

INTERMISSION

I asked you earlier to separate, at least for a while, Judgment from salvation so that we could look closely at what scripture says about the former. How you use the rest of this book is rather dependent on your disposition toward what you've read so far.

I believe that the Bible solidly supports the understanding of salvation I put forth in the first few chapters of this book. The Old Testament law, the writings of the prophets who described Christ and His kingdom, the message of Jesus before He died, the gospel spread by His apostles afterward, and the epistles to Jewish and Gentile churches all point to the same conclusion. In these last four chapters, I'd like to prove that to you.

So, if your world has been turned upside down by finding out that Christianity really isn't about untying God's hands to allow our admittance to heaven, then these chapters will piece Christianity back together, showing exactly what Jesus *did* do and why **no one comes to the Father except through Him**.

If, instead, your mind is abuzz with questions like "If all this is true, then what about (*fill in the blank*)?" then these chapters will answer some of those questions.

You can also use them as primers for your own Bible study, choosing which chapter you read based on what books of the Bible you are reading. I hope you will find they broach issues that might not be obvious at first glance.

In any event, you should not feel that you have to read all these immediately, as though I am "building up" to something. I am, rather, "fleshing out." The level you read to should be based on your own needs.

Preview

The content of these chapters:

- Chapter 8 Investigates the gospel to the Jews. It focuses on the gospels and Acts. It answers questions like “What did Jesus accomplish through His death?” and “What did Jesus preach as the gospel?”
- Chapter 9 Investigates the gospel to the Gentiles. It focuses on the book of John, some critical parables in Luke, and a few key verses describing how Paul saw the “good news.”
- Chapter 10 Gives four keys to understanding Paul’s letters. It shows Paul’s priorities, how he saw salvation, his understanding of justification, what he means by “works of the Law,” and what kind of wrath he describes believers as being protected from.
- Chapter 11 Describes a theory of atonement consistent with the understanding of salvation described here. It portrays the Jewish context and need for a Messiah and answers questions like “How was Christ a sacrifice?” It also demonstrates the critical importance of all stages of Christ’s life, which is something the standard gospel does not.

These chapters become more and more demanding as you go forward.

**Salvation —
Building up the Gospel**

–VIII–

WHAT IS *The Gospel* ANYWAY?

In *Matthew 11:5*, Jesus tells John’s disciples He is preaching **the gospel** to the poor. But what is the gospel?

The modern gospel is a very *internal* one. We have to *understand* that we cannot get into heaven on our own. We have to *believe* that Jesus is God. We have to *accept* Jesus as our personal Savior. We have to *have faith* that Jesus can save us from hell. We have to *surrender* ourselves to Christ.

The external consequences of these internal choices are considered “the icing on the cake.” I’m not saying the church doesn’t care that we practice Christlike behavior, but it is undeniable that the importance of internal resolutions and doctrinal beliefs (as opposed to *belief* in Christ) within evangelical circles is now comparable to the primacy of tradition within Catholicism.

Is the gospel really such an internal one? And are these beliefs of modern Christianity really the core of Christ’s message?

The Pre-Resurrection Gospel

An investigation of Jesus’, John’s, and the apostles’ message prior to Christ’s death and resurrection quite illuminates the matter. The crowds thought Jesus was a teacher or prophet, did not know He was going to die, did not know He was going to be resurrected, and most definitely couldn’t grasp any notion of His being a sacrifice.

As N.T. Wright describes in *Surprised by Hope*, the whole idea that the Messiah would die and be resurrected individually before everyone else was completely new. This is well illustrated by the disciples’ taking Christ’s death as a sign that He was not the Messiah. How could He redeem Israel if He were dead? *John 12:34* shows the Jews did not realize the Christ would die.

One then has to wonder what *Mark 1:14* — **After John was imprisoned, Jesus went into Galilee and proclaimed the gospel of God** — means. This is one of a dozen instances in the gospels where the **gospel** is described as a message to the people. What gospel can Christ and His apostles preach if Jesus forbids them to tell anyone He was the Christ, and His disciples do not realize He is going to die even after He tells them in private?

This is important. Ponder that last question for a moment. Take a walk and consider it. The book will be here when you get back.

The gospel narratives detail the teachings of Jesus. It can be hard to see the forest for the trees, but there are plenty of places where the *essence* of the message has been distilled for us. Let's take a quick journey through those passages to get a handle on what this **gospel** thing is.

Matthew 3:1–2 **In those days John the Baptist came into the wilderness of Judea proclaiming, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.”**

Matthew 4:17 **From that time Jesus began to preach this message: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.”**

Mark 1:15 **Jesus went into Galilee and proclaimed the gospel of God. He said, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is near; repent and believe the gospel.”**

Matthew 10:7 **As you go, preach, this message: “The kingdom of heaven is near!”**

Luke 10:9 **say to them, “The kingdom of God has come upon you.”**

A common theme is **the kingdom of God** or **the kingdom of heaven**.¹ One has to assume that this kingdom, which is **near** and which later is **in your midst**, cannot refer to post-Judgment bliss. This means that these general statements indicate the gospel has *nothing* to do with the Judgment. (Though clearly there are consequences to rejecting Christ's message. We'll discuss that in the next chapter.) Rather, Jesus is proclaiming the “good news” that God has not forgotten Israel. The coming kingdom pronounced in the prophets, a kingdom where peace and justice rule, is imminent. The new covenant is at hand! To the Jews, it is the most natural message in the world. This is yet another reason people

¹By the 1st century, the Jews were so concerned about using the name of God in vain that they often substituted other words for God. “Heaven” was a common example. So “kingdom of heaven” is a more respectful way of saying “kingdom of God.”

think Jesus may be Elijah. Elijah is supposed to come right before the Christ as the **messenger of the covenant** (*Malachi 4:5–6*), and Jesus is proclaiming the covenant prophesied in *Jeremiah 31:31*.

Note the emphasis on *repentance* and the strong indication that it comes in **preparation** of receiving the kingdom of God. Today, some people describe repentance as “being sorry for your sins.” That is a tragically incomplete understanding of the term. Repentance involves a *change in attitude* and a change in behavior as well. It is not mere contrition. It is not looking at your feet in humiliation; it is turning around and walking the other way. *Luke 3:8–17* is a clear indication of this. Repentance is not abjection — it’s rejection.

Even worse—some have taken repentance and twisted it to mean *realizing we need a savior*. The term occurs several times in the Old Testament, and it never means “I know I need a savior.” For example, in *Ezekiel 18:30* we read **“Therefore I will judge each person according to his conduct, O house of Israel,” declares the sovereign Lord. Repent and turn away from all your wickedness; then it will not be an obstacle leading to iniquity.** And in *Jeremiah 15:7* we see **In every town in the land I will purge them like straw blown away by the wind. I will destroy my people. I will kill off their children. I will do so because they did not change their behavior.** This message pervades the Old Testament: a discouraged God desiring a faithful people. There’s nothing abstract or metaphysical here, no complicated logic about what God can and cannot do regarding the afterlife, just a loving husband longing after an unfaithful wife.

The **gospel** we find in the gospel narratives is not a message stressing the importance of *faith* relative to our position in the *eternal* kingdom of God. Rather, it stresses the importance of *repentance* relative to our position in the *imminent* kingdom of God, the kingdom Christ ushered in. These **gospel** proclamations come before Christ even **began** to tell His disciples of anything that would happen to Him (e.g., *Mark 8:31*).

This should not be surprising. Can you find one Old Testament prophet who does not exhort God’s people to repent? Rather, they relate repentance to the receipt of God’s deliverance repeatedly. In *Jeremiah 25:9–12* we read that the Babylonians were to rule over God’s people for 70 years before Israel’s redemption. However, Daniel knows that Israel has not repented during that time and hence risks the loss of this deliverance, so he prays on their behalf.²

²*Daniel 9:2–27*. Incidentally, the prophecy Daniel receives provides amazing support for Jesus as the Christ, for it spells out nearly exactly when the Messiah would come 500 years prior to His birth. See *The Coming Prince* by Sir Robert Anderson. Why do we not use this more when sharing the gospel? It is ludicrous that we prefer to evangelize through fear than through truth.

The Post-Resurrection Gospel of Acts

I've shown that the general message Jesus and His disciples preached before His resurrection had nothing to do with His death, but what about afterward?

It turns out that question is easy to answer. There happens to be a book of the Bible documenting the teachings of the apostles to those they evangelized. Acts is the **only** repository of explicit post-resurrection *evangelism* (that is, preaching of the gospel to unbelievers). So any attempt to uncover Christianity's core beliefs should begin there. It provides a snapshot of what Paul, Peter, Stephen, and others thought *made a Christian a Christian*. When it comes to irony, the lack of respect we give Acts is only eclipsed by our prizing the epistles of Paul more than the epistles of Christ. (See *Revelation 2:1–3:22*.)

To show the clarity of the message in Acts, I have organized all the preaching described there and classified its content.³

	Jesus is Messiah	Jesus arose	Jesus is Lord	Repent	Jesus will judge all	Believers go to heaven	Others go to hell
2:14–41	x	x	x	x			
3:12–26	x	x	x	x			
4:8–12	x	x					
5:30–32	x	x	x				
5:42	x						
7:1–53	x						
9:22	x						
10:34–43	x	x	x		x		
13:16–41	x	x	x	x			
14:14–17					x		
17:2–4	x	x					
17:18–31		x		x	x		
18:5	x						
18:28	x						
20:20–22			x	x			
22:1–21	x	x					
26:1–29	x	x					

The complete omission of hell is pretty damning⁴ to the traditional understanding of the gospel. Those few times when the Judgment is in view, the message does not do the Church any favors.

³The Greek word translated "Lord" can mean anything from "Sir" (as a greeting) to "God." In the table it means "Lord over heaven and earth." (But that wouldn't fit the column.)

⁴Heh! Seriously, the Greek word for hell doesn't show up anywhere in the book... not once. The word in *Acts 2:27* is **not hell** (see chapter nine), though it would hardly matter if it were. How can the gospel have anything to do with Judgment if hell fails to appear *once* in all the evangelism of Acts?

In *Acts 24:1–16*, Paul says he is careful to maintain a clear conscience because both the righteous and unrighteous will be resurrected. The message in *17:30–31* to the Athenians, who had little understanding of Judaism, was **Therefore, although God has overlooked such times of ignorance, He now commands all people everywhere to repent because He has set a day on which He is going to judge the world in righteousness, by a man he designated having provided proof to everyone by raising Him from the dead.**

Due to these examples and the overwhelming evidence in the chart, one can hardly claim that the apostles' gospel is widely preached today. In fact, we have a pretty good understanding of what message the early church taught; pastors just don't publicize it much. The teachings of the ancient church, known as the **Kerygma**, were extremely basic:

- God has fulfilled the promise made to Abraham by sending Jesus, who is the Christ.
- Jesus was crucified and raised from the dead.
- Jesus has been made Lord over heaven and earth.
- Jesus sends the Spirit to believers.
- Jesus will come again and judge the world.
- All should repent and be baptized.

I want to highlight some key parts of this message.

The Power of the Resurrection

I think most people who believe in a divine Being (especially those who read the Bible) take for granted that there will be a Judgment of sorts. The question people care about is how that Judgment works. Things were different in 1st century AD. Part of the message, particularly Paul's, was that there will be a Judgment and a resurrection *at all*. Other mythologies did not call for a Judgment at the end of the era, and the idea that everyone would be given new, uncorrupted bodies was completely foreign to any belief system outside Judaism, and it was not a fundamental or universal belief even for them. Jesus' resurrection is not only a sign that He is the Christ, but also an indication of what God will do to all later.⁵ A close reading shows that this is the bulk of Paul's evangelism in *Acts*.⁶

⁵*Acts 4:2* and others, in particular *1st Corinthians 15:12*.

⁶It also takes center stage in the summary of Peter's gospel to the Gentiles in *Acts 10:42*. (For a discussion of the other half of Peter's gospel, given in the next verse, see chapter eleven.)

The Athenians response (*Acts 17:32*) shows this — **When they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some began to sneer, but others said “We shall hear you again concerning this.”** Paul’s trials in Acts revolve about his supporting the resurrection, a doctrine the Sadducees (the ruling sect of Judaism) disavowed: . . . **I am on trial for the hope and resurrection of the dead!**⁷

Many, though not all, Jews think there is going to be a resurrection at the end of the world — far in the future, as opposed to the near-future hope in a Messiah to deliver them from their oppressors. The idea that the Messiah would die and arise early, *before everyone else*, comes out of nowhere. The idea of physical resurrection is foreign to Greeks, Romans, and most other cultures, so Jesus’ is proof that the God of Israel lived. Bodily resurrection is the **hope** of the new covenant. Jews who believe in a general resurrection and Judgment at the end of all days think all will be judged by their deeds (though perhaps the Jews hope Moses will intercede for them). Evangelism in Acts confirms this view, just as Jesus’ teachings do.

This **hope** is critical to the early Jewish Christians because they actually see our resurrected bodies as the total fulfillment of Abraham’s blessing. Christ was resurrected as the first to receive this body, and everyone who believes in Christ gain the same inheritance Christ has received. See *Romans 8:24*.

The Foolish Path to Kingship

Jesus’ resurrection vindicates the God of Abraham, but it also causes division among Jews. The hope of a Messiah was so central to the Jews of Jesus’ day that disagreement about the Messiah’s identity would obviously create factions in their culture. But the polarization due to Jesus’ claim transcended politics.

The Jews look for a king like David to save them from their oppressors. The Jews see physical death as the outcome of sin, and shameful deaths are the punishment for particularly sinful behavior. Conversely, to survive battles and live a long life suggests one lived righteously (*Leviticus 18:5; Nehemiah 9:29; and Ezekiel 33:19*). Thus, *the idea that the rightful King of Israel would die before saving God’s people made absolutely no sense.*

How can a king free his people if he dies? And why would a righteous man, who the Christ certainly would be, die early? It just makes no sense. This is why Christ’s crucifixion is **a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles**, as described by Paul in *1st Corinthians 1:23*. Paul uses this term, **foolishness**, several times in letters to the Corinthians. It is not a commentary on *why* Jesus died, but rather one on *that* Jesus died. The idea that one could

⁷*Acts 23:6*. See also *Luke 20:27–39; Acts 24:21; and Acts 26:8*.

become a king by shamefully dying with outlaws, apparently crushed by Caesar and rejected by your own people makes no sense at all to those who do not believe that God raises the dead.

For this reason the apostle's claim that Jesus is the Christ causes far more than political strife. It is a blow to the Jews' collective cultural understanding of God's deliverance. As Paul casts the message in *1st Corinthians 15:36*, **What you sow will not come to life until it dies**, is not an easy one to hear. And Jesus' ascendancy through suffering causes jealousy among those Jews who could not accept it (*Acts 17:5*).

The Holy Spirit in Acts — Promise and Gift

While the Judgment gets little play in Acts (other than Jesus being said to be the Judge), *the Holy Spirit* is a major theme of the apostles' ministry. Christ, Peter, Paul, and the writer of Hebrews refer to the Holy Spirit as the **Promise**,⁸ inherited after Christ's death. The disciples give it to those who believe,⁹ but here *believe* has the notion of *obey*, as shown in *Acts 5:32*: **...the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him**. The Spirit was the mark of membership in God's new covenant, so it makes sense that only those willing to repent of ungodliness and obey Christ's commandments receive it.

The Holy Spirit is also the **gift** described by many apostles. Peter uses this language in *Acts 2:38*; *8:20*; and *11:17*. Luke does so in *Acts 10:45*, and the writer of Hebrews in *Hebrews 6:4*. Paul refers to the Holy Spirit bestowed upon Timothy in the same way twice (*1st Timothy 4:14* and *2nd Timothy 1:6*).

The apostles saw our transformed, raised bodies as the full inheritance available to God's people, but prior to receiving that treasure we have the Holy Spirit. This gift is proof that God is fulfilling the promise to Abraham, just as the Israelites were given proof. They had the manna and God's appearance at Sinai. Christians have the Spirit and its revelation to prove they are heirs of a great inheritance. A whole generation of Israelites died in the desert due to disobedience, failing to collect their inheritance; believers are at the same risk.¹⁰

Anyone who desires to be part of the coming kingdom is invited to repent of ungodliness and join the new covenant, receiving freedom from the domination of sin. This is the theme of *Romans 5–8*. Paul is not referring to accountability or God's wrath. He is referring to sin's mastery of our weak flesh — the inability of humans to overcome their selfish desires to serve God faithfully. The

⁸*Luke 24:49; Acts 2:33; 13:33; and Hebrews 9:15*

⁹*Acts 2:38; 8:14–16*

¹⁰*Acts 3:23 and Hebrews 4:5–13* describe this forfeiture of inheritance.

nation of Israel exemplified this predilection toward unfaithfulness, and it fell as a consequence. We will discuss Romans 5–8 more in chapter ten.

Acts turns the modern gospel on its head. We don't see belief causing forgiveness of sins to save us from hell in the future. Instead we find repentance allowing belief, and both bringing forgiveness of sins. This permits receipt of the Holy Spirit, freeing us from bondage to sin *in the present*:

Modern Gospel: Belief → Forgiveness of sins → Deliverance from hell

Gospel of Acts: Repentance → Faith + repentance → Forgiveness of sins → Baptism (receipt of Spirit) → Freedom from bondage to sin

Acts 2:38; 15:9; and 26:20 all describe this, but *3:19,26* is particularly beautiful and comprehensive: **Therefore repent and turn back so that your sins may be wiped out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord...God raised up His servant and sent Him first to you, to bless you by turning each one of you from your iniquities.**

How is Christ to bless us? *What* is the benefit? ...**by turning each one of you from your iniquities.** (Note that Peter is describing not just any blessing but *the* blessing promised to Abraham, the covenant anchoring salvation.)

It makes sense for repentance to come first. After all, John the Baptist is sent to **make the roads straight** for Christ by exhorting people to quit their evil deeds, as described in *Matthew 3:3*. Paul's explanation in *2nd Timothy 2:26* describes our captivity to Satan as one of present spiritual weakness. It has nothing to do with God's justice.

The apostles in Acts are not out to save souls *from hell*. They are out to free people from our natural slavery to unfaithfulness, **from everything the Law could not.**¹¹ This liberation for service to God is worked by the Holy Spirit. The Judgment also factors into their teaching, but as a prompt to *repentance* rather than to faith. The apostles in Acts are not trying to convince people *they need a Savior*. They are displaying Jesus as Lord and explaining the ramifications of His resurrection. You hardly see any mention of "atonement" or "sacrifice" in the whole book. It is the resurrection, not the death, that takes center stage.

Conclusion — Salvation

The repeated teachings of Jesus and His apostles in the gospels and Acts point to one conclusion. ***The salvation Christ wrought consists of freeing believers to faithfulness rather than freeing God to mercy.***

¹¹*Acts 13:39*. We will discuss the Jewish context of this statement in chapter ten.

Jesus' Message — The Rest of the Story

We have looked at the “good news” preached by Jesus — that God has not forgotten Israel and that people everywhere should repent. However, if that were all Jesus preached, the Pharisees would not have hated Him so.

Jesus' message bears a nature strikingly similar to John the Baptist's in *Matthew 3:1–12* and *Luke 3:3–14*. They have the same four components:

- Declaration of the coming kingdom
- Exhortation to repent
- Rebukes to those who had warped God's law to their own benefit
- Specific commandments

We have described the first two already. Just as the Mosaic era began with the Law given on Mount Sinai, the era of Christ began with God's law. Why else would Matthew spend so long (*5:1–7:28*) recording the *Sermon on the Mount*.

Christ gives God's law on earth and continues to do so later through the Spirit. It should not surprise us that Christ's message largely comprises commandments from God. After all, the Jews think He is a teacher or a prophet — teachers interpret the Law, and prophets give God's commandments. When He sends the disciples out in *Matthew 28:19–20*, He tells them . . . **teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.** . . . John's writing is full of references to Jesus' Word as commandments.¹²

Seeing the bulk of Jesus' message in this way is critical, for otherwise we can miss a major point. In today's culture we tend to see rejecting Christ as a matter of unbelief: The person doesn't think Jesus is [fill in all things your church requires]. The standard reasons that someone rejects Christ today are:

- They don't think they believe in God.
- They don't like the idea that God sends people to hell.
- They don't have any reason to believe the Bible.
- They think many paths can lead to God, so the exclusivity of Christianity shows it's invalid.
- The historical behavior of Christians has not compelled them.

None of the above relate to the Jews of the 1st century! They are God's people and cherish God's law. They have far more reason to believe in Christ

¹²*John 12:50; 14:15,21; 15:10; 1st John 2:3–4; 3:22,24; 5:3, and 2nd John 1:6* use the word **commandments**. *John 8:31* refers to **continuing** in Jesus' Word as evidence of being a disciple, *John 8:51–52* describes the **keeping** of the Word, as does *14:23–24* and *15:20*. *1st John 2:7* appears to directly equate the **word** with the commandments of God.

than we do. He raises the dead, cures the blind, and I bet He can even make American cheese taste good.

The reason the Pharisees reject Christ is simple — they don't like what He told them! They do not want to serve God the way He says they have to, as indicated in *John 12:47–48*. They don't appreciate Jesus' criticism in *Matthew 23:23* that they have failed God by not teaching others the **weightier provisions of the law: justice, mercy, and faithfulness**. The Jews reject Jesus for the same reason they killed all the prophets God sent before Him. They do not stumble by lack of faith but rather disinterest in obedience (*1st Peter 2:8*).

Conversely, the *reason* Jesus wants us to believe in Him is explicitly because we find value in His commands. In *John 14:10–12*, Jesus declares He wants people to believe in Him because of His words, but He has done signs so that those of hard heart might believe as well. In *John 7:17* He describes how those who desire righteousness will know that His commands are from God: **If anyone wants to do God's will, he will know about My teaching, whether it is from God or whether I speak from my own authority**. Indeed, *John 7:17* is really a clearer version of *John 3:19–20*, describing how those who desire to serve God find truth in Christ's commands. The Pharisees had no ear for Christ because they did not, down deep, **want to do God's will**. *John 8:37–47* is a critique of the Pharisees on this topic.

What Did Christ Do?

We began this chapter investigating *salvation* by answering the question *What did Christ do?* So far we've looked at the message preached by Christ and His apostles. Other passages indicate more directly Christ's purpose:

Luke 5:32 **I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.**

John 16:7 **If I do not go away the Advocate will not come, but if I go I will send Him to you.**

Acts 3:26 **God raised up His Servant and sent Him first to you, to bless you by turning each of you from your iniquities.**

Romans 6:6 **We know that our old man was crucified with him so that the body of sin would no longer dominate us.**

Titus 2:14 **He gave Himself for us to free us from every kind of lawlessness and to purify for Himself a people who are truly His, who are eager to do good.**

1 Peter 2:24 He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, so that we may leave sin behind and live in righteousness. By His wounds you were healed.

The above is a mere sample.¹³

Jesus comes to do in power what all other prophets had done in supplication: **turn Israel back to God.** He calls humanity to be the creatures they were intended to be and strengthens them to do so by sending the Spirit.

The difference between the new covenant and the old is not that one gets you into heaven and the other does not. In the old covenant, Israel received God's Word on slabs of stone and through the mouths of prophets, whereas in the new covenant God's commands come through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, who empowers us to faithfulness.¹⁴ The weakness of the old covenant was simple: the external Law did not compel Israel to faithfulness. Any reading of the Old Testament reveals this as *the* recurring problem.

Have We Learned Nothing? Pharisees Redux

Because Christ's coming is written throughout scripture, Christ chides the Jews in *John 5:46* for not recognizing Him. The natural question to ask is "What does the Old Testament say about the Christ?"

I strongly suggest that you read all the prophets of the Old Testament with open eyes. You should find the prophecies center on two points:

- The institution of righteousness by elevating and purifying God's people
- The unifying of multiple peoples under the umbrella of God

Several passages detail *how* God will accomplish the above.¹⁵ In every case the goal is to remove ungodliness from God's people, not to somehow untie God's hands to allow mercy at the Final Judgment. God is not trying to subsidize sin but to end it. And not just to remove it from the accounting books God supposedly keeps — God is not turning a blind eye but rather opening ours.

What you won't find in the Prophets is any focus on immortality or believers being in heaven and everyone else in hell. That would be an odd thing to leave

¹³Check out *Luke 13:6–9; John 7:39; 8:34–36; 15:1–8; Romans 6:4; Galatians 5:1; Hebrews 9:14; 1st Peter 1:18–19; 2nd Peter 1:4–5; 1st John 3:4–5, 8–9*; and Jesus' seminal prophecy reading found in *Luke 4:17–21*. Notice how many of these verses specify the reason for Christ's work. If this does not convince you of Christ's real purpose, I don't know what to say. I have left out one aspect of Christ's work, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

¹⁴*Hebrews 8:7–13*. There are, of course, other differences between the covenants. We will compare and contrast these in chapter 11.

¹⁵*Isaiah 59:20–21; Jeremiah 31:31–34; Ezekiel 11:17–20; 36:24–28, and Zechariah 12:10–14* all describe the coming Spirit and its effects; many use covenant language.

out if it were part of the Messiah's purpose. If Christ was meant to solve the problem *How do I get people into heaven without compromising My need for justice?*, the prophets are thunderously silent on the matter. They describe many issues the Messiah would address, but that was not one of them.

Anyone who claims that Jesus' purpose is our individual deliverance from hell has to explain why hundreds of prophetic pages describing what the Messiah would accomplish say nothing about it.¹⁶ The only passage in the Old Testament clearly describing the resurrection is *Daniel 12:1-4*, which associates the Judgment and resurrection to the Archangel Michael rather than the Christ.

Instead you see a repeated call for Israel to return to God. ***That*** is the problem for which Jesus was the solution. What does Jesus say in *Matthew 23:37*?

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those who are sent to you! How often I longed to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling.

The Gospel

I have already alluded to it, but I want to reiterate a certain framework that explains well the writings of the New Testament.

The gospel message is that the new covenant described in the prophets is at hand. This announcement shares many things in common with the Mosaic covenant. There is a freeing of captives, proofs of God's power, intermittent struggle, an inheritance to be claimed, and a godly kingdom to be formed.

In the case of the new covenant, the freedom is deliverance from sin's domination, the proofs of God's power are Christ's resurrection and the sending of the Spirit. The struggle is our current life we live with a transformed spirit and a selfish flesh. The inheritance is our transformed, resurrected bodies and a place in the kingdom Christ is coming back to claim. While anyone who has faith is an heir to that Kingdom just as Abraham became heir through his faith, that inheritance can also be lost due to personal disobedience.

This is the gospel of the kingdom the Jewish writers of the New Testament understood, rooted in the salvation depicted by the Later Prophets. We will discuss the links between Moses' deliverance and Christ's more in chapter eleven.

¹⁶I do not take space to explain why *Job 19:25* says nothing about life after death. I'll just say that anyone who believes Job (who was neither Hebrew nor prophet) refers to deliverance from hell has a hard time explaining *Job 7:9*.

Summary and Final Notes

Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul, and Peter all concur that Jesus' message was a call for repentance and Jesus' purpose was **to bless you by turning each of you from your iniquities to purify for Himself a people who are truly His, who are eager to do good.**¹⁷

The "Good News" is that God has not abandoned Israel and that the Promise of the Spirit has come upon them. The further **hope** we find is that since God resurrected Christ, we can have faith that we can also **attain to the resurrection from the dead.**¹⁸ Indeed, the original Jewish Christians saw our resurrected bodies as the "promised land" of the new covenant. Jesus got their first, and we will follow later. Until then, we wander in the desert with the Holy Spirit as our pledge from God that there is an inheritance for those who obey, unlike the generation of Israelites who did not and died in the wilderness, their inheritance forsaken.

Jesus brings God's commandments and rebuke to Israel. They respond in the same way they have responded to the prophets sent before, as described in parable of the vineyard in *Matthew 21:33–43*, which also warns that God's patience with the Jewish leaders has run out. Jesus tells the Jewish leaders what they did not want to hear — His commands and teachings expose how the traditions and requirements the Pharisees are imposing go against the Law they claim to uphold.

This is what *John 3:13–21* is all about. John uses somewhat indirect language to describe how the Jewish rulers had rejected Christ because His words exposed their failures as shepherds — **This is the basis for judging: that the light has come into the world and people loved the darkness rather than the light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil deeds hates the light and does not come to the light, so that their deeds will not be exposed.** John, writing after the temple was destroyed in AD 70, speaks of the Jews who did not believe as **condemned already** in *John 3:18*. John's passage makes it sound like he is talking in generalities by saying things like **... people loved the darkness rather than the light...** But of course it wasn't *people* in general who rejected Christ, but the Jewish rulers. Jesus only went to the **lost sheep of the house of Israel** (*Matthew 15:24*).

But of course *John 3:13–21* does have general applicability as well. Jesus is *already* acting as judge! His commandments judge us, as they judged the Jewish rulers, because our willingness to follow His commands indicates whether

¹⁷*Acts 3:26; Titus 2:14*

¹⁸*Philippians 3:11*

we want to do God's will or not.¹⁹ The point of this passage is not that Jesus washes away our sins by His sacrifice, saving us from God's eternal wrath. Rather, Christ's commands are like litmus paper. Our accepting/keeping them (or failing/refusing to) says something about our disposition toward God.

While parts of the apostles' message refers to the future, they are not in line with the gospel preached by the Church:

- Jesus' will resurrect all on the final day by His power, both the righteous and unrighteous.
- Jesus will Judge all, for God has vested that authority in Him. The gospel describes *that* this will occur, not *how*. In the 20 or so times the apostles shared the *gospel* with unbelievers in Acts, the word *hell* cannot be found.

Every description of Jesus' message and purpose, both in the Old Testament and the New Testament, points to a salvation consisting of *regeneration* coming from *repentance* with the goal of a people eager to do God's will.

The idea that Jesus came to save us from God's eternal wrath so that we could go to heaven was not taught by Christ. Nor was it taught by His apostles after His death. Nor was it taught by the early Church prior to the Gentiles' rise to dominance. As we will find out later, it was not even taught by the first several hundred years of the Gentile Catholic church. To believe that this teaching is the true gospel message requires us to pretend Christ willfully withheld such enlightenment from all the apostles who were spreading the message and the Spirit in the first century. In any event, finding this message in the Bible is akin to noting words within the floating chaos of alphabet soup.

There is one part of the gospel message we have not answered yet. Why can John say the **gospel message** is to **love your neighbor as yourself**? While we may agree with the requirement, it's not at all clear why it constitutes "good news."

And that's where the missing link between Jesus' gospel to the Jews and Paul's gospel to the Gentiles comes in. . .

¹⁹John 7:17