you ... have taken possession of it and settled in it ... appoint over you the king the Lord your God chooses. He must be from among your own brothers... The king, moreover, must not acquire great numbers of horses for himself or make the people return to Egypt to get more of them ... He must not take many wives ... He must not accumulate large amounts of silver and gold... [H]e is to write ... a copy of this law ... and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to revere the Lord his God and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees (Deuteronomy 17:14-19).

Moses listed four principles relating to the qualifications for kingship. First, he said that Israel’s king had to be chosen by God. The people were not qualified to choose a king that would lead them in the way that God demanded. And they didn’t have the right to vest a person with God’s delegated authority. Only God could delegate his own authority. And he would only give it to a person of his choosing.

The second thing Moses mentioned in Deuteronomy 17 was that the king had to be an Israelite. That is to say, he had to be a native of God’s chosen nation. This was to fulfill the covenant promise God had made to Abraham in Genesis 17:1-8, where he swore that Abraham’s heirs would be kings over their people.

The third qualification in Deuteronomy 17 was that the king was to depend on God rather than on human strategies for securing peace and prosperity. Moses listed four ways that kings might turn from dependence on God.

- The king was forbidden to acquire large numbers of horses probably because they were important for his army. The king was to depend on God’s power, and not on human might, in order to secure the nation.
- The ban on returning to Egypt referred to submitting to a larger empire for protection and provision, rather than submitting to God.
- The prohibition against many wives probably applied specifically to political alliances forged through arranged marriages. This was problematic not just because it made Israel dependent on foreign countries rather than on God, but also because foreign wives were likely to serve foreign gods, and to tempt the king to do the same.
- And the command against accumulating large amounts of gold and silver probably referred to unjust taxation. It was not wrong for the king to be rich. But it was criminal for him to become rich by oppressing God’s people.

As a whole, these restrictions ensured that the king would rely on God for the success of his reign and the security of the nation.

The fourth thing Moses stressed in Deuteronomy 17 was that the king was required to demonstrate covenant fidelity to God by receiving, copying and meditating on God's covenant law. These actions were designed to cultivate personal reverence, appropriate humility and faithful rule.

The kings of Israel and the kings of Judah were the representative of the people to God, so that in many ways they had a sacramental presence there, both as the representative of God on earth and the representative of the people to God. So, that particular swing status that they had was significant in how God responded to both the king and then ultimately how that fell out onto the nation as a whole. And you had this whole history, I think, within Israel and Judah. There are no good kings in Israel. They were all bad. And then, they fell first in 722 B. C. But then within Judah, you had this sort of back and forth, where you'd have a good king, he did right in the eyes of the Lord, and then a bad king who did evil in the sight of the Lord. But when the bad kings did evil in the sight of the Lord, there were major repercussions that came from that. This was where the divine "No" of God's judgment would be heralded against both the king and then also the people as well. And it seems to be that there was a...there's an organic relationship between the status of the king and the way in which the people followed in that. If the king was setting up high places and worshipping foreign gods, the people were as well. And then vice versa; when there were reforms, like we had with King Josiah, that had huge national repercussions for the way in which the people responded to God and his Law. So, the king had a major role in representing both the people and God to the people.

— Dr. Mark Gignilliat

Having seen the qualifications for kingship revealed by Moses, we're ready to consider an additional qualification God established in his covenant with David.

Covenant with David

God established his covenant with David in 2 Samuel 7:8-16, and its terms are mentioned in places like Psalms 89 and 132. This covenant established David's descendants as Israel's permanent dynasty. God demonstrated great benevolence to David and to Israel by ensuring that David's descendants would reign, and that Israel would enjoy the stability of dynastic succession. Listen to God's covenant promises to David in 2 Samuel 7:8-16:

I took you from the pasture and from following the flock to be ruler over my people Israel... Now I will make your name great ... And I will provide a place for my people Israel ... I will also give you rest from all your enemies... I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom... Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever (2 Samuel 7:8-16).

According to this divine covenant, God added a new qualification for kings in Israel: From this time on, God's people were to be led by a son of David. Only his house could claim legitimate, perpetual rule over the entire nation.

As early as the book of Genesis, God blessed the tribe of Judah with Israel's kingship. "The scepter will not depart from Judah," Jacob said in Genesis 49. Since David was from the tribe of Judah, God's promise to David was the fulfillment of this blessing in Genesis. God always intended that Israel would one day have a king from the tribe of Judah. Because of David's obedience and devotion to God, he promised that Israel's kingship would perpetually be traced through David's line. No person could ever legitimately claim to be king in Israel unless he was from David's house. That's why it was so important for the writers of the Gospels to prove, not just that Jesus was called by God, but that he was a direct descendent of David with a legitimate claim to David's throne.

Now that we've looked at the qualifications for kingship, let's turn to our second topic, the function of kings in the Old Testament.

FUNCTION

In the Old Testament, the kings of Israel exercised faithful rule over God's people primarily by executing and administering God's law. As we've seen in prior lessons, it was common for powerful emperors or suzerains in the ancient Near East to conquer and control weaker kingdoms, making them their servants or vassals. These suzerains normally administered their relationships with their vassals through treaties or covenants, which required the vassal kingdoms to serve the conquering suzerain by submitting to his laws. And the same thing was true of Israel's relationship to God. The entire nation was responsible to obey God's covenant, and the king was to ensure that they did.

Kings held their people accountable to God's covenant law in many ways. But for our purposes in this lesson, we'll focus on what Jesus called the more important matters of the law. As Jesus said in Matthew 23:23:

The more important matters of the law [are] justice, mercy and faithfulness (Matthew 23:23).

According to Jesus, and in contrast with the Pharisees' focus on ceremonies and rituals, the most important characteristics of the law are justice, mercy and faithfulness.

We'll consider the ways Old Testament kings executed and administered God's laws according to each of these most important characteristics. First, we'll look at the

king's responsibility to enforce justice. Second, we'll see that the king was to apply mercy. And third, we'll focus on the fact that the king was to promote faithfulness. Let's look first at the king's function of enforcing justice.

Justice

In the context of a king's responsibilities, justice can be defined as judging every person as he deserves, in accordance with God's law.

As individuals or rulers, we have the right, the freedom, and the will to choose a safe path or a sinful path. In the end God's judgment will fall on us all. As a result those rulers will be judged. When Jesus comes he will put all things where they should be. Until then we have a mission. And that is to live as individuals that belong to God's kingdom, and as citizens in a heavenly earth. For the time being, we practice justice and equality, respecting others, respecting the weak, being fair with the unjust, and we try hard to achieve justice knowing that we still live in a sinful world, a broken world, in a world under God's judgment, in a world where brutality, poverty, ignorance and corruption still exist. We are like a candle that gives light, reminding others that there is a loving God in heaven who cares about the unjust and that this brutality, corruption, and arrogance, no matter how long it lasts on earth, it is temporary, and limited in time because there is a God who will, in the end, fix everything.

— Dr. Jonathan Kuttub, translation

Israel's kings were to execute God's justice on at least two different levels. In the first place, they executed God's international justice, enforcing God's law between Israel and other nations.

One way kings upheld justice on an international scale was by peacefully negotiating with other nations, as Solomon did with Hiram the king of Tyre in 1 Kings 5:1-12.

Kings also pursued international justice through war. They did this by punishing wicked nations as Saul did in 1 Samuel 14:47-48, and as David did in 2 Samuel 8:1-13. The king also defended Israel when they were attacked, as David did in 2 Samuel 5:17-25, and as Hezekiah did in 2 Kings 19. Psalm 2 summarizes the justice that Israel's kings were to render toward nations that rebelled against them and the Lord. Listen to what it says in verses 6-12:

[The Lord said,] "I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill." ... He said to me, "You are my Son; today I have become your Father. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession. You will rule them with an iron scepter; you will dash them to pieces like pottery." Therefore, you kings, be

wise; be warned, you rulers of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry and you be destroyed in your way, for his wrath can flare up in a moment. Blessed are all who take refuge in him (Psalm 2:6-12).

These verses follow the ancient Near-Eastern custom of referring to the suzerain as a father and his vassal king as his son. In this case, God was the suzerain and the Davidic king was the son. And God's plan for the world was for the nations to serve and obey the Davidic king. They were to fear and honor him because he was God's instrument of justice in the world.

In the second place, kings were also responsible to execute God's justice on a national scale, within Israel. Kings enforced national justice by leading God's special people in obedience to his law. This included things like providing for the well-being and protection of the weak, as we see in Proverbs 29:14; defending against the wicked, as David modeled in 2 Samuel 4:9-12; prosecuting criminals, as in 2 Kings 14:5; and establishing stability for the growth and prosperity of the citizens, as Psalm 72 teaches. Moreover, kings were not to distort justice to favor the rich or the poor, the powerful or the weak. Scripture speaks of this role of kings in many places, including Leviticus 19:15 and Isaiah 11:1-5.

Drawing once again from Jesus' identification of the more important matters of the law, a second major way kings were to apply God's law was in mercy.

Mercy

Mercy is the imitation of God's compassion toward his creatures. God often treats his creatures with forbearance when they have sinned, and in understanding of their weakness. He grants them good things in life, and relief from suffering, simply because it pleases him to be kind to what he has made. Scripture speaks of God's mercy in many places, such as Psalm 40:11; Psalm 103:8; and Jonah 4:2.

As with justice, we'll highlight the fact that kings were to show mercy in at least two arenas, beginning with international relations. On an international level, kings applied mercy to those nations and people who submitted to the God of Israel. For example, in 2 Samuel 10:19, many vassals of one of Israel's enemies received mercy from David when they made peace with him. And in 2 Samuel 10:1-2, David showed compassion to the king of the Ammonites.

Moreover, Old Testament prophets foretold that the Gentile nations would eventually submit to Jerusalem. They would bring tribute to the capital city of God's kingdom, and receive mercy and protection from God's king. These things are prophesied in places like Isaiah 60:1-22 and 66:18-23, Micah 4:1-8, and Zephaniah 2:11.

Of course, as we've seen in our discussion of justice, God doesn't always want to show mercy. And sometimes he demanded that the king withhold mercy from wicked nations. For example, in 2 Samuel 5:17-25, God instructed David to destroy the Philistines, which David did without mercy. Their evil was so great that they were not to

be spared. So, part of the king's responsibility was to discern when God would have him show mercy, and when God would have him withhold it.

Besides showing mercy in international relations, the king was also responsible to administer God's law by showing mercy on a national level. Because the king was God's vassal, he was required to treat God's people in the same way that God would treat them. And this meant treating them mercifully. As we read in places like Hosea 6:6, God wanted his people to show mercy even more than he wanted the sacrifices required in the law. This is not because God's law is unimportant, but rather because mercy is one of the more important matters of the law. For this reason, a merciful king was an ideal leader, one who imaged God's own pattern of care. David exemplified this in places like 2 Samuel 19:18-23, where he showed mercy to enemies that submitted to him.

Mercy is throughout the Old Testament law. If we can get over our bias sometimes that the law is bad and really read the law as a vehicle of God's loving-kindness, we'll begin to see it everywhere. So even if we look at the Ten Commandments as a starting point, you see a law such as the fourth commandment to keep the Sabbath holy. We have to read beyond that first part of the commandment to see that not only are we to rest on the Lord's Day, or the Sabbath, but we are to allow our household servants, our livestock, all that's under our possession. In our modern world, we would say a God-fearing man or woman who has a business should be merciful to his or her employees and not treat them as resources to be mined or exhausted, but rather treat them as people. To be a steward over the people God has placed over us. So there's a merciful provision there. You see a lot of individual detailed laws in the Old Testament that show mercy. The command in Deuteronomy to leave the gleanings in the corner of the field, so that those who are needy could come along and have something to eat, so they could pick what was left over. You have other Old Testament laws such as the command not to charge interest to a countryman. In that world it's not a capitalist investment economy, and the charging of interest was often a way to abuse and take advantage of people. It would become a substitute for generosity. If one could make an advantage off of a needy fellow Israelite, he could enrich himself, but he would end up depriving the other. So the command says, don't do that. Instead, be generous by not charging interest, and lend to those who have need. The law of release from indenturement every seven years or the law of Jubilee that restored people to the land that unfortunate providences had taken them away from, unfortunate circumstances, so these laws of restoration. God was merciful to his people, and then he commands them to reflect his own character in the laws of the Old Testament.

— Rev. Michael Glodo

In addition to justice and mercy, a third way the king was to execute God's law was by promoting faithfulness to God.

Faithfulness

Faithfulness can be defined as loyalty to God, demonstrated through heartfelt trust and obedience. Faithfulness involves believing that God is who he says he is, loyally serving him and no other gods, and rendering him loving obedience.

As we did with justice and mercy, we'll consider two ways the king was obligated to promote faithfulness, beginning with the international arena. The kings of Israel were to lead God's people toward fidelity to God in such a way that the surrounding nations would repent of their idolatry and sin, and begin to serve God. Kings fulfilled this role especially by establishing faithful worship in the nation of Israel, as we see in Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple in 1 Kings 8:41-43. This global mandate to disciple and discipline the nations is also indicated in passages like Psalm 72:8-11, and Zechariah 8:20-23.

Besides promoting faithfulness to God internationally, the king was also to encourage faithfulness on a national level. The king was to promote faithfulness within the nation of Israel especially by ensuring and providing for purity in worship. Good kings provided resources and plans for worship, organized the personnel, dictated policies for the maintenance of the temple, and often played important roles in the public celebrations of worship. For example, David did these things in 1 Chronicles 15, 16, and 23-28.

The king's commitment to promoting Israel's faithfulness affected the nation in profound ways. Because he was the nation's representative before God, the people often experienced heightened blessings under the leadership of faithful kings, and heightened judgments under faithless kings. God blessed faithful kings with prosperity in Israel and the physical expansion of Israel's borders. Unfaithful kings would be punished as well. In fact, the book of Kings partially blames the exile of Judah on the disobedience of Israel's kings.

Listen to God's words to King Solomon in 1 Kings 9:6-7:

If you or your sons turn away from me and do not observe the commands and decrees I have given you and go off to serve other gods and worship them, then I will cut off Israel from the land I have given them and will reject this temple I have consecrated for my Name. Israel will then become a byword and an object of ridicule among all peoples (1 Kings 9:6-7).

Sadly, not every king of Israel and Judah was faithful to God, and the people often suffered as a result. But even when the temple had been neglected or the people had fallen into idolatry, faithful kings were often able to reform and restore the nation's worship. We see this with Hezekiah in 2 Kings 18:1-8, and with Josiah in 2 Kings 22:1-23:25. Their reform efforts encouraged and even produced faithfulness among God's people, and thereby encouraged God to bless the nation during their reigns.

Having seen the qualifications and functions of Old Testament kings, we're ready to look at the expectations the Old Testament created for the future of kingship in Israel.

EXPECTATIONS

The Old Testament established many expectations for future kings, and especially for the one special messianic king that was prophesied to fulfill God's goal of establishing his kingdom on earth. And of course, the New Testament reveals that this messianic king was Jesus. So, we should look at these Old Testament anticipations in some detail.

We'll look at the expectations for the future of kingship in Israel that were created by two sources: first, the historical development of kingship in the Old Testament; and second, specific prophecies about a future king over Israel. Let's look first at the expectations created by the historical development of kingship.

Historical Development

We'll begin by looking at the vital role human kingship played in God's plan before the monarchy in Israel, from the days of creation to the time of Israel's judges.

Before the Monarchy. When God created the world, he placed Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden to serve as his vice-regents over creation. God indicated this role for humanity in Genesis 1:26-27, where he planned and created Adam and Eve in his image.

In the days of the Old Testament, terms like "image of god," "likeness of the gods," and the "son of god" were commonly used to refer to kings and emperors. This terminology expressed the belief that kings were earthly representatives or viceroys of their gods. It was the king's job to ensure that his god's will was accomplished on earth. So, when the Bible calls Adam and Eve images of God, one thing it means is that God appointed the entire human race to be his vice-regents on earth. In the broadest sense, then, all human beings were created to live as royalty, as God's servant kings who ensure that his will is done on earth. The idea that divine images were royal figures helps explain Genesis 1:28, where God gave this mandate to our first parents:

Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground (Genesis 1:28).

God wanted to turn the entire earth into his kingdom. So, he appointed his vice-regents, the human race, both to fill the world with additional images of God, and to exercise dominion or rule over the entire creation. This command is often called the cultural mandate because it commands us to build God's kingdom by establishing cultures and civilizations throughout the world.

After Adam and Eve fell into sin, they and their descendants strayed so far from their original responsibilities that God judged sinful humanity in Noah's flood. Even so, God didn't cancel humanity's royal function in the world. After Noah and his family had exited the ark, God reaffirmed the cultural mandate, commanding all his royal images to spread God-honoring civilization around the world.

But the vice-regency of humanity shifted in a significant way in the days of Abraham. God redeemed Abraham and made him the father of his chosen people, Israel. Although all human beings were still God's vice-regents in a general sense, the Lord chose Abraham and his descendants to be the firstborn of all the families of earth. God made a special covenant with Abraham in Genesis 15 and 17 indicating that Israel had the special, royal privilege of building a holy nation for God. And this nation was to be the starting point for spreading God's will to all other nations.

Later in history, God began to fulfill his promises to Abraham by sending Moses and then Joshua to lead Israel. Under their rule, God rescued his people from slavery in Egypt, and empowered them to conquer Canaan — the Promised Land — where they were to become a large nation of redeemed, holy images of God.

Sadly, Israel failed to complete the conquest of Canaan. So, after Joshua died, national unity disintegrated and various local judges and Levites led the tribes through a very troubled time. Although God blessed Israel during these years, the leadership of judges and Levites was not adequate to move Israel toward success as the leading nation of God's royal images. The writer of the book of Judges made this plain throughout his book. Listen to the final line of his book in Judges 21:25:

In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit (Judges 21:25).

Very similar comments appear in Judges 17:6, 18:1, and 19:1. These repetitions emphasized that Israel could move forward as God's chosen nation only under the rule of a righteous king who served as God's special vice-regent.

Well, the book of Judges seems to be a rationale for the coming of the king. There's a cycle in the book of Judges that the judge is raised up, it's okay for a while, the people fall into sin, they cry out to God and God raises up another judge. And the author clearly wants to make the point that there needs to be something more stable, more secure, and longs for a ruler and a leader after God's own heart. And of course that attribute is particularly applied to David, the king after God's own heart, and who is seen as something of a model of what kingship looks like, not only for the people of Israel then, but actually for how God exercises his rule over his people. So, the book of Judges then is something of a polemic for the need for a king, a king who would rule under God, who would show us how God rules his people both then, and indeed even today.

— Dr. Simon Vibert

It's important to put the book of Judges in the entire plan of God, the storyline from Genesis all the way to the coming of Jesus Christ. The book of Judges is looking back to the previous revelation, all the way to Adam as a kingly figure, Abraham in the Abrahamic covenant anticipating coming of kings through his line, Moses giving the old covenant, Deuteronomy 17, where there's the coming of the king anticipated. Yet, there is, not at that point in God's plan, the actual kings that are coming. Judges then, in some sense, is showing the need for leaders, the need for rule. Joshua picks up from Moses; the judges pick up from Joshua. Yet, there is no king that God has been anticipating. There is no fulfillment of that yet. The judges are, depending on their leadership, if they're good the nation usually does not too badly. If they're evil the nation does poorly, and there is no king. When the king comes, Judges is saying to us, things will be better. Things will be fulfilled from what the Old Testament has given to us. And then, of course, we move from Judges to then the Saul and David, sort of set over against one another — the people's king, God's king — which again leads us to the great Davidic Covenant, the promises of David's greater son. All of this is part of God's plan, setting us up for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, showing us what the true king will be like in contrast to these other kings, the need for a king to restore what we were once made to be. And all of that is part of God's plan that is leading us to Jesus Christ

— Dr. Stephen Wellum

Now that we've looked at the origins of human kingship in the days before Israel's monarchy, let's turn to the historical developments during the monarchy in Israel.

Monarchy. According to 1 Samuel 8:5-20, at the end of the period of the judges the nation of Israel envied the stability and order kings provided to surrounding nations. But they refused to wait for God to raise up a king in his own time. Instead, they demanded that he give them a king immediately. In response, God appointed Saul as the first official king over Israel.

Now it's important to realize that Israel's desire for a human king wasn't sinful in itself. God had revealed several times beforehand that he planned for Israel to become a mighty nation with a great human king. For example, in Genesis 17:6, God promised Abraham that kings would be included among his descendants. In Genesis 49:8-10, Jacob blessed his son Judah by announcing that one of Judah's descendants would rule as king over Israel. And as we saw earlier in this lesson, Moses even prescribed regulations for Israel's kings in Deuteronomy 17:14-19. Beyond this, in 1 Samuel 2:10, shortly before Israel pressed God to give them a king, righteous Hannah had offered a prophetic prayer that God would eventually establish a righteous king over his people.

But despite God's good plans for kingship in Israel, the nation sinned by refusing to trust God and to wait for his timing. And God's appointment of Saul as their king was

intended partly to discipline them for this sin. And while Saul did move Israel forward in some ways, his own rebellion against God's caused the Lord to depose him and his family.

But after Saul's failure, God graciously gave Israel the kind of king they needed by raising up David as their king. Like all the rest of fallen humanity, David was a sinner. But he was also a man after God's own heart. And God empowered him to unite the nation, defeat their enemies, and bring security and prosperity to Israel. Moreover, God made a covenant with David so that his descendants would always rule over Israel as their permanent royal dynasty. We read about this covenant in places like 2 Samuel 7; 1 Chronicles 17; and Psalms 89, 132.

When David died, his son Solomon succeeded him as king. In many ways, Solomon's reign was the high point in the history of Israel's kings. He expanded the territories of Israel, and increased its wealth and good reputation. Sadly, he also seriously violated God's law by worshipping the gods of his foreign wives. So, the Lord divided the kingdom in the days of Solomon's son Rehoboam. And the generations that followed were even more unfaithful to God, so that eventually both Israel and Judah came under God's judgment and were exiled from their lands. The northern kingdom of Israel was conquered by Assyria in 723 or 722 B.C., and the southern kingdom of Judah was conquered by Babylon in 587 or 586 B.C. The last legitimate king was David's descendant Jehoiachin, also known as Jeconiah who was deposed and carried into captivity in 597 B.C.

By the end of the monarchical period, God had revealed a great deal about human kingship. In the broadest sense, all human beings were God's vice-regents over the earth. In a narrower sense, the nation of Israel held a special vice-regency as the sacred family of humanity that was to be a model for other nations. And in the narrowest sense, David's royal descendants occupied the office of God's chief vice-regent. God ordained the sons of David to lead the Israelites and the rest of the world in service to the will of the supreme king, God himself.

Now that we've looked at the historical development of the office of king before and during Israel's monarchy, let's explore the period after the monarchy, when Israel and Judah lived in exile and there was no Davidic king.

Exile. Although the Babylonians had destroyed Jerusalem and removed David's heir from his throne, the Persian emperor Cyrus conquered Babylon and decreed that the Israelites could return to the Promised Land. We read of this development in 2 Chronicles 36 and Ezra 1.

The years following Cyrus' edict are often called the period of restoration. The returnees re-consecrated the altar of God, built a new temple, and rebuilt Jerusalem's walls. Early on, in Haggai 2:21-23, the prophet Haggai even told this restored remnant that if they were faithful, God might appoint their governor Zerubbabel, who was a descendant of David, to David's throne. But the people weren't faithful to God. So, the Old Testament ends with only a remnant of Israelites living in the Promised Land, with their hopes of glory postponed into the future.

In the time between the Old and New Testaments, Israel's apostasy continued to delay the restoration of kingship in Israel. The Greek Empire defeated the Persian Empire and took control over the Israelites in Palestine. And later, the Roman Empire defeated

the Greeks and took charge over the Promised Land. During all of this time, Israel had no king ordained by God.

The pitiful condition of Israel under the oppression of the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Medes and the Persians, the Greeks and the Romans demonstrated one thing very clearly: the reign of a righteous son of David was critical to the future. Israel needed a Davidic king to fulfill its role in the world as God's chosen people. So, the faithful people of God continued to look forward to the time when God would honor his covenant with David by sending a righteous Davidic king to rescue them from their oppressors and to extend the will of God over the entire world.

Now that we've looked at the historical developments of the office of king, let's consider the expectations for the future of kingship that rose from specific prophecies in the Old Testament.

Specific Prophecies

The Old Testament contains far too many prophecies about the future of kingship in Israel for us to mention them all. So, for our purposes in this lesson, we'll mention just four important themes. In the first place, Old Testament prophets predicted that God would restore the Davidic dynasty.

The Old Testament especially emphasizes the Messiah is first of all a son of David. Of course, David was that great king of Israel who trusted in the Lord so significantly, won powerful victories, in many, many ways obeyed the Lord. Of course he had some significant failings as well, but David becomes the paradigm of what the Messiah will be. He will be a ruler who brings peace to the nation. And so we see in the latter part of the Old Testament after David has died there is an expectation that a son of David will come and that's especially aligned with the idea that there will be peace and righteousness and joy.

— Dr. Thomas Schreiner

But, in the Old Testament the figure who became known as the Messiah was the king, was the king from David's line. David was given a covenant by God and in that covenant he was promised that one day God would raise up a king who would have a special, unique Son of God relationship, relationship with God as his son. Who would reign forever on the throne of David, who would establish justice and righteousness. So really, when we refer to the Old Testament Messiah, we're referring to a king, the ultimate king, the king who would bring God's salvation and deliverance.

— Dr. Mark Strauss

The prophets said that God would eventually send a righteous Son of David to restore Davidic kingship to Israel. We see this in many places, including Psalm 89, Isaiah 9:7 and 16:5, Jeremiah 23:5 and 33:25-26, and Ezekiel 34:23-24. As just one example, listen to what God said through the prophet Amos in Amos 9:11:

In that day I will restore David's fallen tent. I will repair its broken places, restore its ruins, and build it as it used to be (Amos 9:11).

In the second place, the prophets predicted that this future son of David would give God's people freedom and victory over their enemies. The Old Testament prophets frequently spoke of a time when God would dramatically intervene in history to conquer his enemies on behalf of his faithful people. God promised to render judgment against all those who opposed his ways, including the unfaithful within Israel. And the prophets repeatedly associated this victory with the future heir of David's throne, who would act as God's great vice-regent. These expectations are prophesied in places like Psalm 132:17-18, Isaiah 9:4-7, Jeremiah 30:5-17, Ezekiel 34:2, and Zechariah 12:1-10. For instance, listen to this prophecy in Jeremiah 30:8-9:

"In that day," declares the Lord Almighty, "I will break the yoke off their necks and will tear off their bonds; no longer will foreigners enslave them. Instead, they will serve the Lord their God and David their king, whom I will raise up for them" (Jeremiah 30:8-9).

In the third place, Old Testament prophets predicted that this future Son of David would establish an everlasting kingdom. The Old Testament prophets regularly taught that when the great Son of David ruled over Israel, they would enjoy God's blessings forever. The Davidic king's reign would make earth like heaven, and his people would live enduringly in peace and prosperity. This expectation appears in passages like Isaiah 55:3-13, and Ezekiel 37:24-25. For example, listen to what Isaiah said about the future son of David in Isaiah 9:7:

Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this (Isaiah 9:7).

And in the fourth place, the prophets also taught that this future son of David would establish a worldwide kingdom. The future Davidic kingdom would be limitless not only in time, but also in geography. It would expand to fill the entire earth. All who repented of their sins would enjoy its blessings, regardless of their nationality or ethnicity. We see instances of this in Psalms 2, 68, 72, 110, and 122. Listen to the way Daniel 7:13-14, describes this aspect of the future king and his kingdom:

There before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven... He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him (Daniel 7:13-14).

One of the key texts in the Old Testament for understanding the role of the Messiah is Psalm 2, which is a very clear prediction that God has appointed a special king, who he's appointed on his holy hill, on Zion. And when you read it carefully you discover this king that God is going to appoint is also going to be the one who is going to be the ruler over the nations. The obedience of the nations will be his. And he's an authoritative figure that all nations, and all the rulers of the earth are meant to come down, and effectively to worship, "to kiss the Son," is the phrase in Psalm 2. It's this idea that he's not just Israel's Messiah, although he is, but because he's Israel's Messiah, he's also the Lord over the whole world, the rightful Lord over the whole world. So one of the key things to understand is that the Messiah was a human figure, actually, it was understood it was to be a human figure who is going to come and is going to be the ruler of the world.

— Dr. Peter Walker

The Old Testament ended with great hopes for the future of kingship. God would send a special son of David, a supreme vice-regent. He would defeat all the enemies of God's people. And he would establish an everlasting kingdom on earth for everyone that would submit to his rule. This kingdom would fulfill God's original purpose for humanity as the image of God; it would fulfill God's original purpose for Israel; and it would fulfill God's original purpose for establishing David's throne. The righteous Son of David would turn the entire world into God's kingdom, and purge it of all evil, and establish peace and prosperity for all his people for all time.

Having explored the Old Testament background to the office of King, we're ready to turn to our second major topic: the fulfillment of the office of king in Jesus.

FULFILLMENT IN JESUS

The New Testament clearly teaches that Jesus is the Davidic king promised in the Old Testament. For example, the Magi described him as the king of the Jews in Matthew 2:2. Jesus' disciples attributed royal titles such as Messiah or Christ to him in places like Mark 8:27-29. He was called the king of Israel in John 1:49. And most importantly, just before his death, Jesus himself claimed to be the Messianic king promised by the Old Testament. Listen to his conversation with Pontius Pilate in Matthew 27:11:

The governor asked him, “Are you the king of the Jews?” “Yes, it is as you say,” Jesus replied (Matthew 27:11).

We find similar reports in Mark 15:2, Luke 23:1-3, and John 18:33-37. Even though Jesus didn’t ascend to the throne of Israel during his earthly ministry, the New Testament clearly teaches that he really is the promised Davidic king. And he will return in the future to fulfill every Old Testament expectation for the throne of David.

We’ll examine the fulfillment of the office of king in the person of Jesus in ways that correspond to our survey of the Old Testament background to this office. First, we’ll see that Jesus fulfilled the qualifications for the office of king. Second, we’ll note that Jesus modeled the function of kings. And third, we’ll explore the ways Jesus met the expectations the Old Testament created for the future of kingly service. Let’s begin with Jesus’ kingly qualifications.

QUALIFICATIONS

Earlier in this lesson we saw that the Law of Moses listed four qualifications for kings. First, the king had to be chosen by God. Second, he had to be an Israelite. Third, he had to depend on God for success and security. And fourth, he had to maintain covenant fidelity in his rule and in his personal life. And beyond these qualifications, the covenant with David specified that the king had to be a son of David. At this point in our lesson, let’s look at how Jesus met each of these qualifications, beginning with being chosen by God.

Chosen by God

As we’ve seen before, God is the great emperor or suzerain over all creation. And the king of Israel was the servant king or vassal over God’s special, holy nation Israel. And since only God can delegate his own authority, he himself had to choose all the legitimate kings that were to receive and exercise a measure of God’s authority over his nation.

Jesus met this qualification because God selected and designated him to be king over Israel. We see this in Jesus’ genealogy in Matthew 1:1-17, and in the angel Gabriel’s announcement to Mary about the birth of Jesus. Listen to Gabriel’s words to Mary in Luke 1:31-33:

You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end (Luke 1:31-33).

God made it clear that he had chosen Jesus to be the king over his people.

The second qualification for the king was that he had to be an Israelite.

Israelite

It almost goes without saying that Jesus met the qualification of being an Israelite because he was born into an Israelite family. His miraculous incarnation in the womb of the Virgin Mary made his birth unusual. But he was still a legal child of Joseph and Mary, and a full member of the covenant community of Israel. This is confirmed by Jesus genealogies in Matthew 1 and Luke 3, and also by passages like Romans 9:5 that speak of Jesus having true Israelite ancestry.

The third qualification in the Old Testament was that the king had to depend on God rather than on human strategies for securing peace and prosperity.

Depend on God

Jesus met this qualification because he depended entirely on God's power to establish security and prosperity for his people. He didn't try to make alliances with Herod or Pilate, or with any other human government. Instead, he relied on God's authority and power to establish and maintain his kingdom, as we see in passages like John 13:3, and 19:10-11.

The fourth Old Testament qualification for king that Jesus met was that he demonstrated covenant fidelity to God through his relationship with God's covenant law.

Covenant Fidelity

Jesus' fidelity to God's law is seen in many ways, but especially in his adherence to its original meaning and in his dedication to fulfill everything the law required. For example, in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7, Jesus repeatedly emphasized the original meaning of what was written in the law, in contrast with the oral teachings of what was said by the teachers of the law. In addition, he specifically said that he had come to fulfill every last detail of the law. Listen to what he said in Matthew 5:17-18:

Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished (Matthew 5:17-18).

The Apostle Paul echoed this idea in Romans 8:3-4, where he said that Jesus actually had fulfilled the whole law, not just for himself, but on our behalf as well.

The Bible says that the Law is a schoolmaster that points us to Christ, that brings us to him, prepares us for him. The Law is given and it's a

reflection of God's character. But we fail to keep the Law. And so when Jesus comes he shows us perfect humanity fulfilling its intended purpose, which is relationship with God typified with faithfulness to God's commands. So Jesus comes, showing us true humanity in the way it's supposed to be, but also fulfilling that law for us. Jesus fulfills the Law in his continual faithfulness to covenant keeping, law-abiding behavior. So that he becomes our righteousness. The Bible says that God is both just and the justifier. And so he comes with his Law, and then he comes with his Son keeping the Law for us. So he both is the just one, and the one who justifies us in Christ.

— Dr. K. Erik Thoennes

It's important to stress that Jesus is faithful to the covenant, to be the very basis for his right to rule over us. I mean this is picking up a lot of themes that go really back to Adam. Adam as our head, our representative of the entire human race is, as all of God's creatures, to be obedient, to be faithful. We are the creatures. We are the ones who are to obey our creator, to serve him and to obey him and love him in every area of our life. In his disobedience, he brought with it sin and death and judgment. The only way for that to be reversed is we need God to do the remedy for us and to do so through another Adam, through another human. And so we have the strong emphasis on "God will provide one like an Adam" through these various prophet, priests, and kings, ultimately culminating in our Lord Jesus Christ who, and you think of in the Gospels, he has come to do the will of God. He has come to obey. Galatians 4 says that he was born of a woman, born under the law, to obey all of the law. Well, why is that necessary? Because he has to undo what Adam did. By his obedience — and we think of this not just in terms of his life, but his life is important here too — by his obedience, sometimes we call this his "active obedience," he fulfills all the requirements of the law for us. By his obedience, supremely in his death, Philippians 2, he obeys even unto death on the cross. He is then by virtue of that work, by virtue of that obedience as our king, as our priest, he is exalted to God's right hand. It's not as if he wasn't king before and Lord before. He's always been that as God the Son. Yet, he is God the Son incarnate by his work, and he has to, through his humanity, be obedient, to be faithful, to do that on our behalf, so that he can win for us our salvation. He could not be the one who is given to be King of Kings and Lord of Lords in that messianic work, in that kingly work, without his full obedience and faithfulness unto the Father.

— Dr. Stephen Wellum

The fifth Old Testament qualification Jesus met was that he was a son of David.

Son of David

God's covenant with David established David's descendants as Israel's permanent dynasty. So, only David's heirs could make a legitimate claim to Israel's kingship. Jesus' membership in David's house is clearly taught in many places in Scripture. To list just a few, we see it in Matthew 1:1-25, Romans 1:1-3, and Revelation 5:5 and 22:16.

Now that we've looked at Jesus' qualifications for kingship, let's turn to the ways Jesus fulfilled the function of kingly service.

FUNCTION

Earlier in this lesson, we said that the basic function of a king is to exercise faithful rule on God's behalf over his vassal nation, especially by administering God's law. Now, all Christians recognize that Jesus did not complete his work during his earthly ministry. In fact, Jesus continues to work from heaven and in the church right now. And he will eventually return to complete his work. He has done more than enough for us to celebrate that he really is the Christ, the Davidic king God sent to restore his kingdom.

We'll consider Jesus' function as king by using the same categories we observed in the Old Testament background to this office: enforcing justice, applying mercy, and promoting faithfulness. Let's look first at the Jesus' enforcement of justice.

Justice

As in our section on the Old Testament, we'll explore the concept of justice in two arenas, beginning with international justice. During most of his earthly ministry, Jesus didn't directly involve himself with human governments. But he did pursue justice by waging war against the kingdom of Satan and his demons, and by freeing his people from the tyranny of sin. Scripture describes this as a spiritual battle between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan in places like Luke 11:14-20, and Ephesians 2:2. So, it's reasonable to compare it to the ways Old Testament kings pursued international justice through war. As Jesus said in Matthew 12:28:

If I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you (Matthew 12:28).

In this verse, Jesus indicated that the exorcisms he performed were proof that he was leading God's kingdom in battle against the kingdom of Satan.

Old Testament kings also executed international justice by engaging in peaceful negotiations with other nations. Although Jesus didn't do this often, he did receive peaceful tribute from the eastern magi, who brought him gifts in Matthew 2. These magi

were representatives of foreign nations, and their intent was to foster good will between their nations and Israel's newborn king.

In addition to executing justice internationally, Jesus also upheld God's justice within national Israel. Like other human kings, Jesus didn't normally get involved in personal disputes. Instead, he left them to lesser courts and arbitrators. But he did frequently exhort justice among his people. We see this in places like Matthew 5:25-26, and 12:15-21; as well as Luke 18:7-8. Jesus also guaranteed that he was keeping track of good and evil works in order to repay them when he returned in judgment. This aspect of his royal role is apparent in passages like Matthew 10:15, 11:22-24, and 12:36, where he spoke of specific condemnations that will be made in the future. We also see it in John 5:22, where he indicated that he is the one who will render that condemnation.

In addition to enforcing justice, Jesus fulfilled the function of a king by applying God's law in mercy.

Mercy

Jesus demonstrated royal mercy by imitating God's compassion toward his creatures. He showed forbearance when people sinned. He understood their weakness. He provided for them. And he granted them relief from their suffering.

When we think about a king, in our normal human history of kingship, we always think about somebody who has absolute authority. They walk in the room and people begin to bow and do whatever they want, whatever the king desires. But the kingship of Jesus, as in everything in his life, seems to turn the whole world upside-down. I'm thinking of that first chapter in John where it uses the concept of creator there, the one who made the world. It says, "he came to his own and his own received him not." Now for anybody who says, well, I believe Jesus is the King, which I do, and you put a verse like that there, you say well what kind of king would come to a world that he had made and allow himself to be rejected? So I think the showing of mercy is not just because the Lord feels sorry for us, which I'm sure he does, but I think it's because he's trying to reveal something about the inner life of God. Mercy has got to be connected to the triune life. And the Trinity, from my perspective from eternity, the King himself, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the King of all the Universe, is a God who three-in-one is giving himself one to another, Father to Son, Son to Father, Spirit to the other two, in this self-giving. So that when Jesus comes to show mercy to sinners, he's expressing that self-giving love, which is the King's self-revelation. He will judge. He will eventually condemn those that don't love him. But when he comes to the earth, he comes to people who have been abused, who have been warped by all kinds of wrong powers and the Devil himself, and this king comes and he says, I'm not going to demand anything of you. First, I'm going to come and give myself to

you. So all of his acts of mercy are acts of the Triune God's heart in the world to give oneself away. But that's how our King works. He comes without a demand. He comes with a self-giving. And I think mercy is a marvelous expression of that self-giving love that starts in the heart of God, in the incarnation offered to people wherever Jesus went. And, of course, its climax is on the cross, his mercy to us, the King who would die giving his life away that we might receive the mercy of God for salvation. So he is the only truly merciful King, and he describes what that mercy is in his kingship.

— Dr. Bill Ury

Jesus comes and shows mercy because he's the merciful one. I'm thinking right now, however, of his beatitudes. There is a couple of them that strike me. The second beatitude went like this: Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted. To me that means blessed are those whose heart is broken over the things that break the heart of God. So when God takes on human flesh and he comes here, he looks around about his world and he sees things that make him sad. And instead of just crying, he says, not only will I shed a tear, but I'll move towards those situations mercifully. It's interesting that Barclay would suggest that the word mercy in the New Testament Greek means to get inside the skin of. So this whole understanding of compassion means that I can feel something of what they're feeling right now. And instead of just saying I'm glad I'm not there, I'm going to be there. I'm going to move towards them, and I'm going to be to them what I believe God the Father wants me to be for them in this moment and this time.

— Dr. Matt Friedeman

We'll look at the way Jesus demonstrated his mercy in two spheres, beginning with the international arena. On an international level, the king was to apply mercy to the nations and people that submitted to God. And Jesus did this in several ways. For one thing, he provided miraculous healing for many Gentiles, who were outside the nation of Israel. For example, he healed the daughter of a Canaanite woman in Matthew 15:28. He healed the servant of a Roman centurion in Matthew 8:13. And he exorcised a legion of demons from a man in the Gentile region of the Decapolis in Mark 5:1-20.

Moreover, Jesus ministered in several Gentile areas, including Tyre, Sidon and the Decapolis, so that his message and works became a light of revelation to the Gentiles, as Simeon had prophesied would happen in Luke 2:32.

But even more obvious than his international mercy was the royal mercy that Jesus displayed on a national level. As the king, Jesus was responsible to treat God's people in the same way that God would have treated them. And this meant treating them mercifully. The ideal king was a merciful one that reflected God's own pattern of care.

Jesus showed tremendous mercy to Israel as their king. He spent years patiently instructing and exhorting them. He performed countless miracles — healing their diseases, casting out demons, creating food for the hungry, and even raising the dead.

But perhaps the miracle that best showcases his royal mercy is the healing of the paralytic man, which is recorded in Matthew 9:1-7, Mark 2:1-11, and Luke 5:17-25. In that instance, Jesus not only healed the man's paralysis, but he actually forgave his sins. And he did something similar in Luke 7:36-50, where he forgave the sins of the woman who anointed his feet with perfume.

It's very, very important to answer the question rightly: Why is it only God that can forgive sins? The biblical answer is, it's because that is the one who we've sinned against. He is the Lord. He is the Creator. He is the one who has made us. We owe him everything. And our sin is first and foremost against him. Now, there's implications of sin for one another. There's implications of sin upon the universe. But first and foremost in our relationship as image bearers before God, our rebellion against him is sin against him. Only he can forgive sins. You think of Psalm 51 where David says, "Against you and you only have I sinned." You think of David's life, I mean, he has sinned against a lot of other people. He's affected the nation; he's affected Uriah; he's affected Bathsheba; he's affected his son. But David rightly sees that ultimately he has sinned before God. Our problem, and the human problem that people fail to realize, is that it's only God who can forgive. It's only God who can solve the problem of our sin.

— Dr. Stephen Wellum

When I sin against someone or someone sins against me, and the request for forgiveness is made and received, between humans what is happening is one party is saying, "I will not allow the offense that you made against me to be a relational impediment to our ongoing relationship," which is important, which we must do to one another as a reflection of our understanding of how we've been forgiven by God. But when God forgives, he forgives in such a way that actually cancels the objective debt of my guilt, and that's something that I can do for no one else and that no one else can do for me. So God forgives in a way that cancels the objective debt of my guilt. This is divine forgiveness, which makes it very interesting, for example then in Mark 2 when Jesus is healing the paralytic and says to him, "My son, your sins are forgiven." The scribes are sitting there observing this, and in their hearts, we're told, they're sort of silently thinking to themselves, "Who is this man claiming to forgive sins because no one can do this but God alone," which is sort of precisely the point. They hear Jesus saying that he's forgiving this man in a way that only God can forgive, and they're troubled by this; they assume he's

blaspheming. It means they've heard him correctly and they've responded to him wrongly. This is one impressive piece of evidence in the Gospels for the deity of Jesus. That in his own self-understanding, his own self-claim, is a claim to forgive sins, not just merely in removing relational offenses — presumably he's never seen this paralytic before — but to forgive sins in a way that actually cancels their objective guilt in the way that only God can.

— Dr. Rob Lister

All sin is a transgression and offense against God, who is himself the ultimate standard of righteousness. Moreover, since God alone is the highest king and final judge, he is the only one who has authority to forgive these offenses against him. Only he has the authority to demonstrate mercy on this level. But since Jesus was God's perfectly righteous vassal King, God delegated to him the authority to grant forgiveness, so that Jesus could also apply God's mercy to his people.

The third way Jesus fulfilled the function of a king was by executing God's law in a way that promoted faithfulness to God.

Faithfulness

As we did with justice and mercy, we'll consider Jesus' promotion of faithfulness in two parts, beginning with the international arena. The most direct way Jesus promoted heartfelt worship and obedience to God was by preaching the kingdom of God to the Gentile nations. We see this in Matthew 4:13-25, 24:14, Luke 24:47, and especially in Jesus' commissions to his disciples in Matthew 28:18-20 and Acts 1:8. In both of these commissions, Jesus commanded his followers to make disciples of all nations, and to be his witnesses to the ends of the earth.

And of course, Jesus also promoted faithfulness on a national level. As with his international work among the Gentiles, Jesus promoted faithfulness within the nation of Israel especially through his preaching of the gospel. As he went from town to town, he commanded the people to repent, to turn away from their sin and become loyal to God, because God's kingdom was at hand. Listen to the way Matthew summarized Jesus' preaching in Matthew 4:17:

From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near" (Matthew 4:17).

We see similar summaries in Mark 1:15, and Luke 5:32 and 10:13. And we find examples of this kind of preaching in many places throughout the Gospels.

Jesus placed such a strong emphasis on faithfulness to God. He did this because faithfulness is an expression of trust. It's an expression of realizing God really does deserve our faithfulness, our trust, our obedience, our devotion, above all else. When you disobey doctor's

orders, you're not just saying something about the orders; you're saying something about the doctor. And when you disobey God, you're not just saying something about his commands that you're disregarding, you're saying something about the God who gave those commands. And so faithfulness is an expression of trust. It's an expression of seeing God for who he is, and then of course, doing what he says. So, faithfulness to God is an expression of obedience. It's an expression of daily devotion and trust in who he is. Paul in Romans talks about the Christian life in his apostolic ministry as one that should lead to the obedience of faith. It's a beautiful expression which in some ways summarizes the Christian life. We see God for who he is, we put our faith in him, and that naturally leads to obedience. We obey the God that we trust.

— Dr. K. Erik Thoennes

Faithfulness is what Jesus offered to us as the joy of walking with him, knowing him intimately. But he also wants my responsiveness daily to him. He's not forcing me to obey him. He's not making me follow a law. He says, I need a faithful heart no matter what your emotions are today, no matter what you feel is going on in the world, badly or good, I need a faithful bride. I need a faithful servant, a faithful lover of my own heart. And that's what I think he was getting at with guys like me who tend to look at the world in terms of how I can define spirituality. The Lord says there's something much deeper than that. I want a faithful heart. Just like a married couple, that's the foundation of true love. Faithfulness no matter what comes down the road. So the Lord requires faithfulness, but he also enables faithfulness by his Holy Spirit's presence.

— Dr. Bill Ury

Having considered Jesus' royal qualifications and his function in the office of king, we're ready to see how he fulfilled the Old Testament expectations for the future messianic king.

EXPECTATIONS

Throughout Israel's history, the frailties and sinfulness of its kings prevented them from fulfilling their responsibilities before God. Even faithful leaders like Moses, Joshua and David, who submitted themselves to God's law and cared for his people, weren't able to do all that God required. At best, they provided peace and security for a short time. But the requirements of the law were too great for them to meet on a perpetual basis. The law is simply too difficult for any fallen human being to fulfill to God's

satisfaction. Moreover, even the best leaders were limited by age and death. Problems like these are identified in several places in the Bible, including Zechariah 4:6, Acts 13:34-39, Hebrews 4:8, and Romans 8:3-4.

The kings that ruled God's people in the Old Testament never achieved God's greatest blessings for his people. They couldn't. They were frail, fallen human beings. But their failures created the hope that God would eventually honor his covenant with David by sending a righteous son of David to rescue his people. This king would be especially empowered by God's Spirit so that he wouldn't have the normal limits of human frailty. He would be the one that kept God's law perfectly as the redeemer for the past failures of the line of David, and of the nation of Israel, and of the human race. And this is exactly the kind of king God sent in Jesus. Through Jesus — the righteous son of David, the Messiah — God finally did for humanity what we couldn't do for ourselves.

We'll consider the way Jesus fulfilled these Old Testament expectations by focusing on four aspects of his kingship. First, we'll see that Jesus restored the Davidic dynasty. Second, we'll focus on the freedom and victory he gave to his people. Third, we'll consider the everlasting kingdom that Jesus brought. And fourth, we'll focus on the worldwide nature of that kingdom. Let's begin with the fact that Jesus restored the Davidic dynasty.

Davidic Dynasty

On many occasions in the New Testament, Jesus is specifically identified as the prophesied son of David who restores David's dynasty. Inspired writers drew this connection in passages like Matthew 1:1, Luke 3:31, and Romans 1:3. The Apostle Paul proclaimed it in Acts 13:22-23. And Jesus himself claimed to be the messianic son of David in Matthew 21:15-16, and Revelation 3:7 and 22:16. This evidence demonstrates that Jesus really was the prophesied son of David, the future messianic king that would fulfill God's kingdom purposes for all creation.

As the heir to David's throne, Jesus began to fulfill God's kingdom purposes first by restoring a faithful remnant within national Israel, namely, his faithful apostles and disciples. Then, as Jesus commanded in Matthew 28:19-20, these followers expanded their ranks by evangelizing and discipling both Jews and Gentiles in every nation they could reach. And their disciples moved even further into the world making still more disciples. This process has continued ever since, with the result that God's earthly kingdom now includes a huge percentage of the world's population, and is present to some degree in nearly every tribe and country on earth.

Jesus also met Old Testament expectations by giving freedom and victory to those who were faithful to him.

Freedom and Victory

During his life on earth, Jesus acted decisively to give his people freedom through victory over their spiritual enemies, such as sin, death, and demons. Listen to these words from Matthew 1:21-23:

[The angel of the Lord said to Joseph,] “She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: “The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” — which means, “God with us” (Matthew 1:21-23).

In this passage, Matthew compared Jesus’ birth to the Immanuel child mentioned in Isaiah 7:14.

In the context of Isaiah’s prophecy, the Immanuel child was a sign that God was the warrior king that was with his people in battle. He would fight for them and defeat their enemies, bringing them freedom from oppression through victory in war. And this is what made Jesus so special. He was the prophesied king God would use to fight and defeat the greatest enemy of all: sin. We see this same theme in John 8:36, where Jesus said that only he could give true freedom from sin.

Jesus also gave his people victory over death. Paul talked about this in Romans 6:4-9, and 1 Corinthians 15:54-57, where he assured us that Jesus’ resurrection defeated both sin and death on our behalf. Now, in some sense, sin and death are still problems for us, since we still sin and our bodies still die. But we already have victory over these enemies because they no longer have the power to control and condemn us.

And something similar is true of the demons. As our great King, Jesus has defeated them, and given us the victory. They still trouble and tempt us. And they can even harm us physically. But they have no power to hold us in bondage or to damage our souls. Listen to how Paul described Jesus’ victory over the demons in Colossians 2:15:

Having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross (Colossians 2:15).

When Jesus returns, he will completely defeat every enemy that opposes him and his people. But even now, he has executed preliminary judgment against those that would do us the most harm, in order to secure our freedom from their mastery.

The third Old Testament expectation of kings that Jesus fulfilled was that he established an everlasting kingdom.

Everlasting Kingdom

The Old Testament foretold that the promised king would usher in a kingdom that would exist forever. It would be heaven on earth, and it would endure for all time under its Davidic king. And the New Testament affirms that Jesus’ rule as king will last forever in passages like Matthew 19:28-29 and 25:34, Luke 1:33, and Hebrews 1:8-13. But where is this kingdom now? Did Jesus really fulfill this expectation? Or are we still waiting for him to do it?

One of the things that Jesus accomplished during his earthly ministry was to establish the kingdom of God on earth. Now, what that appears to mean is that, in an act of divine power, Jesus established a beachhead in hostile territory, and inaugurated an invasion initiative that is destined to restore this planet to its rightful creator and owner and king. This initial assault on hostile territory manifested itself in a number of dramatic ways: challenging systemic evil, challenging demonic evil, dispelling deception with light and truth. It was a powerful introduction of an alternative allegiance. This campaign is still underway. There remains mopping up operations, cleaning up, last holdouts to be eliminated. And the final enemy that remains to be overcome is death. And so, even as we participate in the power of the Spirit in this ongoing kingdom campaign we pray, “your kingdom come, your will be done.” There’s still something we need supernatural aid to see achieved.

— Dr. Glen Scorgie

In fulfillment of Old Testament expectation, God's saving rule has broken into this world in Jesus Christ, culminating in his death, his resurrection, his resurrection demonstrating that his death has been victorious. Sin has been dealt with. Death as the consequence of sin has been defeated. And not just in the resurrection. His glorious ascension — he is now seated at God's right hand. Pentecost — he has poured out the Spirit. All of that is part of the coming of the kingdom. The, what we call, the “inauguration of the kingdom,” it is now here. Yet, our Lord Jesus Christ has also told us that there is still the future. We still pray. Think of the Lord's Prayer, that we pray, “Your kingdom come.” Well, the kingdom has come. He has won victory. It is still awaiting its consummation.

— Dr. Stephen Wellum

One of the most difficult things for people to understand, especially Jewish people, to understand, is the relationship between the first and second coming of Jesus the Messiah. It's understandable that people would say, well, how could Jesus be the Messiah and have fulfilled messianic expectations when we don't see lions lying down with lambs. We don't see people beating their swords into plowshares. We don't see peace on earth, good will toward men. So how is it that the Messiah has come? What we call it is inaugurated eschatology. This idea that end-time realities have been brought into history with the first coming of Jesus. They've been inaugurated, they've been initiated and begun in a decisive way, but they still are being worked

out to the point where there will ultimately be a consummation of these realities. It's been called "the now and not yet" of the kingdom. That the kingdom has come, Jesus has brought it. He's delivered the decisive blow in the battle. But the battle still rages and it awaits a future, ultimate fulfillment in coming.

— Dr. K. Erik Thoennes

Jesus clearly established his messianic kingdom before he ascended to his throne in heaven. We see this in passages like Matthew 12:28, where Jesus said that his power to exorcise demons proved that he had already brought the kingdom of God. Exorcism was not a sign that the kingdom was on its way. Instead, it was proof that the kingdom was already present in power, and that its king was casting down his enemies. And while some scholars object that the kingdom didn't come in the visible way many expected, Jesus insisted that it was a mistake to look for its physical manifestations in the sense of traditional political power. As he told the Pharisees in Luke 17:20-21:

The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, "Here it is," or "There it is," because the kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:20-21).

Finally, the fourth Old Testament expectation for the Davidic king that Jesus fulfilled was that he established a worldwide kingdom.

Worldwide Kingdom

When Jesus returns, the entire new earth will be part of his kingdom. And his physical power and rule will replace all earthly governments. For now, his universal reign is primarily spiritual, as we see in Ephesians 1:21-22. But when he returns, it will also be physical. Revelation 21–22 paint a glorious picture of the new heavens and earth, where Jesus reigns as king from his capital in the New Jerusalem.

The New Testament makes it clear that Jesus really is the long-awaited messianic King, the son of David who came to bring God's kingdom to earth. He didn't fulfill all the Old Testament prophecies and expectations during his earthly ministry. But he fulfilled so many of them that he proved he is the true King, and he has assured us that he will come again to finish what he started. On that day, his kingdom will perfectly fulfill God's original purposes for creation. The entire world will be God's earthly kingdom, free from sin and suffering, secure in peace and prosperity, and blessed by the fellowship and presence of God.

So far in our lesson on Jesus the King, we've explored the Old Testament background to Jesus' kingly office and the fulfillment of this office in Christ. So, now we're ready to turn to our last major topic: the modern application of Jesus' role as king.

MODERN APPLICATION

While there are many ways to describe the modern implications of Jesus' kingship, one helpful model can be found in Question and Answer 26 of the *Westminster Shorter Catechism*. In answer to the question,

Q. How does Jesus execute the office of a king?

The catechism answers,

A. Christ executeth the office of a king, in subduing us to himself, in ruling and defending us, and in restraining and conquering all his and our enemies.

This answer describes the ways Jesus' kingship impacts our lives in terms of three traditional categories from systematic theology. First, Jesus subdues us to himself, that is, he brings us into his kingdom, so that we are no longer his enemies but his beloved citizens. Second, he governs his kingdom by ruling and defending us. And third, he restrains and ultimately conquers all his and our enemies.

Following the emphasis of the *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, we'll discuss the modern application of Jesus' office of king in three parts: First, we'll see that Jesus builds his kingdom. Second, we'll consider the fact that he governs his people. And third, we'll focus on the way he conquers his enemies. Let's look first at how Jesus builds his kingdom.

BUILDS HIS KINGDOM

We'll consider how Jesus builds his kingdom from three perspectives: first, the goal of his work; second, the manifestation of his kingdom in the world; and third, the methods Jesus is using to build his kingdom. Let's begin with the goal of Jesus' work.

Goal

Scripture teaches that God plans to turn the entire world into his earthly kingdom, so that his rule on earth reflects his rule in heaven. We see this in places like Matthew 6:10, where Jesus taught us to pray that God's kingdom would come, and that his will would be done on earth in the same way that it is already done in heaven. And we see it in the picture of the new heaven and new earth described in Revelation 21–22. So, broadly speaking, the goal of Jesus' kingdom building is to turn the world into God's earthly kingdom, fit for him to inhabit, and full of people who are completely loyal to him.

But if the goal is for God to have an earthly kingdom, what role does Jesus play? Well, even though God is the supreme King over all creation, he has appointed Jesus to rule it in a more direct fashion, so that God's kingdom is also rightly called Jesus' kingdom. In this regard, God is like an ancient Near-Eastern suzerain, and Jesus is his vassal king. And because Jesus wants to please his suzerain, he has dedicated himself to accomplishing God's goal. Listen to how Paul described Jesus' submission to God the Father in 1 Corinthians 15:24, 28:

Then the end will come, when [Christ] hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power... When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all (1 Corinthians 15:24, 28).

As God's supreme vassal king, Jesus has authority over God's kingdom, and even over creation. And he is using that authority to conquer everything that opposes God, and to subject everything to God, in order to accomplish God's purposes for his creation.

But what does this goal mean for us? How should modern Christians respond to the idea that Jesus' goal is to turn the entire world into God's kingdom? Well, the simple answer is that we should make God's kingdom the main goal for our lives, too. Whatever other goals we have — making a living, providing for our families, staying healthy, getting an education — they should all be pursued in ways that further the kingdom of God. As Jesus taught in Matthew 6:33:

Seek first [God's] kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well (Matthew 6:33).

The second aspect of the way Jesus builds his kingdom we'll mention is the kingdom's manifestation in the world.

Manifestation

Many theologians throughout the ages have noticed that when the New Testament talks about the present manifestation of Jesus' kingdom, it often associates the kingdom with the church. The relationship between the kingdom and the church is described in many places throughout Scripture, including passages like Ephesians 1:19–2:20; and Revelation 1:4–6. As just one example, listen to this discussion between Peter and Jesus in Matthew 16:16–19:

Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of

**the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven”
(Matthew 16:16-19).**

This passage says at least three things that closely associate the kingdom with the church. First, Jesus said, “I will build my church.” And then he followed this statement by saying that he would give Peter “the keys of the kingdom of heaven.” Notice the connection here: Peter, an apostle and part of the foundation of the *church*, would have power over the “kingdom” of heaven.

A second detail that highlights the relationship between the kingdom and the church is the fact that Peter applied the title Christ to Jesus. The word “Christ” means “anointed one.” It was a specific reference to the fact that kings were anointed with oil to mark their claim to the throne. So, by calling Jesus “Christ,” Peter was identifying Jesus as the prophesied Davidic King. And it was in his role as king that Jesus was going to build a church.

And a third detail in Matthew 16:16-19 that points to a close connection between the kingdom and the church is that Jesus intended the church to participate in the warfare between Hades or “hell” and the kingdom of heaven.

These details all point to the fact that both Jesus and Peter thought of the church and the kingdom as very closely related concepts. But as closely related as the church and kingdom are, they’re not precisely identical in the New Testament. The majority of scholars agree that the kingdom is a much larger concept than the church.

The relationship between the church and the kingdom of God is a very interesting one. The kingdom of God is the macro-vision of the restoration of all things to a willing submission to the perfect will of God. A vision that is all encompassing for the entire universe, certainly this planet and human life. It’s a submission to the king that will create an incredible shalom of life as it was intended for God’s glory and our great joy. The church is one of the principal instruments God has chosen for the advance of this macro-vision. It’s important not to equate the church, and certainly not religious ecclesiastical structures, with the kingdom; they are not one in the same, but the one is a means to the end. And also, the church should, as a city set on a hill, so to speak, already be manifesting in its own interior life and social dynamics, the very dynamics that will one day characterize God’s entire creation from sea to sea. We are to be the prototype of the kingdom as well as agents of the kingdom.

— Dr. Glen Scorgie

Both the concepts of the kingdom of God and the church are indispensable for a full Christian understanding of how we are to live in any part of our lives. But I think it’s important for there to be a distinction between the two. I think many Christians, including me for

years, thought well, the church is sort of like the climax of the kingdom, so we're kind of the most important thing going. But the kingdom concept in all of Scripture is much larger than the church. So the way I view, and I think the Bible does too, views the church as an irreplaceable part of the kingdom, but it's a sub part or a piece of the kingdom work. God's kingdom, his rulership, has always been the base of reality. He is the reigning Lord of the universe, of all creation, of us. He is Lord of all peoples, all nations, all kings, all tribes. Now most don't know that, but he is. So the kingdom of God, the reign of God, is an overarching theme in all of Scripture. The church, hopefully, are those people who have submitted to the lordship of Jesus, recognize his sovereign lordship and have submitted themselves to being his agents in the world.

— Dr. Bill Ury

The New Testament teaches that the final glorious stage of God's reign over creation began at Christ's first coming. Since that time God's kingdom on earth has continued to grow and to bring many facets of human culture under submission to God. And when Christ returns, God's kingdom will be entirely unopposed and thoroughly manifested throughout every aspect of nature and human culture.

But how does the church fit into that outline of history? Essentially, the church is the core of God's kingdom on earth in the present age. We devote ourselves to furthering the kingdom of God now. And when Christ returns, we'll inherit the full blessings of the kingdom. Until that time, we spread the gospel of Christ by teaching everything he commanded, in order to extend God's manifest reign into every dimension of human society, to the greatest degree possible, prior to the return of Christ.

It's very important that the church understand its place in the kingdom. When we are going to be with him in the future, when he comes again, I don't think we're going to be referred to as the church. I think that will be the kingdom. The bride will be produced for her bridegroom, that other very important picture in Scripture. So why I'm saying it this way, I think that sometimes we as a church have too high a view of ourselves. We think we're the only answer, or God's only purpose. And we're very, very important. He died for the church. He died to offer himself. But he also died for the world. So the best way for me to view myself as a member of the church of Jesus Christ is to say, I've got one goal and that's to be the body of Christ. I am called to be his hands, his feet, his arms to the world just like he would be if he were here. That's my king's command to me and to us as the church. The sad thing is I think sometimes the church says, "Well, we're the climax of the kingdom, therefore we're the end of what he's come to do and therefore we are going to sit and do nothing or just enjoy his presence until he comes again." I think that's a wrong view and we need to correct ourselves and get back into the

business of connecting the church's purpose with the kingly purposes of our Lord and Savior.

— Dr. Bill Ury

Now that we've considered the goal for which Jesus builds his kingdom, and the manifestation of his kingdom, we should turn to the methods Jesus uses to build his kingdom.

Methods

Jesus' builds his kingdom in two primary ways, both of which directly involve the church: he adds more *people* to the church, and he expands its *geographical borders*. In the New Testament, Jesus began gathering people primarily from Israel. But at his ascension he instructed the church to expand his kingdom from Judea, to Samaria, to the ends of the earth, as we read in Acts 1:6-8. Jesus is building his kingdom by expanding the church to include the entire human race and cover the whole world.

But how do we, the church, respond to and participate in this work? In general terms, the answer is found in these words from the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20:

Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you (Matthew 28:19-20).

As we can see here, the primary methods Jesus uses to build his kingdom are evangelism, baptism and biblical teaching. And rather than carrying out these methods single-handedly, Jesus has assigned the church to perform them on his behalf. Evangelism brings people to faith. Baptism joins them to the church. And teaching helps them grow in ways that strengthen the church and lead to its further expansion.

The challenge at the end of the Gospels is that we should go into all nations, proclaiming the good news and making disciples. The language of discipleship implies more than just being a learner. It implies more than just being a believer. But it also implies being in a relationship with God. Yes, the God who will teach us. Yes, the God who will lead us, but the challenge to make disciples is to have people who will be in a lifetime's apprenticeship, relationship, with God. And, therefore that needs to be well-modeled, so I think that people need to be in relationship with other believers who can show them how to live the Christian life well. It needs, obviously, teaching as well. People need to understand God's requirements of his followers and his disciples. But I think also it needs to be embedded in the church because it is there that God has put in place the structures for people

to grow as Christians and indeed to be lifelong learners, to use that phrase, those who are in relationship with God and following him faithfully.

— Dr. Simon Vibert

Having looked at the modern applications of the idea that Jesus builds his kingdom, let's turn to the fact that he governs his people within that kingdom.

GOVERNS HIS PEOPLE

We'll consider two aspects of the way Jesus governs his people. First, we'll focus on the fact that he rules them for their good. And second, we'll see that he defends them from their enemies. Let's look first at how Jesus rules his people.

Rules

Jesus' rule is focused on securing our eternal good, those blessings that we will enjoy with him forever. Everyone that comes to him receives mercy and pardon, as we see in passages like John 6:35-37, 7:37, and 10:28-29; and Acts 5:31. He adopts us as heirs of God, and shares with us all the covenant blessings he has earned through his perfect obedience. We read about these aspects of Jesus' rule in Acts 13:34-39; Romans 8:17, 32; and Hebrews 2:13. Moreover, he grants us all these blessings as a gift of grace, as we read in John 1:16, Ephesians 2:8-9, and many other places.

Christ's loving rule also provides us with temporal good in the present world. He gives us his presence through the Holy Spirit, as we see in Acts 2:33, Galatians 4:6, and Philippians 1:19. He gives us clear direction in the Bible, so that we can serve him faithfully, as we see in 1 Corinthians 9:21, Galatians 6:2, and Colossians 3:16. And he appoints leadership for the church, delegating to them authority and power to minister to his people, as we read in 1 Corinthians 12:28, and Ephesians 4:11-12.

King Jesus is not a harsh dictator; he is a loving king that cares and provides for us. Far from being a source of trouble, his rule is a benevolent blessing that benefits us both now and forever. And our response to this rule should be obvious. In order to receive the blessings our king has for us, we need to submit to his rule. We should be obedient to his law and trust in his mercy and power to overcome our failures and difficulties. And, of course, we should be thankful for his leadership, and praise him for his goodness to us.

Now that we've talked about the implications of the fact that Jesus rules his people, let's turn to the idea that he also defends us.

Defends

There are many ways that Jesus defends believers, but for our purposes in this lesson we'll focus on just three. First, Jesus defends us against the temptation to sin.

As our king, Jesus defends us against temptation in many ways. For example, he warns us of temptations ahead of time, as we read in Matthew 6:13. He strengthens us to resist sin, as we read in Hebrews 2:16. And he protects us from situations that would overwhelm us or trap us, always making sure that we have a way to avoid sin, as we see in 1 Corinthians 10:13 and 2 Timothy 4:18.

Second, when we do give in to temptation, Jesus defends us from the corruption of sin. One way Jesus defends us against corruption is by disciplining and correcting us when we sin, so that we don't subject ourselves to sin's mastery. We see this in Jeremiah 46:28, Hebrews 12:5-11, Revelation 3:19, and many other passages. And another way he defends us against corruption is by granting us forgiveness and cleansing from sin when we repent, as we see in 1 John 1:9.

Third, Jesus defends us against accusations of sin. All Christians are prone to sin. And when we do, Satan tries to persuade God to condemn us, as we read in places like Revelation 12:10. But Jesus defends us against these accusations, so that God counts us as perfectly righteous. Although Scripture often speaks of Christ's intercession for us in terms of his priestly office, Romans 8:34 indicates that it's also an aspect of his kingship. As the great vassal king, Jesus defends his people against accusations by interceding for us with the great suzerain.

Because Jesus defends us so strongly, we can have great confidence in our battles with sin. If we rely on his strength to resist temptation, and on his forgiveness to cleanse us from sin's effects, and on his advocacy to protect us from sin's consequences, nothing can harm us. Jesus is the great and powerful warrior king that leads us into battle against sin. And even if we don't fight well, we still can't lose — because he won't let us. He will always preserve and protect us, forgive and cleanse us, defend and acquit us. And eventually, he'll bring us into the unfailing blessings of his eternal kingdom.

Now that we've looked at the ways Jesus governs his people, we're ready to turn to the fact that he also conquers his enemies.

CONQUERS HIS ENEMIES

When God's law is violated, many people are often hurt. We see this every day when crimes are committed. There are victims who have been robbed, or swindled, or beaten, or betrayed, or even killed. And in the language of Scripture, the criminals that commit these crimes have made themselves the enemies of both their victims and God. And the proper response of the government is to catch and punish these criminals. Their judgment is supposed to be both an appropriate penalty for their crimes, and a way to protect their victims and the rest of society from further crimes. Scripture speaks of this in places like Proverbs 20:8 and 25:5.

And something similar is true of the judgment that Jesus brings. He punishes his and our enemies according to justice, in order to exact retribution for their crimes. But he

also punishes them as an act of blessing and benevolence toward us, in order to protect us from their sin and violence, and to purify and protect the world he is making for us. This is why the judgment and destruction of sinners is a critical part of Jesus' mission of turning the world into God's earthly kingdom. In order for the world to be pleasing to God and fit for him to inhabit, and in order for us to enjoy its everlasting blessings, the corruption of sin must be completely removed from it.

As we saw earlier in this lesson, Jesus began executing judgment against many of his and our enemies during his earthly ministry. These enemies included sin, death and the demons. Jesus' victory over these enemies is secure, but he hasn't finished punishing them yet. So, in the present age, Jesus continues to execute judgment against them, and he will complete their judgment only when he returns. This fact is taught in 2 Peter 2:4; Jude verse 6; and Revelation 20:10, 14.

But Jesus and his church also have other enemies. Every sinner who hasn't submitted himself to Christ is a citizen of the kingdom of Satan and an enemy of God. Scripture makes this clear in Matthew 13:37-43; Luke 19:27; and Ephesians 2:1-3.

At the present time, Jesus executes partial judgment against some of these enemies during their earthly lives, as when Herod was struck dead in Acts 12:23 because he allowed the people to treat him as a god. But for the most part, Jesus forbears in his judgment against his enemies, patiently withholding his judgment until he returns.

It's very interesting that future judgment is often expressed as part of the gospel as presented in the New Testament. This may seem like a curious element of what would otherwise be good news. But the truth is that this is part of the good news. And the reason it's part of the Good News, is it's God's assurance that just as suffering will not endure forever, but be addressed with healing, injustice will not be permitted to continue indefinitely, but wrong will be made right. There is something of a deep longing in every human heart that injustice will not prevail, or be dismissed as unimportant because we are moving on. This is God's assuring promise to those who suffer that this will not be tolerated. They have an advocate, and that they do not need to go out with some sort of revengeful vigilante justice and take it into their own hands but to entrust themselves to a faithful judge who will do right.

— Dr. Glen Scorgie

The apostles were clear that Jesus' rule as king would include a future day of judgment, when everyone would answer to his rule and his law. This judgment on the last day is mentioned in places like Acts 17:31, Romans 14:10-12, and Hebrews 10:26-31. The coming Day of Judgment is a central part of Christ's work as king because it will satisfy his justice toward sinners, his mercy toward believers, and his faithfulness to the Father as he purifies his kingdom.

Although the doctrine of the last judgment can be terrifying for those who haven't received Christ as Lord, this isn't a bad thing. These warnings provide an opportunity for the unfaithful to repent of their sin, and to receive forgiveness, mercy and grace from our

king Jesus Christ. Yes, they're strongly worded. But at their core, they're offers of blessing to those who repent. In fact, this is why gospel presentations in the Bible often contain a warning of future judgment. For example, we see this in Matthew 21:32-44 and Acts 17:30-31.

I think many Christians are perplexed sometimes by the description and presentation of the Gospel in Scripture, which also includes a very clear message about the devastating eternal punishment of the unrepentant, those who are not in Christ, those who die in their sins. You know, I think I understood a little bit better when I had a doctor look me in the face and say, "We found a tumor in you." Now, that doesn't sound like good news, but you know, it really was good news. It was good news that he found it. It was good news that he told me about it. What if he thought it wasn't nice to tell me I had a tumor in me? Well, that wouldn't be loving; that wouldn't be gracious. That wouldn't be good. He found that tumor, and he told me, "Here's the reality. You've got a tumor, and it'll kill you. But we can do something about it." So, there's the good news. You know, the Scripture presents so clearly the judgment that is to come and the consequences of sin. That's good news that we know that. It's good news also because it displays the glory of God. We're not told that there's a judgment coming and, by the way, this is something God just can't prevent from happening. We're told that this is the outpouring of God's righteousness and his justice, his holiness. So, it's good that we know that in order that we would flee to Christ in order to avoid the destruction that is to come, the judgment that is to come. But, you know, the Bible also is very honest when you come to the closing chapters of the New Testament in the book of Revelation that the glory of God is in the salvation of the redeemed and in the judgment that is poured out upon the unrepentant. Now, when we look at that, we have to recognize that God's glory is most quintessentially, infinitely seen when he displays his righteousness, both to those who are in Christ and have their sins forgiven in Christ by no merit of their own, and to those who, to the end, obstinately refused him. You know, the reality is that we need to know this. The gospel is good news first of all because it tells us how we can flee the destruction that is to come, how we can trust Christ and be found in him and find everlasting life. But it's also good news because we need to know the rest of the story. That's part of the gospel too.

— Dr. R. Albert Mohler, Jr.

The Bible's teaching about the last judgment should actually be very encouraging for believers. It assures us that our suffering is not in vain. Every wrong will be set right, as we read in James 5:7-8, and 2 Thessalonians 1:4-10. Christ's judgment is reason for praise, because it will destroy the presence, corruption and influence of every form of

evil, and result in the purged and perfect world that we will inherit and inhabit forever. As the angel proclaimed in Revelation 14:7:

Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water (Revelation 14:7).

CONCLUSION

In this lesson, we've explored Jesus' office of king. We've considered the Old Testament background of his office in terms of its qualifications and functions, and the expectations for its future. We've also seen the fulfillment of each of these aspects of the office of king in Jesus. And we've explored the modern application of Jesus' kingship in terms of the way Jesus builds his kingdom, governs his people and conquers his enemies.

In this series, we've surveyed the riches of the doctrine of Christ. We've seen Jesus as the redeemer throughout all history; we've considered his life and ministry; and we've explored his offices as prophet, priest and king. Our knowledge of Jesus, however, should never be purely academic. But when we grasp who he is, and comprehend what he has revealed about himself, we will then love and follow him throughout our lives, in all that we do, in our homes, our work, our churches.

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We Believe in Jesus

LESSON
FIVE

The King
Faculty Forum



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We Believe in Jesus

Lesson Five: The King

Faculty Forum

With

Dr. David Bauer
Dr. Steve Blakemore
Dr. Stephen Chan
Dr. Paul Chang
Dr. Robert Chisolm
Dr. Dan Doriani
Dr. William Edgar
Dr. Matt Friedeman
Dr. David Garner
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Dr. Thomas Schreiner
Dr. Glen Scorgie
Dr. Mark Strauss
Dr. K. Erik Thoennes
Dr. Gideon Umukoro
Dr. Simon Vibert
Dr. Stephen Wellum

Question 1:

What is the kingdom of God?

The New Testament tells us that when Jesus became a human being, he also became the king over God's kingdom on earth. But we have to admit that for unbelievers, it can be hard to identify Jesus as this world's king. In fact, for those who haven't embraced Christ as King, the whole idea of the kingdom of God can be confusing. After all, what kind of kingdom has a king we can't see, and no discernible borders? What is the kingdom of God?

Dr. Jonathan Pennington

The kingdom of God is one of the most important and largest concepts in the Bible. In fact, that translation, "kingdom of God," has some good things about it, but sometimes it can actually mislead us from the main idea, which is not so much a place, but instead the fact that God is the true King; that he reigns; it's the kingship where the rule and reign of God. I think the kingdom of God is one of the greatest concepts of the Bible because it encompasses all of his work from creation to new creation. And I like to think of the reign or kingdom of God as God establishing his rule, re-establishing his rule, from heaven to earth, from creation to new creation. I think the book of Revelation certainly shows this in a great way because it really is an unfolding of one of the central ideas of the New Testament, and that is the Lord's Prayer where Jesus teaches his people to pray that God's reign, his kingdom, would come from heaven to the earth. And that is the great Christian hope.

Dr. Dan Doriani

The kingdom of God is the rule or the reign of God. The kingdom of God is not a realm. God is not a king over certain borders. There's not a border guard keeping people out. It's not a geographical entity. It's a spiritual entity over which God reigns.

And it can be construed two ways. In one sense, God rules over all things, and then especially those who willingly submit to his reign. So we could say there's the voluntary submission to his reign and the involuntary, in the sense that God rules even over those who rebel against him. God's kingdom encompasses all things. Of course, we're used to the idea that Jesus announces the kingdom, and so he is talking about yielding to him, believing in him, following him ethically. Absolutely that's true, but God's kingdom also extends over all things. It extends over economics, politics, workplace, policies, the arts, the sciences, entertainment, sports, our homes, our gardens. Essentially anything you can name is a sphere over which God reigns, and he wants us to willingly yield ourselves consciously to his rule.

Dr. Steve Blakemore

We ask ourselves the question, what is the kingdom of God? I mean, God is the king. God is the rightful ruler. There has never been anything that was out of God's control in the sense that he was not sovereignly able to be over all things. So what would the kingdom of God introduce, or the concept introduce into our understanding of God's work in the world or the world's relationship with God? And I've come to think of it in these terms: The kingdom of God is the rightful, true reign of God in willing people who rightly recognize God's rightful claim on their lives, who lovingly, trustingly, fully and willingly surrender to the sovereign lordship of God. Now, that means that the church is in some way the visible manifestation of the kingdom of God. The church is the way that God's kingdom is made visible in creation, in history, right now. But that surrender that we experience now is only a precursor. Ultimately, God will renew all things. God will destroy every enemy. God will remove every impediment from our perfectly knowing him and our completely obeying him. He will remove those impediments. That's the ultimate promise of God. But right now, we participate in an anticipatory way willingly, lovingly, freely by acknowledging in Jesus Christ God's salvation and God's lordship over our lives. And through that, the church bears witness to the ultimate gift of the kingdom that is promised in the *eschaton*.

Dr. K. Erik Thoennes

The kingdom of God is fundamentally God's rule and reign. That is something that he has been working out throughout all of human history but was inaugurated in the ministry of Christ. Jesus brings with him this rule and reign of God that's inaugurated there. It's not consummated yet, but it is being worked out. It starts slowly, Jesus tells us. It often shows up in ways we don't expect, in humble ways. But it's God's rule and reign fundamentally brought through the King, Jesus.

Dr. William Edgar

The kingdom of God consists of two fundamental realities. The first is God's rule. He is Lord over all things. Now, as the book of Hebrews points out, we don't always see that rule manifested, but it is. He is governing all things. He is the Lord of Lords, the King of Kings. The second is the realm of his righteousness. As the kingdom extends, the righteousness of God, his will, is made known and applied on earth as it is in heaven. So by the time of the end, you will see the perfect expression, the perfect

completion of both God's rule and his righteousness here on earth. As of now, we believe it, but we're still waiting to see the final fruition of it.

Question 2:

What gives God the right to rule as king over all creation?

Throughout the entire Bible, God is referred to as the great King, the sovereign over all, who will reign forever and ever. But how did God come to be the ultimate ruler? What qualifies him to be in charge? What gives God the right to rule as king over all creation?

Dr. David Garner

Scripture presents God as Creator. We find in Genesis 1 that he made all things simply by declaring them. He, by fiat, said, "Let there be" and there was. The way in which that took place is really beyond the scope of our comprehension. How can words have such efficacy? How can they have such power? Well, they can only be true if God is completely other than we are. He is not dependent upon anything. He is the eternal, infinite, all-powerful, all-knowing God. And as the Creator, he is also the owner of all things, and he has chosen to create some things and not create others. He has caused some people to be born and not others to be born. That is fully within his right and power and authority to exercise. Many people struggle with the idea of God's absolute authority. I think Paul speaks of that struggle in Romans 1 when he describes how humanity in its sinfulness seeks to suppress the knowledge of God, seeks to suppress the clear revelation of God. Well, what is that clear revelation? That he is God and we're not. That he is fully in control, that he is fully authoritative. And I think an important component for us as humans to recognize about our existence is that we don't have a say in things in that ultimate sense. We are blessed to be alive. We are blessed to have the opportunity to give glory to the one who made us. And then, to think about the fact that not only did he make us, and not only did he not just immediately obliterate Adam and his progeny in view of Adam's first sin, but also, in his perseverance, determined to still call a people to himself, to still even give, as Jesus will describe in Matthew 5 in the Sermon on the Mount, to cause the rain to fall on the unjust and the just. You see, God is a merciful God. He is a kind God. He is a patient God. Every breath that I have, every breath that I breathe, is not only something that's given from him, but it is also something that I need to be aware of, points me ultimately to him. And so my entire existence is dependent upon the God who has made all things, and for that reason, we need to recognize that he is wholly sovereign and he has the right to act as he wills. One final comment I would add about God's sovereignty is it's not a capricious sovereignty. It's not a sovereignty that operates distinct from his character as a good God. And so not only is he sovereign, but he is also good. And it is on that basis that we are called then to delight in him.

Dr. William Edgar

One of the questions we often get in apologetics is, "I didn't ask to be born; how does God get to rule over me?" And I think the simple answer to that is, exactly because

you didn't ask to be born. That was a choice made by someone else, your Creator that vests the proper authority in God himself. God doesn't derive his authority from outside of himself. He is his own authority. His attributes, all of them, are authoritative. But of course, it's not the kind of authority we're used to as human beings, which can be tyrannical, or capricious, or arbitrary. It's authority that is good because God is good. We don't always see that. We question his providence at times, and even the most saintly people have gone through trials that don't make sense to them, and they rightly ask God in faith, "Why are you allowing this?" He sometimes gives the answer here and now, but most times he waits and maybe it will be only in the new heavens and new earth that we'll finally find out the answers to all these things. But we can trust his authority because he has an amazing track record. The greatest proof of his authority is, of course, sending his Son to die for our sins and to be raised up for our justification. No other philosophy, no other god remotely comes to this kind of answer. So God's authority is in itself, but it's proven over and over again in Jesus Christ.

Dr. John McKinley

The Bible displays God as king over all creation. His rule is absolute, and he does not accept any other contender. His right to be so is, whatever way you think about ownership and rights, God has it. He made it, he sustains it, and he rescued it at great personal cost through incarnation and crucifixion. So he has the right to do whatever he wants with everybody, and the fact that he is benevolent in doing so should make us praise him for everything that he does do.

Dr. Glen Scorgie

Some people ask what gives God the right to rule as king over all creation. Well, three reasons come to my mind. The first is that God as creator of all that exists has a kind of patent or ownership claim on his handiwork. So there is this sort of proprietary interest and entitlement on that basis to administer what he has brought into being. I think a second reason, and perhaps we sometimes overlook this, but every time there's an election you think about it, and it's this: only God is qualified to administer with wisdom and competence all that this universe, and particularly this little corner of it, our world, encompasses. This is an administrative task that exceeds the competence and pay grade of any human being. He's really the only qualified candidate. And then of course, in the third place, there's what the old Scots used to call "the crown rites of the Redeemer." God has the right to be king because he made it all and us, he's the one singularly qualified to do a good job of leadership, and then on top of that, he paid an incredible personal price to redeem us back a second time through the blood of his Son. We are bought with that price. And so indeed, the crown rights of the Creator Redeemer are compelling. But I should also add that the imagery of king, which in some ways seems antique to us today, is really a way of saying as king he does not rule for his own ego. He rules, as Calvin said, chiefly for our sake as our powerful protector, provider and advocate. The concept of king is upsetting to egalitarian-minded moderns with a strong sense of personal entitlement and autonomy, but indeed, king does not convey in this instance a tyrant or anyone

who is inclined toward narcissism. The king rules at personal sacrifice so that we are safe and can flourish

Question 3:

Why does the Old Testament sometimes present God as a warrior king?

In the history recorded in the Bible, one prominent function kings performed was waging war against other nations. In fact, the Old Testament often depicts God as a warrior king that fights and defeats his enemies. But how do we reconcile this idea with God's goodness and mercy? How can a benevolent God promote war and destroy nations? Why does the Old Testament sometimes present God as a warrior king?

Dr. Scott Redd

One of the most significant depictions of the Lord in the Old Testament is God's role as king, and as a king, he would have multiple duties just like any other ancient Near Eastern king, multiple duties and functions that give light to his office as king. One of those functions would have been a warrior function. You see, in the ancient Near East, the king was considered the leader of the hosts, the leader of the armies of his nation, and as such, he was also the greatest warrior. So God, or the Lord, being a warrior throughout the Old Testament depicts God as a king who is a warrior king. He goes out and defends, he fights for, he delivers, and he protects his own people. As a matter of fact, most of the great events of the Old Testament are defined and described in this warlike imagery. Genesis 1, for instance, the story of creation shows Yahweh going to war with the forces of chaos and void in the sea, pushing back the sea. Psalm 104 actually retells the creation story and highlights this warrior imagery of God, Yahweh as a warrior king going out and pressing back the forces of chaos and death. Likewise, when God delivers his people from Egypt, Yahweh goes to war with the gods of Egypt. So when we look at the story of Exodus, God going down and sending plagues against Pharaoh and his house and indeed the whole nation of Egypt, is not just God showing random or arbitrary power in Egypt, but rather, he's addressing through each individual plague what were perceived to be the strengths and the domains of the Egyptian gods. So Yahweh is fact, even in Exodus, a delivering warrior. He comes in and he delivers his people from the Egyptian household, from the Egyptian pantheon of gods, and delivers them unto himself.

Likewise, in the conquest, when God's people go in to drive out the Canaanites from the land, we see God going in as a warrior before them. God secures the victory. It's not through strength of their own arms or through their own power or might as a mighty people. Indeed they weren't. They were the least of the nations. And yet the Lord gives them great victory because he is the warrior, not his people. We see it in the story of Gideon — where it's perhaps the most obvious — where Gideon is told to build up an army to go out against the Midianites, and yet you would think that his goal was to build this largest army that he possibly could. And yet the Lord calls him to pare back his army, to show it to be a smaller army, to cut out certain

individuals from the army to have a lesser number. What a great way for God to show his power, because, in fact, his victory is not in Gideon's numbers or his military prowess, but it's in the Lord as a warrior. So God being a warrior king is a cause of great hope and great satisfaction to his people. They know that he is not a king who sits passively by, who requires them to have the victory. But rather, their victory is in him. God's role as a warrior king is a cause for consolation and comfort, but also a cause for confidence. As we go out into the world around us, God's people can be sure that their God is a warrior and that he goes out and fights for them, and he protects them, and he defends them, and the victory will be his.

Dr. William Edgar

I think contemporary people are a bit skittish about the idea of a God who goes to war or justifies war. There is plenty of war on our planet, but we generally don't like it, especially if we follow Christ who told us to turn the other cheek and to be peacemakers. But of course, war is very much a part of bringing justice to a world that's already in chaos, and so Christians reading the Bible have developed the idea that some wars are just. They're just because they're fighting off aggression and they're fighting off injustice. This is the kind of warrior that God is. He goes to battle for his people, he rescues them from their enemies. In the Old Testament, much of this was physically real. Think of the Exodus, think of the angel of the Lord battling for the people of Israel. But as the people were disobedient and sent into exile, a higher level of warfare was introduced, if I can call it that, and that is a spiritual warfare. So Jesus comes, and he still is the warrior, and there are times when he acts like one. He threw over the moneychangers' tables in the temple. But until the end of time, he will be mostly leading us in the battle against sin, and the flesh, and the Devil, telling us to put on the whole armor of God, and leading his people in what really is a war against all the forces of evil. The book of the Revelation tells us that Jesus is this warrior, and he wins. The victory is his, and now we're waiting for that victory to unfold.

Dr. Matt Friedeman

I think the Lord shows himself as a warrior king in the Old Testament because, I believe, at the end of the day everybody wants someone fighting for them. And it not only happens in the Old Testament. I think it extends into the New Testament where the Lord, the Holy Spirit, Jesus, is still fighting on behalf of the people. And if you go all the way to the book of Revelation, what do you find? You see a bit of the warrior king there as well. So I believe it's not just in the Old Testament. I believe it's an extension on into the New Testament, and at the end of the day, it's great knowing that someone wants to fight on your behalf.

Dr. Robert Chisholm

The Old Testament presents God as a warrior king who fights on behalf of his people. And for some people, that's a troubling image because they don't like war — none of us do — but at the same time, God has to fight because there are forces that are opposed to him in both the spiritual realm and sometimes in the earthly realm. And actually, if you study the Old Testament, you see that God has been at war from the

very beginning. We don't understand all of what was going on prior to creation, but we do know that at creation God had to fight and win a battle. You don't see that in Genesis 1, but you see it in other passages in the Old Testament that refer to creation. For example, in Psalm 74 beginning with verse 12, the psalmist affirms, "But God has been my king from ancient times, performing acts of deliverance on the earth." And then he goes back beyond the historical period and he says, "You destroyed," speaking to God, "You destroyed the sea by your strength; you shattered the heads of the sea monster in the water. You crushed the heads of Leviathan; you fed him to the people who live along the coast. You broke open the spring and the stream; you dried up perpetually flowing rivers. You established the cycle of day and night; you put the moon and sun in place. You set up all the boundaries of the earth; you created the cycle of summer and winter." It's clear that this is in a creation context. It may also be alluding to what God did at the Exodus when he defeated the Egyptians, some symbolism for that perhaps. But notice that God defeated the sea and the sea monster Leviathan. Those are symbols that come right out of the ancient Near Eastern world; they're symbols of chaos, of forces that are opposed to God. And this passage seems to indicate that God had to fight a war in conjunction with his creative work. Of course, we know that Satan is the ultimate reality behind this symbolism.

We also see this in Psalm 89:8: "O Lord, sovereign God! Who is strong like you? Your faithfulness surrounds you." So they're celebrating God's kingship. "You rule over the proud sea; when its waves surge, you calm them. You crushed the proud one and killed it; with your strong arm you scattered your enemies." And so once again we have this motif of God defeating these monsters at the beginning of the creation. And then notice verse 11: "The heavens belong to you as does the earth; you made the world and all it contains. You created the north and the south." And so once again, this victory by God over these forces seems to be associated with creation. So I would argue that God was opposed from the very beginning by the forces of Satan. He overcame them, he created this world, but throughout history, Satan has continued to oppose God, and so God has to be at war, and sometimes he calls his people to war. In the Old Testament they were physical wars against nations that were under the control of the evil one. Paul says, in the present era we are not fighting human enemies. We are battling against spiritual forces in high places, and it's through the power of the Holy Spirit that we win those victories. So God has always been at war. There's a very comforting passage, though, in Isaiah 27 verse 1. Isaiah is looking to the future, and we read there that the Lord once and for all in the future is going to defeat Leviathan, which is the symbol of these spiritual powers headed up by Satan.

Dr. John Oswalt

The Old Testament presents God in a great variety of ways because he's not just a force with a mask on like the pagan gods. He is a real person in all of the complexity of that. So on the one hand, he is the Father who has compassion on his children; but on the other hand, he is the warrior who fights for his children, and he will sometimes fight against them as well. Because we're representing that God is all-powerful, and anything that might be expressive of personality is appropriate to him. So then, if evil is the enemy army, as it is, God is presented as the warrior king who comes to defeat.

One of the most beautiful pictures of this is in the 52nd chapter of Isaiah where the people are captive to their sins and they're represented as being a besieged city, and the watchman is on the walls looking to see if a delivering army is coming over the mountains, and we have the famous words, "How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news." The watchman says, "Yes, I can see the herald coming; God the warrior is coming to defeat our enemies, both within and without."

Question 4:

Why were ancient kings, and even God in his divine kingship, sometimes referred to as fathers?

Many ancient Near Eastern peoples referred to their kings as "fathers." And the Bible frequently uses this same language for God. But what prompted this title? Was it appropriate to call kings "father"? Why were ancient kings, and even God in his divine kingship, sometimes referred to as fathers?

Dr. Richard L. Pratt, Jr.

Kings in the ancient world called themselves fathers because they were portraying themselves as paternalistic. That is, they were caring for their people, taking care of their needs, protecting them and those kinds of things. Now in reality most of that was just propaganda because kings in the ancient world for the most part served themselves rather than serving their people. But at the same time, when God revealed himself to Israel, he used this common way of thinking about kings as fathers, and in the case of God being our Father, our royal Father, our imperial Father, it's not propaganda. It's true. God takes care of us. He provides for us. He protects us like a father would, so He's the father of his entire empire, the father of his kingdom.

Dr. Simon Vibert

Well, the language of fatherhood that we hear used with respects to ancient kings is a language of authority and therefore to call a king a father was a recognition that he did have authority over his subjects. And that language of course transposed to the one who has authority over all. So, God as the Father, is not just a title related to his intimacy and care, but it also relates to the fact that it acknowledges that he is the high King over all, the one with absolute authority.

Dr. Paul Chang (translation)

The Bible was written in human language. Our human relationship to God as Creator is often expressed in terms of the relationship between a father and his children. In this context, God's fatherhood represents our origin and his authority.

Dr. Mark Strauss

Ancient kings and God in his kingship were referred to as fathers primarily because, I think, of the patriarchal system of the day where a clan, or an extended family, would have a patriarch, a father, who would oversee them, who would have a authority in that context. And that patriarch had ultimately the authority to provide for the clan, to

provide for the family, and to protect the family. So I think those two things are key when we talk about God as Father; when we talk about ancient kings taking on the father figure — provision for their people and protection for their people.

Question 5: **Why is divine justice important?**

One of the things God does as King is administer divine justice to all people. Of course, many people today take offense at the idea that God holds them accountable, and that he plans to reward or punish them for their thoughts, words and actions. But that doesn't change the fact that upholding justice is the right thing to do. Why is divine justice important?

Dr. Steve Blakemore

Well, the Christian concept or understanding of the divine justice is incredibly important for these reasons: First of all, because God is holy and transcendent. But also, because of God's consistent character, we know that God's demands of us for righteous actions are not just some capricious choice on his part. He always acts out of his faithful, holy character. And so our concept of divine justice reminds us that God is not a capricious God. Secondly, our concept of divine justice reminds us that God wants us to participate and reflect his own righteousness. He wants us to enjoy lives that are filled with righteousness and, therefore, are evidenced in lives that seek after divine justice, that is, divine righteousness. Thirdly, the doctrine of divine justice reminds us how important we are in the grand scheme of things, that God has so exalted human beings that he takes our sins very seriously because of the glory to which we are called — not because he's disgusted with us or hates us — but the glory to which we are called by our being created in his image. And so the concept of divine justice reminds us of some very important things. And finally, the concept of divine justice lets us know this: In the end, in this world that's filled with sin and suffering in which sometimes wicked men and evil people seem to be carrying the day, it will not be so, for God's justice in the end will be done. His judgment will come. His mercy will be shown to those who have said, "yes" to his mercy, but his judgment and his justice will be unflagging and unfailing.

Dr. R. Albert Mohler, Jr.

I saw a news account just recently about courts going after the very last surviving Nazi war criminals. The prosecutor who was engaged in trying to hunt down these very last surviving war criminals said, "We have to do it because humanity and our sense of justice requires it." Well, you know, that's right. There would be something wrong about a society that says, "We know these horrible things were done, but, after all, the perpetrators are old, and it's going to be tough and expensive and difficult to track them down." We understand, even on our human scale of justice that justice just has to be achieved. But, you know, the other thing we learn from the human scale of justice is that we never actually achieve justice. We can put a drunk driver in jail, but we can't restore life to the one who was killed in the accident. We can do all kinds of

things in terms of sentences and punishments and sanctions, but we can't make things right. We can't give a paraplegic the ability to walk. We can't give the dead the ability to live. We can't give a mother back her child or a wife back her husband. Our human scale of justice reminds us that we're not good at punishing for what sin really is. You know, some of the most famous cases in American criminal history come, and there are people who have been given, individuals who have been given, like, 20 life sentences. Well, that's just to make us feel better because he only has one life to serve. We desperately need God's justice because all around us is a created order crying out that justice has to come. Inside our human hearts is the knowledge that justice has to come. We have, in our humble honesty, the recognition that we can't make this happen. There's only one who can bring that justice. There's only one who is infinitely just, infinitely wise, all-powerful, and able to bring this about. We yearn for the justice of God. And this much is clear: we're all going to see the justice of God.

Question 6:

How is the kingdom of God similar to ancient suzerain-vassal relationships?

Kingship in biblical times was largely administered through covenants or treaties. And in many places in the Bible, Israel's relationship to God is described in terms of the covenants that existed between great suzerains or emperors, and the vassal or servant kings that lived under the suzerains' authority. How is the kingdom of God similar to ancient suzerain-vassal relationships?

Mr. Bradley Johnson

Kingship in the ancient Near Eastern context of the time of Jesus and before was largely grounded in the concept of covenant. So we have evidence of treaties, ancient treaties, in which a king, or an overlord, or what's called "suzerain" would then enter into an agreement with some people who have become essentially his servants or his "vassals," and they define a relationship such that the overlord, the suzerain, defines a set of terms by which a relationship can be maintained, and he says something like this: "I will offer you protection, I will offer you prosperity, I will offer you identity in exchange for your participation with me by sharing a portion of your crops, by giving me your allegiance and by not forming allegiances with other kings or overlords." And so it tended to be a very mutual sort of a circumstance in one sense. And if we begin to think about kingship and the nature of covenant in the terms of this kind of an agreement, then what we find is that various portions of the Old Testament seem to conform very precisely with the exact elements of the suzerain treaties. And so we see things like preambles where we have these initial statements given by Moses to the people saying, "Here's the deal, folks..." And you see this element where memory is invoked to recall the good works of God the King, and the stipulations are laid out. Here's the Law. This is what you're going to have to do to stay in right relationship with this king, this overlord, and as a result, here are the

benefits, and we're going to provide an authorization of this covenant by means of witnesses. And that's another element of the suzerain treaties.

And so we've got to understand first and foremost that the nature of kingship is probably very well grounded in this idea of a suzerain-vassal relationship where there's mutual caregiving and exclusive devotion. If we start from that premise, then the kingdom of God, the kingdom of heaven as it's laid out in the New Testament, makes perfect sense, because God comes with very high expectations, but he also comes with a list of very desirable outcomes. So if we were to plot this, we would say this is high in risk, but high in reward. So the nature of the kingdom of God is one of an overlord who is superior, who demands exclusive allegiance, but in turn provides a lot of great stuff for our benefit and our wellbeing. I think in terms of the function of the kingdom, it's not something that has geographical boundaries. I mean, there aren't fences that are built to delineate where the kingdom ends and begins, but rather it's a matter of allegiance. It's what rules are people playing by? Are we playing by the rules of a secular authority as they're given to us? Are we following the rules of pop culture as it comes to us? Are we following the rules of our own reason doing what seems right in our own eyes? Or are we playing by the rules of God as he's given them to us? And I think that represents the scope or the domain of the kingdom. The kingdom is not something we build. We don't construct it. We participate in it. We join it. We find where it's happening and we accept the invitation to play by those rules, to satisfy the stipulations and the requirements of the covenant, and then we enjoy or reap the rewards of that kind of living.

Question 7:

In what sense is Jesus God's vassal king?

When Scripture talks about the kingship of Jesus, it sometimes indicates that Jesus' kingship isn't precisely the same as the Father's kingship. In general terms, we can say that the Father is presented as a great suzerain or emperor, and Jesus is presented as the Father's vassal or servant king. But if Jesus is God, how can he be a vassal? In what sense is Jesus God's vassal king?

Dr. Robert Chisholm

Jesus's kingship needs to be understood in light of the ancient Davidic kingship because Jesus is the ideal David. He is *HaMashiach*, the Messiah. And of course in the Old Testament, the Davidic kingship is patterned after something that we see in the ancient Near Eastern world, so-called suzerain-vassal relationship where the suzerain, the king, rules over his subjects, usually by treaty. And David is God's chosen ruler over the world. And so there's a sense in which God chose David to be his vice-regent to rule on his behalf. And, of course, Jesus is the one who ultimately fulfills that. In Revelation 1:5, Jesus is described as the faithful witness, the firstborn from among the dead, the ruler over the kings of the earth. Jesus has been granted kingship over the rulers of the earth by God. And of course this goes back to Psalm 2, which is a very famous Psalm that is cited quite often in the New Testament. And in

Psalm 2, the nations are raging and complaining and they want to get out from beneath the authority of God and his chosen king. But then the king says, “I will tell you what the Lord decreed. He said to me, ‘You are my Son; this very day I have become your Father.’” And the background for this language is this ancient Near Eastern relationship where a king would adopt one that he had chosen to rule on his behalf. The Lord himself says in verse 6 just before this, “I myself have installed my king on Zion, my holy hill” — Jerusalem. So the Davidic king was chosen by God to rule. And we read on in verse 8, “You have only to ask me and I will give you the nations as your inheritance, the ends of the earth as your personal property. You will break them with an iron scepter; you will smash them as if they were a potter’s jar.” And then the kings of the earth are urged to do what is wise and submit to correction and serve the Lord in fear, and repent in terror, and give sincere homage; otherwise, God will be angry, and their destiny is not a pretty one if they have to deal with God’s anger. So we see that Jesus is this king in Revelation 1:5. And the background for that is Psalm 2 where God has chosen the Davidic King to rule on his behalf. And all of this is patterned after what we see in the ancient Near East.

Dr. Simon Vibert

The language of vassal king as opposed to suzerain king speaks about delegated authority, and Jesus is great David’s greatest son — was of that line of kingship. And even as David had his authority as king delegated from the Father, so too Jesus did as well — God being the one with all authority. In fact, he is the one of whom Jesus says, “All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me,” and therefore, sends his disciples in the Father’s name to make disciples of all nations.

Dr. Richard L. Pratt, Jr.

Normally when we think about the kingship of Christ, we think of that as something very exalted, high, up there, and because Jesus is now at the right hand of God the Father, and he is the King, but we must remember that Jesus was exalted in his kingship in his human nature. That’s to say in his divine nature Jesus was always the King. He was always ruling as the sovereign over all things, but Jesus was given authority in heaven and earth in his human nature, and Jesus is the son of David, and therefore the one who represents the nation of Israel and the people of God. And the son of David, like David himself, was a vassal king. He was a servant of the greater king, God the Father in heaven.

Question 8:

What makes Jesus the ideal ruler over the kingdom of God?

God established Jesus as the messianic King on earth. And he appointed him to rule over all creation. Jesus’ ancestors, like David, had also served God as kings. But Jesus was able to fill this role in ways that far surpassed every king that had gone before him. What makes Jesus the ideal ruler over the kingdom of God?

Dr. Greg Perry

The book of Revelation talks about Jesus as the Lion of the tribe of Judah, as the King — the Davidic king. And so that language reveals a couple of things. One of the things is it shows that Jesus not only reveals who God is, but he also reveals true humanness, the full nature of what it means to be a human being. And so in his role in the New Testament as the son of David, the Son of God language actually oftentimes, most often, refers to his role as the Davidic king, the Messiah. And in that sense, he represents a historic people. In the case of the book of Revelation, it's the people of God spread throughout all of the nations, and he is our king, our representative to the Father, or the suzerain. So he is our king in history, in time, a full human being who represents his people to the Father. Of course, also, he represents God to us, but that doesn't diminish the fact that he's fully human as well and represents us to God.

Dr. Stephen Wellum

One of the great titles of the New Testament that's applied to the Lord Jesus Christ is that he is Lord. The title "Lord" comes from the Greek "*kurios*". Some, who do not want to affirm the full deity of the Lord Jesus Christ and see this title as reflecting the fact that he is the Lord, try to say that, "Well, *kurios* can be used of kings and earthly rulers, and thus this doesn't at all prove that Christ is the Lord." Now, no doubt *kurios* has that range of meaning; every word has a range of meaning and it is then important to set those words in their context in the Scripture, and when we do that there are some instances where *kurios*, Christ, can be addressed as "lord" probably by the crowd, not in the full deity sense. Yet, when we have the affirmations repeatedly in the New Testament, where he takes on the very name of the Lord, *kurios*, from the Old Testament, which picks up the covenant name of God from the Old Testament Israel. Particularly, you think of, say, Philippians 2, where he goes to the cross, he humbles himself, even to death on the cross. The Father is the one who then exalts him by resurrection, then gives him a name above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow and tongue confess and that name that is given to him is Lord, *kurios*. That comes right out of Isaiah 45, where that name is applied to Jehovah or Yahweh from the Old Testament, and that now comes over into its application to Christ where you have a clear affirmation that the New Testament is saying that the Lord Jesus Christ is nothing less than the one who takes on the very identity, role, aims of the Lord of the Old Testament. In fact we can see this change of lordship, Lord, the name Lord from the Old Testament applied to Christ many, many different places. The book of Hebrews does it repeatedly. Paul's letters do it. In fact, God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ speaks of Christ as one who has the very identity of God of the Old Testament. So that it's not enough just to say, oh this is just a human title. No, in the New Testament it is referring to the unique fact that the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ is indeed the Lord. Speaking of his God equal-ness with the Father and with the Spirit, which then we understand in terms of Trinitarian relations.

Rev. Jim Maples

In Matthew's gospel we find a great emphasis on the kingdom of heaven. Matthew begins his gospel with the lineage of Jesus with the intent of showing that Jesus is the rightful heir, the Davidic king. This Davidic king is Jesus of Nazareth. The rightful

king, when Jesus is born, is working in a carpenter shop in Nazareth. And Matthew makes this case about the kingdom of heaven. His audience, his original audience, was primarily a Jewish audience, we believe, and this book is to say to the people, here's your rightful king. He places a lot of emphasis on that, but he goes beyond that. He goes beyond the great Davidic king who is to come. Matthew goes much farther, and he emphasizes the kingdom of heaven in its concrete manifestation as he demonstrates in this gospel that this term "kingdom of heaven" refers to Christ's rule over all people and all spheres. It is a question of authority. And we see this theme running along in the gospel of Matthew with the theme of the kingdom authority. The people were amazed, he said, because Jesus taught them as one who had authority. The Pharisees and Sadducees always asked Jesus, "By what authority do you do these things?" The gospel ends with the words: "Jesus said, 'All authority has been given to me in heaven and in earth.'" And this kingdom idea is much more than the nationalistic Davidic king that the people had come to expect and to look for. This is the statement that Matthew makes that Christ is king over every square inch of creation.

Question 9:

What do Christians mean when we say that Jesus is our king?

Christians that don't live in a monarchy don't always understand the office of king. Some of us struggle to understand the concepts associated with kings in the Bible, and even to appreciate the idea that Jesus is our king. So, what do Christians mean when we say that Jesus is our king?

Dr. Gideon Umukoro

The kingship of Jesus is an issue that the American church is not really too familiar with except the missionaries that have gone out overseas to countries where kings are still in power. The country I come from, Nigeria, is a democratic nation, but the kings also are there, playing vital roles alongside democracy. And it's not what it looks like. The kings have higher power than the governors who oversee the states, because if — take for example, if the governor of my state wants me in the government house, I can send his envoy back to him that I'm busy. When I have the time, I will come. But when the king sends for me, I don't have any say. I don't have any excuse. I must be there right away. And even if I am indisposed, I will have to be put in a wheelchair or a stretcher and be brought before him, because when he sends his envoy, the envoy comes with the scepter of the king and they put it in the front of your house, and that's to show to you that the king needs you immediately, and you have to move with the envoy back to the palace. So that is how the kings reign and wield power in my country Nigeria.

And when we see Christ as the king, as the sovereign, from the point of how I just described the African king, then the kingdom we are praying for will come very soon. You see, most of us don't really understand the power of a king. The king owns everything, including you, your wife, and your children. The king has the right to

accept you in his domain, he has the right to banish you out of his domain, and the governor has nothing to say about it, because the king's word is final. And I really am glad that Jesus is the King Jesus, and if he actually is the king, then he owns every one of us. He has the right to summons us, and we don't have any excuse to give to him. He has a right to everything that we have worked and labored for on earth here because he's the king. If we accept him as the king, then when he says, "go," you go. When he says, "come," you come. When he says, "stay," you stay. The issue of Jesus as the king needs to be elaborated to the Western church, most especially the American church, because we lift up our hands in worship and say that we give all to Jesus, but because of our little or myopic understanding of who a king is, even when Jesus is summoning us, or is sending us, is asking us to give, we don't really understand his sovereign authority and power. So it's an area that the church in America needs to really elaborate on. Jesus is king, and because of that, I own nothing on earth here, including myself, my wife, or my baby. We don't own anything. He is the owner of all.

So when we see Jesus from this point as a sovereign king, then it will enable us to do what he bids us with joy and not with struggle, because if we are on earth here, and we are subjected to unrighteous kings, unjust kings, how much more should we give ourselves freely to a just and honorable king who will not deceive us, who will not take from us unjustly what we have labored for just as the kings of the world do? So, when we see Jesus, one of his offices, as the office of the king, then we give what he wants from us with joy. Because he is the owner, and he will not allow us to suffer by taking from us what will give us happiness and joy, because he is a righteous God, he is a righteous king. So, I want us to see this office of Jesus, the sovereign kingship office of Jesus, as a great privilege for us. Some of us who are even under the tyranny of a wicked dynasty and kings, it gives us hope that we are under a king who cares for us even when our earthly kings fail us. So that is exactly the beauty of seeing Jesus as the righteous, holy and just king.

Question 10:

What did the Jews in Jesus' day expect the Messiah to do, and did their expectations reflect Old Testament teachings?

In the Old Testament, God appointed the kings of Israel and Judah to rule as his vassals over his people. But, ultimately, these kings failed to lead the people into God's greatest blessings. So, Israel and Judah looked forward to the day when the Messiah would fulfill all their hopes for kingship. But when Jesus arrived, the Jewish people rejected him, partly because they didn't believe he really was the Messiah. What did the Jews in Jesus' day expect the Messiah to do, and did their expectations reflect Old Testament teachings?

Dr. Mark Strauss

The evidence from the 1st century suggests that the Jews were looking for, especially, a political and military Messiah who would establish God's kingdom, who would

expel the Romans, defeat the Romans, and establish God's kingdom in Jerusalem as the center. So it was very nationalistic in that sense. Jesus didn't show signs that he was going to fulfill that nationalistic sense; instead he had a much larger vision, really. It wasn't about the Romans; it was really about creation itself. Creation was in a fallen state, and Jesus came to reverse the fall, to establish, once again to establish, God's kingdom on earth, and that kingdom meant the defeat of sin, the defeat of Satan, the defeat of death. So Jesus was looking at something much greater than merely a political victory, merely a military victory.

In fact, Jesus' miracles really demonstrate what the kingdom was all about because when Jesus healed the sick, what was he doing? Well, he was obviously demonstrating God's compassion, God's love for people. He cared for people, so he healed them, but really it's much more significant than that. In the Old Testament prophecies of Isaiah, Isaiah predicts that when the kingdom comes, that is when God restores his creation, the lame will walk and the blind will see; the deaf will hear. In other words, sickness is ultimately a result of human fallenness and the fallen state of creation. So what Jesus is doing, he's doing little snapshots of the kingdom. He's demonstrating what it would look like when God restores his creation. And so the healings are really a demonstration that this is much greater than just a physical defeat of the Romans or physical liberation in Israel. This is a restoration of the world as God had originally intended it to be. The exorcisms then, have the same significance because what does Jesus do? He casts out demons. Well, that's an act of compassion; freeing someone from Satan's power; but in another since it's got a larger purpose. And that larger purpose is to demonstrate that Satan himself is being defeated. This world has been in the grip of Satan since the fall of Adam and Eve. God is taking back his kingdom and so little snapshots by Jesus, to demonstrate that by casting out demons, showing his authority over Satan; that with his death on the cross he's going to defeat sin, Satan, and ultimately death as well.

Dr. John Oswalt

Clearly the concept of the Messiah is very important in the Old Testament. The Messiah is the Anointed One, the anointed King. It's interesting to wonder how would Christ have come, if in fact Israel had been obedient and had not demanded a human king. But they did. And so you had this succession of anointed ones, who were not caring for their people, who were not establishing God's justice in the world, who were self-centered. And so you have this longing emerging in the Old Testament; "Oh, couldn't we have a Messiah who would be what a Messiah is supposed to be?" And so you have this picture of the king who is coming, but especially in Isaiah there is a fascinating connection between this coming king and the Holy Spirit. The people of the Old Testament are not only longing for a Messiah, they're also longing for the Holy Spirit to come and enable them to obey their Torah. So, it's interesting to see the ways in which Isaiah, in particular, pictures the relationship between the Messiah and the Spirit. He'll be filled with the Spirit. He is anointed by the Spirit. He is the one who speaks through the Spirit. And therefore, the apostles don't seem to be surprised when the risen Jesus says to them, "Wait in Jerusalem for the promise of the Father." It's as though, ahhh, finally the Messiah has said something we expected the Messiah

to say — “I’m going to make the Holy Spirit available.” What they didn’t do was to understand what the Messiah’s cost would be to bring in this age of God’s justice and the age of the Spirit. They did not connect Isaiah 53 to Isaiah 11. They did not connect the fact that the Messiah would have to die in order to bring in this kingdom of justice and peace and the life of the Spirit.

Dr. Thomas Schreiner

It is very interesting to think of what the Jews of Jesus’ day thought in terms of the coming of the Messiah. Actually, there were many diverse beliefs out there. We have some documents from the Dead Sea Scrolls that show that some believed in two messiahs coming, a priestly messiah and a kingly messiah. But the mainstream expectation was that the Messiah would be a son of David and that he would bring in political peace; that he would drive out the Romans. You can read this today in a book called *The Psalms of Solomon*. That’s even available on the Internet. You could Google that and find that very easily. The *Psalms of Solomon* speak of the wicked who are in Israel, probably thinking of the Romans and some within Israel who compromised with the Romans, and it teaches very clearly that when the Messiah comes, he will come as a military ruler, he will expel the sinners, he will bring in righteousness, and then the people of God will dwell in peace. And it’s clear, I think, in reading the New Testament — we think of John 6 for example where the Jews came to make Jesus a king — that this is what the Jews of Jesus’ day expected of him as well. And, of course, as you know, Jesus crossed them up again and again. He seemed to have no interest in this political realm that they were expecting. He surprised the religious leaders again and again with his stance towards the Law, which I think was a right understanding. He focused, of course, on women and tax collectors and sinners. I think the religious establishment believed that the kingdom would come in if Israel would obey the Law, and they actually viewed Jesus as a threat in that regard, because Jesus didn’t seem to be advancing obedience to the Law but transgression of it, at least in their view. So he didn’t have the political machinery that they expected, and then in terms of the Law, he didn’t do what they expected as well, and so they were, I think, scandalized by him. Actually, I think at the end of the day, they viewed Jesus in terms of Deuteronomy 13, a person who did signs and wonders and miracles but was actually a false prophet and therefore that he should be put to death. So they had just a profoundly different understanding of Jesus.

Question 11:

Why do Christians believe that the kingdom of God has already come, but that it hasn’t come in all its fullness?

Some passages in the New Testament seem to suggest that God’s kingdom hasn’t come to earth yet. But others make it sound like his kingdom is already here. And most theologians solve this apparent tension by saying that both are true — the kingdom is here in some sense, but not here in another sense; it has been inaugurated, but not consummated. How is this possible? Why do Christians believe that the kingdom of God has already come, but that it hasn’t come in all its fullness?

Dr. David Bauer

The reason some theologians say that the kingdom of God has come, but hasn't come in its fullness is — short answer — because that is what Jesus himself said. You find this, for example, in Matthew 4:17 and parallels. Also, a parallel especially in Mark 1, close parallel there: “Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” That is a very ambiguous statement. And I think it's deliberately ambiguous. The Greek word, which happens to be “*engiken*,” is itself, in its root, ambiguous. It can mean “near,” in the sense of actually being here, or “near” in the sense of being very close and about to dawn. And then, the tense that is used, it's the perfect tense in Greek, actually intensifies the ambiguity of it, heightening the ambiguity between its being “at hand” in the sense of already here, or “at hand” in the sense of not yet here. This is played out in the gospels where side by side in all the Synoptic Gospels you have statements by Jesus, which indicates that the kingdom of God has already come in his ministry — “If I, by the Spirit of God cast out demons, then you know the kingdom of God has come upon you,” Matthew 12. Luke has a very similar statement in his gospel. Luke says, “If I by the finger of God cast out demons, then you know the kingdom of God has come upon you.” Jesus, of course, has been casting out demons all along, so that's a very clear statement, among many others in the Gospels, that the kingdom of God has in some sense come in the ministry of Jesus.

But then, alongside those statements in the Gospels are other ones that indicate the kingdom isn't here yet at all. And so, the kingdom is described in those passages as yet to come. As a matter of fact, this is a point of the Lord's Prayer. Throughout this whole period, apparently, we are to pray “Thy kingdom come” — may thy kingdom come — “thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” There is, then, this tension between the already and the not yet of the kingdom of God, which actually is a modification of Jewish expectations. In apocalyptic Judaism, all of reality was divided into two periods: the present evil age and the age to come. And the expectation there is that when God ushered in his end-time kingdom, the age to come, it would happen cataclysmically, suddenly, and absolutely. You move immediately from the period before the kingdom to the period of the kingdom, the age of the kingdom. But in the New Testament, you have what I've called “the elongation of New Testament eschatology,” so that the age of the kingdom, as was envisaged in apocalyptic Judaism, is subdivided now into two periods, the present, or the “already” of the kingdom of heaven and the “not yet” of kingdom of heaven. I might mention too, though, that the fact that the kingdom of heaven, as Matthew calls it, or the kingdom of God, has already come in a sense, a sure and certain indication, assurance really, that the kingdom will be consummated. Because once God has begun to usher in his kingdom there is no calling that back.

Dr. R. Leslie Holmes

That kingdom is here, but the kingdom is also at hand, the Bible says. What it's telling us is that this kingdom of God, which has come in Jesus Christ, is not yet fulfilled completely, because the reality is that it is in the process of being fulfilled. I like to think of it as saying this is a kingdom of hearts, and it is being fulfilled one

heart at a time. And when all the world recognizes Christ as he really is as Lord, then we will see the return of Christ, and the kingdom will have been consummated.

Dr. Dan Doriani

Jesus' teaching on the kingdom of God is robust and complex. First of all, he will say different things about the presence of the kingdom. He will say, "The kingdom ... is near." "The kingdom is ... at hand." Sometimes he says, "The kingdom ... has arrived." It's near because it's about to burst into this world. Those are the first sort of statements. In a sense, when he even says it's near, it's already come in part because the Messiah's here and the first proclamation has been made, but the miracles are going to come rolling out any day now and the crowds and the people repenting. So we're just in the cusp of the first manifestation of the kingdom. Later on he says the kingdom has arrived. He uses a word that means "the journey's over." They didn't have trains in those days, but the train has pulled into the station, the plane has landed, the boat has pulled into the port, etc. It's arrived. It says that especially about casting out demons. "If I, by the finger of God, cast out demons, then you know that the kingdom of heaven," — or the kingdom of God, it varies from gospel to gospel — "has come upon you," or "has arrived." It's here. The fact that I'm casting out demons is the proof that I have the power over Satan, and I'm spoiling his realm. Of course, it's also true that Jesus will also, will speak of the kingdom in the future tense as well. And so we're supposed to pray, "Thy kingdom come." That is to say, "may it come." Well, if it's here, why should we pray that it would come more? And of course the answer is many things that are here and yet not here. When, for example, a couple is first beginning to feel they love each other we might say they have, they have begun to love each other, their love has come in part and yet there is much more to come. It's going to grow deeper and richer. When you embark on a new job you say, "Well, I've arrived. I now am in this position that I was seeking." But you're just getting started, and you're going to grow so much deeper in wisdom and knowledge and training and experience and the fruit. So it's clearly possible that the Bible speaks both ways, that the kingdom is here, and yet it is to come. We are going to drink again in the kingdom. We're going to celebrate the Lord's Supper in the kingdom. So it's both here and not here.

Question 12:

What is the relationship between the kingdom of God and the church?

Scripture says many of the same things about the kingdom of God and the church. For example, both are God's people, and Christ is king over both. But the kingdom and the church aren't identical. So, do they just look alike? Do they overlap? What is the relationship between the kingdom of God and the church?

Dr. Steve Blakemore

This question about the relationship between the kingdom of God and the church is one that's haunted Christians for a long time, at least since the Reformation and probably before. But as I understand it, the relationship between the kingdom of God

in the earth now, that which Jesus has inaugurated and is already at work like leaven in the loaf, but is not yet complete, the presence of the kingdom of God in the earth and the church, is something like this: Jesus Christ has come, and in his incarnate life, in his ministry in overcoming the power of evil, in his self-sacrificial life to overcome the power of sin, in his resurrection from the dead to overcome the power of death, he has renewed creation, and there is now at work in creation the reign of God. The kingdom of God has now been launched so to speak into the world through Jesus Christ. The church is not that kingdom. The church is filled by its nature with some of those who, maybe at the end of all things, will be tares sewn among the wheat. So the church is not the kingdom. However, as the body of Christ, the people of God, the temple in which God dwells by his Spirit, the church is meant to be, by God's design, the visible manifestation of the reality that the kingdom of God has come upon the earth in Jesus Christ. The church is not inconsequential to the kingdom then. The church is meant to be the visible evidence in our lives of worship, our lives of obedience to the gospel, our lives of self-giving love and reflecting the character of Christ in how we treat one another and how we relate to the world. Those lives are meant to reveal to an unbelieving world that the kingdom has come and that the promise of God is certain. So the relationship between the church and the kingdom of God is the relationship of the reality to a sign, much like the bread and the wine in Holy Communion are signs of the reality of the self-sacrificial, broken body and shed blood of Jesus Christ.

Rev. Mike Glodo

Jesus himself was the embodiment of the kingdom, but as he gathers us into him, he also gathers us into a fellowship with one another. It's not just an elective or voluntary organization where we can get things done better, but we reflect the unity of Jesus when we unite together in his church and come under his shepherds. Because he did leave us, first of all, apostles. He told Peter, "You are the Rock on which I'll build my church." Jesus is the Cornerstone; the apostles are the foundation stones, we're told in places like Ephesians 4. And we're all being built into a spiritual house or a temple for God as 1 Peter 2 reminds us. And so we're not just followers of Jesus individually, but we are the embodiment of this new creation that Jesus has brought in by his resurrection from the dead, and by his giving of the Spirit to us as his new temple, so that we are the presence of the kingdom of God in the church where people can find mercy and forgiveness, and they can find provision when they lack, and they can find companionship when they're lonely. So the church really is a foretaste of the new heavens and earth, which will one day be visible throughout the whole creation.

Question 13:

How should Jesus' office of king influence the way we live and work?

When Jesus came into the world, he established God's kingdom on earth. And when all God's purposes have been fulfilled, he'll rule as king over all creation. But what does this mean for us today? As we wait for the consummation of the kingdom, how should Jesus' office of king influence the way we live and work?

Dr. Dan Doriani

We submit to the King. We hear the good laws of the King; we follow Jesus' words; we imitate his deeds as he in various ways encourages us to do. We also live mindful of the fact that the King has put us — we are humble, we should be humble when we say this — has left us in charge of his kingdom. "What is man that you are mindful of him ... You have put all things under his feet." And we are responsible to govern the world for God. That means, of course, that we must distinguish between, say, the kingdom and the church. The church is the focal point of the kingdom, it's the concentration point of the kingdom, it's the vanguard of the kingdom, it's the nursery of the kingdom, but it isn't the whole of the kingdom. The kingdom is manifest when we start Christian schools of any kind, that's an easy one. The kingdom is also manifest in ever increasing circles through our life. The kingdom is manifest when we husbands and wives love our spouses, when we care for our children, when we bring some savor of Christ to our neighborhood, when we help inculcate warmth and caring, and somebody's sick and I bring them a meal and they are touched, and then before long... This is the way my wife operates. Whatever neighborhood we live in, she starts bringing people food when they are sick, when they are needy, when they are down, and then you know what? Food, within two, three, four, five years, food is going back and forth, and people are caring for each other the way they should.

And maybe, most importantly, in our workplaces. You work in the music industry. Your job is to make money by writing hits. It's not as easy to write hits that build people up, that maybe don't preach, but somehow reflect biblical morality. When you make cars your job is to make a profit for your corporation. When you design anything, when you put up buildings, when you sell advertising, no matter what you do you can do it in a way that is strictly serving yourself or your company and exploiting or maybe indifferent to the people that you could be serving, or you could be mindful of your responsibility to bring the kingdom. We could ask this test question: When you get up in the morning, when you work throughout the day, are you answering the legitimate prayers of God's people? "Give us this day, our daily bread." Are you giving anybody their daily bread, are you giving them food, clothing, shelter, love, protection? Are you treating others as you would be treated? Does the King smile at you? Does Lord Jesus smile at you? Oh, you didn't execute your plan perfectly. But are you striving to live in a manner that's faithful to the King? And when I say in our daily work I do not mean simply our employment, the work for which we get paid. You may be paid or unpaid; you may be a volunteer; you may work in the home. But we're responsible to serve the King, the Lord Jesus in every sphere of life, beginning in the heart, visibly first in the church, and then in every sphere of life.

Dr. Stephen Chan (translation)

We are to encourage Christians to pursue and long for the coming of God's kingdom. First in the personal dimension, the authority of the kingdom of heaven is our power in life. It motivates us to submit to God, and live a God-centered life, so that the authority of God manifested in our lives, would become the goal of our spiritual lives. Second, we need to learn the concept of the kingdom of heaven in view of redemptive

history. As we learn how it begins, uncovers, and completes his redemptive plan. Then we will see that the teachings of the kingdom of heaven unify the Old and New Testament. They help us to see the grand blueprint of our redeeming God, and easily grasp his comprehensive purpose. Third, the kingdom of heaven creates a right biblical worldview and helps us to see that all things belong to God. His kingdom will come to completion. And he will judge and wipe out all the evil powers on earth, because God himself is the absolute king. So we no longer live just for ourselves. We want to care for our neighbors, society, and the wellbeing of this world. We ought to pay attention to the things either near or far from us. We ought to enter into the society, and transform all aspects accordingly, as our duty.

Dr. Peter Kuzmič

I think the most crucial question that we have to ask is, how do the kingdom of God and the kingdoms of this world intersect? Where and why do they collide? Where do they partner? How does the gospel of the kingdom relate to the conditions of humanity in the world in which we live? You know, we evangelical Christians claim to be the “Great Commission” Christians. I hear the Great Commission called at all the time, and I tell my American friends, “Wait a moment, you are not really faithful to the Great Commission when you say, when you call the Great Commission Matthew 28 and you say, ‘Go and make disciples of all nations.’” — you know, nations again. I say, “That’s not where the Great Commission begins.” It doesn’t begin with our going. It begins with his being. And so it really begins a verse earlier with the risen Lord gathers his disciples and says, “All power,” depending on the translation; I think New International Version says, “All authority.” The Greek word “*exousia*” is not easy to translate. It could be translated dominion, you know, relating to the rule of the kingdom — kingdom of God. “All power” — all *exousia* — in heaven and on earth is given to me. Therefore” — I will translate — “as you go, make disciples of all nations.” This is a very important linkage. Now, when Jesus says, “All power in heaven and on earth is given to me,” for somebody out in the world who doesn’t understand biblical language that sounds scary. Whoever claims all power is dangerous. We’ve known here in Europe, West and East, Adolph Hitler, Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin. We’ve known in other parts of the world from Mao Tse Tung to Pol Pot, and so on. History’s full of tyrants and dictators who claim to accumulate all power and became very destructive, killing millions, if not hundreds of millions, of innocent people.

Now, Jesus is the only one who can claim all dominion, all power, with legitimacy. And by the way, his power is not destructive because it is power and love, power motivated by love, power moderated by love. See, if you have love alone, you have a nice sentiment, but maybe you are helpless because you don’t have power to change anything. If you have power alone without love you destroy, you kill, you hate. It’s the divine genius that brings love and power together. “God so loved the world that he sent his Son.” Now, Jesus, who is the incarnated love, and who claims all power — and remember it’s after his resurrection — that is central to his kingdom. Kingdom is Jesus’ master thought. In the first three gospels alone, 121 times you have the kingdom mentioned. We don’t understand who Jesus was, why he came, what he

taught, and what happened on the cross, and what happened on the third day. We don't understand what he means when he says, "The kingdom of God is at hand." He is the only one that can legitimately claim all power because he is the only one that walked on this planet earth and never sinned, never lied, never deceived. He's also the only one who, after he was killed, dead, buried, came back. So, he's the risen Lord. It is the inauguration of a new era of human history. He's bringing hope to the nations. And so the kingdom of God is at work in very powerful ways, and that's where world evangelization and discipling the nations then is based on this, what I call, "the great foundation." You don't have a great commission without the great foundation. And then he caps it with a great promise, "And I will be with you to the very end of the ages." So, Jesus the Lord, Jesus the King, is the ruler who has all power, and so we go, we disciple, we teach, we proclaim his rule in his power.

The kingdom of God is the preeminent thought throughout the Bible. And we know that God, the Creator, is King of the universe. In the Old Testament, he appointed human kings to administer justice and care for his people. But he also had a plan to rescue his people from sin and death. So, he sent his Son, Jesus Christ, as the perfect messianic King. And when Jesus returns, he'll consummate the kingdom and rule it forever. But until then, we anticipate his coming by living in ways that are worthy of the gospel, and that honor our King.

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