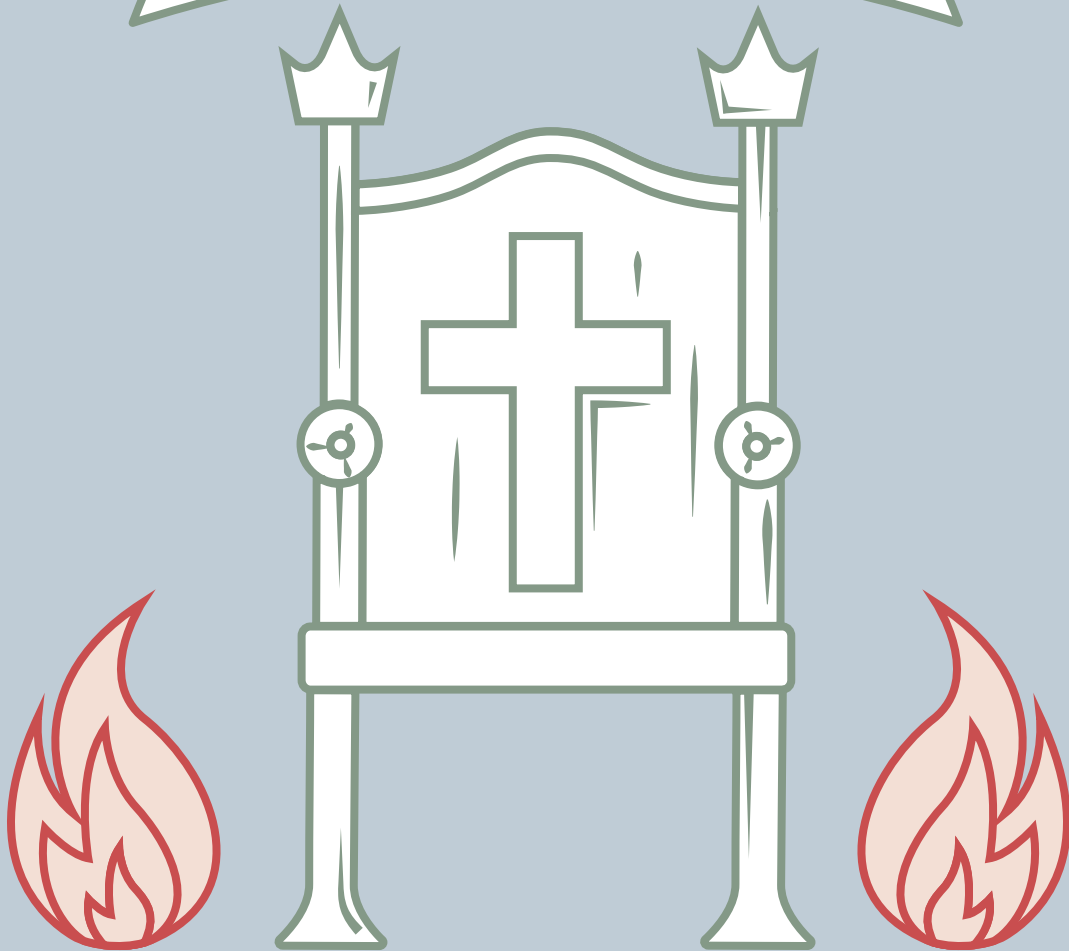


**A COVENANT**



**ADVENT**



**Christmas has become  
cozy. Advent calls us to  
stay awake.**

*NT Wright*

# A Covenant Advent

## Primer

The Bible is a book of stories. They are stories that teach us about God's goodness, His creation, our obedience and both man's failure and faithfulness. While the Bible is made up of smaller stories, it is also a book where these stories fit into a larger, all-encompassing narrative. Adam and Eve, Abraham, Moses, David, Elijah, Daniel, Isaiah, Jesus, Paul, etc, are all part of the overarching narrative or story of the Bible. This overarching narrative is that the pinnacle of God's creation rebelled against His goodness and created a separation they could not close or cross. In His desire to love and draw back His rebellious creation, God sent His son to suffer, die, and rise again that our relationship with God could be restored. It is a story of love. It is a story of grace. It is a story that we do not deserve to be a part of but by God's goodness we are. The story of the Bible centers on God's redemption of mankind back to Himself. The story climaxes at the cross; when God sent His Son to die for us and rise again to pay the penalty of our sin and to conquer the power and effects of sin and death. This is not simply the New Testament story, but the story of the Bible. The Old Testament builds toward it and the New Testament continues from it.

The covenants God made with Israel form the framework of the overarching narrative of scripture. A covenant is a commitment or promise. Covenants can be made between equal parties or between a king and His subjects. In the story of God's redemption of mankind He made covenants with Adam, Abraham, Israel and Daniel, promises that would ultimately find their fulfillment in Christ.

Through this devotional we will look at some of the major covenants in scripture found in the Old Testament and the stories that flow from them. Sometimes we might forsake the Old Testament for the New Testament or consider the Old Testament not as important to our faith as the words of Jesus, the apostles or Paul, but we have to remember the whole Bible is about Jesus and the Old Testament sets the stage for why and how Jesus came. The Old Testament is more than a history of Israel or a bunch of rules; it is a story of a covenant people looking forward to a savior because of the promises given by their Creator. Through the covenants God reveals Himself, His plans and His purposes to His people and the world; plans and purposes that are ultimately fulfilled in Christ.

## What is Advent?

The word "advent" means coming or arrival.

Advent is a season of celebration and expectation. It is a season where we look back at the first coming (or first advent) of Christ, when He came as that baby in a manger. It is a time to look forward to the second coming of Christ, when He will establish His kingdom and rid the world of sin and brokenness. This is done as we celebrate in the present. It is more than the Christmas story; it is the buildup and expectation that leads us to the Christmas story. It is the expectation felt while waiting for the promised Messiah. It is looking to Christ, who was promised throughout the Old Testament, to be the focus of our holiday season.

As you read the scripture passages you will notice, with the exception of the last two, that they are not extremely Christmas-y. This is because we want to walk the historical and biblical path that lead us to His coming. We want to build anticipation. We want to be reminded that Christmas is not simply about a baby in a manger, but about a savior who had been promised throughout history from God to His covenant people.

The covenants will be our signposts as we walk the path of Advent together. The passages we read will be the stories that lead up to and reveal God's covenants and how they are ultimately fulfilled in Jesus. The goal is to get a better understanding of God's plan of salvation and a greater love and appreciation of the savior who sits at the center of God's plan. Each day there will be a short passage to read, a brief paragraph or two meant to encourage thought about the passage, and a set of questions to guide you through the passage. Here's the easy part, the questions will be same every day.

Here are the questions we will be using to walk through the passages:

- **What do we learn about God?**

(ex. God is Holy, God is forgiving, Jesus is God and creator, etc)

- **What do we learn about people (humanity or myself)?**

(ex. We can make mistakes and blame others - Adam and Eve)

- **Is there a sin to avoid?**

(ex. Lying, blame, listening to lies about God, etc)

- **Is there a truth to stand on?**

(ex. I am promised life and righteousness in Christ)

- **Is there an example to follow?**

(ex. Abraham obeyed and followed God by leaving his home and going where God sent)

- **Is there a command to obey?**

Not every passage will have an answer to each of these questions, but they will help us think through the passage and how it applies to our lives.

As you study through this Advent devotional it is my prayer that in the busyness of the holiday season, we would be reminded why we celebrate. We celebrate because God chose to love us and provide us a way back to Him. We celebrate because God's plan of love was not made on a whim but is etched throughout history. We celebrate because God has built history around the coming of His son who came as a baby and provides us a way to salvation. We celebrate because we are unworthy of His love, but He has shown it to us immeasurably. We celebrate because He is worthy to be celebrated.

**CREATION**

## December 1: John 1:1-5; 14-18

*[1] In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. [2] He was in the beginning with God. [3] All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. [4] In him was life, and the life was the light of men. [5] The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. ... [14] And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. [15] (John bore witness about him, and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.'") [16] For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. [17] For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. [18] No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.*

Like all good stories, we'll start with the beginning. The beginning of our story is not a place or time but a person. Before we look at the creation account in Genesis we want to look at who the creator is. In John's opening to his gospel, he looks at Jesus before the manger; he shows us Jesus who existed in eternity past. When John talks about the Word that was in the beginning with God and was God, he is talking about Jesus. Jesus' beginning did not start in the gospels but He has always existed with the Father and with the Spirit. The mystery and awesomeness of the incarnation (when Jesus came to Earth as a baby) is that Christ, who has always existed and through whom all things were made, "became flesh and dwelt among us." The God of creation stepped out of His glorious home in Heaven to put on the frail flesh of His creation that we could experience and be with the God who no one has ever seen. In Christ, we see Him and know Him.

Further Study:

- What do we learn about God?
- What do we learn about people (humanity or myself)?
- Is there a sin to avoid?
- Is there a truth to stand on?
- Is there an example to follow?
- Is there a command to obey?



# **EDENIC COVENANT**

## INNOCENCE

## December 2: Genesis 2:5-9, 15-17

*[5] When no bush of the field was yet in the land and no small plant of the field had yet sprung up—for the LORD God had not caused it to rain on the land, and there was no man to work the ground, [6] and a mist was going up from the land and was watering the whole face of the ground—[7] then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature. [8] And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed. [9] And out of the ground the LORD God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. ... [15] The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. [16] And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, [17] but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”*

When God created the world, He called it good. It was a time and place where there was no sin, there was no death. It was innocent. This is the world Adam and Eve lived in. They had the blessing of being able to walk with God daily. They were given responsibility to work and keep God's creation. God provided for them food and shelter. They were allowed to eat of any tree they liked except for one, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. In this land of perfection, they were given one commandment. In this time of innocence, there was one action that could turn everything on its head. Sadly, knowing the story, we know how it ends up. Man trades the perfect world that God offered for a lie. He traded life for death. He traded closeness with God for separation. He traded peace for wrath.

Let's not fool ourselves into thinking if it would have been us, we would have done better than Adam and Eve. No, we would have listened to the same lies and sinned the same sin. We are no longer innocent; not just because of Adam and Eve but because of our own sin and idolatry. BUT God offers us innocence again. Christ is our propitiation (1 John 2:2). This means He satisfies God's justice and wrath toward our sin. It means that innocence, and the relationship that comes with it, is offered again through Christ.

Further Study:

- What do we learn about God?

- What do we learn about people (humanity or myself)?
- Is there a sin to avoid?
- Is there a truth to stand on?
- Is there an example to follow?
- Is there a command to obey?

# **ADAMIC COVENANT**

## THE FALL & GOD'S GRACE

## December 3: Genesis 3:1-13

[1] Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?" [2] And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, [3] but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" [4] But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. [5] For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." [6] So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. [7] Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.

[8] And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. [9] But the LORD God called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?" [10] And he said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself." [11] He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" [12] The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate." [13] Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

Truth and lies. These may be the most foundational descriptors of God and Satan that paint the picture of the vast divide between the two. Satan is called the father of lies (John 8:44) while Jesus declares Himself to be the truth (John 14:6), the Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of truth (John 16:13), God's word defines truth (John 17:17) and Hebrews 6:18 tells us that God cannot lie. God is a god of truth and Satan is the enemy who lies, and most of His lies are about God. If he can get us to believe His lies, that God is not good, that God cannot be trusted, that God does not love us, then he can get us to make all types of poor and sinful decisions. That was his plan with Adam and Eve, spread lies about God to get them to doubt God. After their sin, after they believed the lies of Satan and acted on them, they began to look more like Satan than their creator. They tried to hide their failure and sinfulness behind degrading fig leaves. Instead of looking forward to walking with God they hid from Him. Instead of accepting

responsibility for their actions they lied and blamed in an attempt to escape punishment. One action changed them and changed history.

Sin is destructive. Sin drives us away from God. Sin deceives us into thinking we don't need God, but nothing could be further from the truth. We call Adam and Eve's failure The Fall, because mankind fell from innocence into guilt and shame that day, and that is where mankind sits. In the muck. In the mud. In the darkness of our sin. We can't rescue ourselves. We can't pull ourselves out of the pit of our sin. The best we can do is to make clothes out of fig leaves that will wither and die. We need one who is the epitome and definition of truth to rescue us from the lies that have pulled us far from Truth and Light. We need a savior. We need Jesus.

Further Study:

- What do we learn about God?
- What do we learn about people (humanity or myself)?
- Is there a sin to avoid?
- Is there a truth to stand on?
- Is there an example to follow?
- Is there a command to obey?

## December 4: Genesis 3:14-21

*[14] The LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field; on your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. [15] I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." [16] To the woman he said, "I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be contrary to your husband, but he shall rule over you." [17] And to Adam he said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; [18] thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. [19] By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return." [20] The man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all living. [21] And the LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them.*

With all sin comes punishment and judgement. This passage describes for us the punishment issued by God to Adam, Eve, and the serpent. It would be easy to look at this passage and just see the condemnation of sin and walk away discouraged, but if we do that, we miss the grace that fills these verses. Here we are introduced to the Adamic Covenant, a covenant of grace. Yes, there are the results of sin that have to be dealt with, painful childbirth, conflict in relationships, and painful work but there is so much more. Look at v15 again. This is called the protoevangelium, the first proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The offspring He is talking about is Christ. While the serpent (Satan) will bruise the heel of Christ (the cross), Christ will bruise the head of the serpent, a much more painful and permanent offense. Here, in the midst of God's punishment for sin, He shows grace by telling them there is a time coming when He will provide for the forgiveness and cleansing of the sin they just brought into the world. Also, let us not miss out on v21. Back in Genesis 3:7, Adam and Eve tried to hide their sin by their own actions by making clothes of fig leaves, an attempt that failed. In v21, we see the first sacrifice for sin. Hebrews 9:22 tells us that, "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins." God kills the first animal to provide cover for their shame and nakedness. He does what their self-righteousness could not do, could never do. He would do it again for all humanity when He sent His son, the spotless Lamb of God, to shed His blood to cover the sins of all who would believe.

Further Study:

- What do we learn about God?
- What do we learn about people (humanity or myself)?
- Is there a sin to avoid?
- Is there a truth to stand on?
- Is there an example to follow?
- Is there a command to obey?



## December 5: Romans 5:12-21

*[12] Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned—[13] for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. [14] Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come.*

*[15] But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. [16] And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification. [17] For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.*

*[18] Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. [19] For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. [20] Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, [21] so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Death and life. Adam's sin brought death into the world. The spiritual death he and Eve suffered for disobeying God and eating the fruit. The death of the animal to cover their guilt and shame. Death has not stopped since that moment. Because of Adam death has spread and reigns over all mankind. That is the ultimate effect of sin. But while Adam brought death, Jesus Christ brought life. Jesus brings the free gift of grace. Adam brought judgment and condemnation; Jesus brings justification. Justification is being declared righteous or being made right, or innocent, before God. The innocence that Adam lost in the garden is restored by Jesus Christ. We are made right before God not because of our goodness or will, but through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We are right before God because of Jesus' goodness, not our own.

The greatness of this gift is that we do not work for it or earn it or keep it by our

obedience, it is a free gift through the love and grace of God. Also, it is for all mankind. Adam's action led to the condemnation of all men, but Christ's work provides salvation for all who believe. No matter who you are, your background, your skin color, your nationality, or your belief system up to that point; if you trust in the work of Christ and forgiveness He offers, innocence and freedom from sin, guilt and shame are offered to you.

Further Study:

- What do we learn about God?
- What do we learn about people (humanity or myself)?
- Is there a sin to avoid?
- Is there a truth to stand on?
- Is there an example to follow?
- Is there a command to obey?

# **ABRAHAMIC COVENANT**

A CHOSEN PEOPLE

## December 6: Genesis 12:1-3

*[1] Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. [2] And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. [3] I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."*

Covenants are built on trust. God gives a command or makes a promise and we are put in the position of trusting Him to fulfill His promises and to follow His commands. Adam and Eve failed to trust in the goodness of God and listened to lies of the Enemy. The Abrahamic Covenant is based on a promise. The promise is that God would bless Abram, make him a great nation, and bless all the families of the earth through him. It was Abram's responsibility to trust God. Trust is always shown in action. For Abram, that meant following the command to leave his father's house and go to a land that God would show him. God has made promises to us. He has promised forgiveness (1 John 1:9) and righteousness (2 Corinthians 5:21). He has promised us eternal life (Joh 3:16). He has promised us that nothing can separate us from His love (Romans 8:38-39). These promises and more found in scripture are not because we are so good or so worthy; they are because of Jesus.

When God promises Abram that "all the families of the earth shall be blessed" through him, that blessing comes in the person of Jesus. Abram is the father of the Israelites. In the Old Testament, the Israelites become the chosen people of God. He gives them the covenants and His law and the sacrifices and His presence. He also gives them the privilege of being the people that the Messiah comes through. All the nations are blessed through Abram, not because Israel is such a powerful or great nation or because the Israelite people are in some way overly beneficial to the rest of the world. All the nations are blessed through Abram because Jesus came from Abram's lineage and anyone in the world who is saved is saved through Jesus. Jesus is the central character of the Bible and history. Even as the Jewish nation was being started, it was started with a promise that was fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

Further Study:

- What do we learn about God?
- What do we learn about people (humanity or myself)?

- Is there a sin to avoid?
- Is there a truth to stand on?
- Is there an example to follow?
- Is there a command to obey?

## December 7: Genesis 15:1-6

*[1] After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: "Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great." [2] But Abram said, "O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" [3] And Abram said, "Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir." [4] And behold, the word of the LORD came to him: "This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir." [5] And he brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." [6] And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.*

Abraham trusted God but he struggled. Part of the covenant God had made with him was that he would be a great nation. This implies his lineage would continue and would grow. The problem was that Abraham and his wife Sarai had no children. For the promise to flourish and be fulfilled Abraham had to have a child, and he was getting older and older. In his struggle, God reaffirmed His promise. He promised Abraham a child and reminded Abraham of His promise that His children would outnumber the stars of the sky. Abraham believed God's promise and it was credited to him as righteousness. Abraham's righteousness, his justification, was not based on who he was or his goodness, it was based on his trust in the promises of God. Promises that were ultimately fulfilled in Christ.

When Abraham struggled with trusting God, God didn't berate Abraham or mock Abraham or leave Abraham. God reminded Abraham of truth. He reminded Abraham of His promises. He reminded Abraham of His covenant. We live in a world of competing voices. Much like Eve in the garden we are bombarded with the lies of the enemies while trying to walk in God's truth. Rich Mullins once said that it is hard to be like Jesus and that is true. Sometimes we wear down. Sometimes, like Abraham, we struggle. Sometimes we look at the situations we are in and think God has left us. When we find ourselves in those moments, our response is not to trust ourselves or trust our hearts. It is not to look to another source or another savior. Our response is to go back to truth. If truth is based in who God is and God never changes (Hebrews 13:8) then the things He has promised us; grace, forgiveness, presence, faithfulness (Hebrews 13:5); never change either. If we stand on the never changing promises of God, if we stand on His covenant with us in Jesus Christ, then we find strength and reassurance in times of doubt.

Further Study:

- What do we learn about God?
- What do we learn about people (humanity or myself)?
- Is there a sin to avoid?
- Is there a truth to stand on?
- Is there an example to follow?
- Is there a command to obey?

## **December 8: Romans 4:1-5, Galatians 3:14**

*[1] What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? [2] For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. [3] For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness." [4] Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. [5] And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness,*

*[14] so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.*

The blessing of Abraham comes to us through the person of Christ. The Abrahamic Covenant, much like the Adamic Covenant, set the stage for Jesus' arrival and sacrifice. Jesus is the descendent of Eve who would bruise the head of the serpent and Jesus is the blessing of Abraham to all the families of the earth. Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness. We believe God, and His promise of salvation through Christ, and we are counted as righteous. There is a freedom in this. If we had to work for our salvation, we could never work enough. If we had to earn our salvation, we would always be in debt. If it were up to us, we would exhaust ourselves trying to attain something that was out of our reach. But God chose to give us a gift. A gift promised at the very beginning of creation. A gift promised to be given through His chosen people. A gift we could never earn but desperately need. He chose to offer us salvation through the sacrifice of His son.

Further Study:

- What do we learn about God?
- What do we learn about people (humanity or myself)?
- Is there a sin to avoid?
- Is there a truth to stand on?
- Is there an example to follow?
- Is there a command to obey?



# **MOSAIC COVENANT**

## THE LAW & ASSOCIATION WITH GOD

## **December 9: Exodus 3:1-15**

[1] Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian, and he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. [2] And the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed. [3] And Moses said, "I will turn aside to see this great sight, why the bush is not burned." [4] When the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." [5] Then he said, "Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." [6] And he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

[7] Then the LORD said, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings, [8] and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. [9] And now, behold, the cry of the people of Israel has come to me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. [10] Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt." [11] But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?" [12] He said, "But I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain."

[13] Then Moses said to God, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" [14] God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel: 'I AM has sent me to you.'" [15] God also said to Moses, "Say this to the people of Israel: 'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.

Moses and the burning bush is one of the most well-known Bible stories there is. It has been in movies and books, Christian and secular alike. Most know of the bush that is on fire and does not burn. But what most probably miss out on

is the real importance of the story, not the burning bush but the message given. God speaks through the burning bush to call Moses to a task. He is sending Moses to Pharaoh to tell him to let the Israelites, who had become slaves to the Egyptians hundreds of years before, go. God says that He has seen their affliction and heard their cries. He knew their suffering. They were oppressed and He was going to free them and bring them to the land He had promised Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This leads to the incredible story of the Exodus and God sending plagues to prove to Pharaoh that He alone is God. There are rivers turning to blood, swarms of gnats and flies, fire falling from Heaven, and even a sea splitting down the middle; proof that God will do whatever to show He is God and rescue His people.

As incredible the story of the Exodus is, it's not the greatest story of rescue there is in the Bible. That one belongs to Christ. The story of the gospel, like the Exodus, is one of an oppressed people who need freedom. Our slavery is not to a foreign nation but to sin and guilt and death. God sees the suffering of His people and this time, instead of sending an emissary and plagues, He Himself comes, the Messiah, God in human flesh, to bring a freedom that is greater than national independence. He brought us freedom from sin and judgment through the death and resurrection of Jesus. Through Him, we have been freed from the suffering and oppression of sin and death and have been promised a home greater than anything we could ever find on this earth.

Further Study:

- What do we learn about God?
- What do we learn about people (humanity or myself)?
- Is there a sin to avoid?
- Is there a truth to stand on?
- Is there an example to follow?
- Is there a command to obey?

## December 10: Exodus 12:1-14

[1] The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, [2] "This month shall be for you the beginning of months. It shall be the first month of the year for you. [3] Tell all the congregation of Israel that on the tenth day of this month every man shall take a lamb according to their fathers' houses, a lamb for a household. [4] And if the household is too small for a lamb, then he and his nearest neighbor shall take according to the number of persons; according to what each can eat you shall make your count for the lamb. [5] Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male a year old. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats, [6] and you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month, when the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill their lambs at twilight.

[7] "Then they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. [8] They shall eat the flesh that night, roasted on the fire; with unleavened bread and bitter herbs they shall eat it. [9] Do not eat any of it raw or boiled in water, but roasted, its head with its legs and its inner parts. [10] And you shall let none of it remain until the morning; anything that remains until the morning you shall burn. [11] In this manner you shall eat it: with your belt fastened, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. And you shall eat it in haste. It is the LORD's Passover. [12] For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the LORD. [13] The blood shall be a sign for you, on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you, when I strike the land of Egypt.

[14] "This day shall be for you a memorial day, and you shall keep it as a feast to the LORD; throughout your generations, as a statute forever, you shall keep it as a feast.

Nine plagues. God had sent nine plagues on Egypt to show His power and convince Pharaoh to release His people. Plagues of blood, frogs, lice, flies, livestock death, boils, fiery hail, locusts and darkness; but Pharaoh would not release the Israelites, instead he just hardened his heart. There was one more plague to come. The worst one yet. One evening, God would go throughout Egypt and the firstborn of every family would die. But God would provide protection. A sacrifice could be made. A lamb would be slaughtered and the blood put on the doorposts of the house. For all the households that listened in faith to God's word and put the blood on their house, God would pass over

those houses and they would be spared the heartache that came with God's judgment. This is a story that has stuck with the Israelites since and a time that is still celebrated today. There was a Passover celebration 2000 years ago that impacted the world. Another lamb would be slain and His blood would cover the sins of His people and bring life instead of death. Jesus was our lamb who died. He was our lamb whose blood was shed. It is His blood that covers us and brings us grace and life instead of death and judgement.

Further Study:

- What do we learn about God?
- What do we learn about people (humanity or myself)?
- Is there a sin to avoid?
- Is there a truth to stand on?
- Is there an example to follow?
- Is there a command to obey?

## December 11: Leviticus 26:12

*[3] "If you walk in my statutes and observe my commandments and do them, [4] then I will give you your rains in their season, and the land shall yield its increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit. [5] Your threshing shall last to the time of the grape harvest, and the grape harvest shall last to the time for sowing. And you shall eat your bread to the full and dwell in your land securely. [6] I will give peace in the land, and you shall lie down, and none shall make you afraid. And I will remove harmful beasts from the land, and the sword shall not go through your land. [7] You shall chase your enemies, and they shall fall before you by the sword. [8] Five of you shall chase a hundred, and a hundred of you shall chase ten thousand, and your enemies shall fall before you by the sword. [9] I will turn to you and make you fruitful and multiply you and will confirm my covenant with you. [10] You shall eat old store long kept, and you shall clear out the old to make way for the new. [11] I will make my dwelling among you, and my soul shall not abhor you. [12] And I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people.*

Israel was God's chosen people. He called out Abraham and established a covenant with him that He would make Abraham a great nation and bless all people through him. This covenant was repeated to his son and grandson and was to be carried out through the nation of Israel. When God rescued His people from Egyptian slavery, He wanted to bring them to the promise land and establish them as a nation. With that goal in mind, He gave them the Law. God's law filled several roles; it established a moral standard for Israel, it set governing laws, and created their worship guidelines. It established them as God's covenant people who were to live, act, worship, and be different from the nations that surrounded them. It associated them with God. It declared to the nations around them that the God they served was the one true God and He was worthy of their lives. The promise that came with this association was they weren't just tied to God in name or ritual, but in relationship. God promised to confirm His covenant and dwell with them. He would walk with them and they would be His people and He would not abhor them. He would be their God and they would be His people.

Israel would not do well in relationship with God. At first, they wouldn't trust Him to give them the Promised Land, so they wandered in the wilderness for 40 years. When they finally took the Promised Land, they didn't obey God and chase out all the other people living there. During the time of the Judges they fell into a cycle of sin, discipline and repentance. They then rejected God as their king so

they could have a human king like all the nations around them. Even when they had a king, they built idols and false gods to worship, turning their backs on God (often at the leadership of their kings). Israel rejected God and His law enough times that God brought discipline in the form of pagan nations destroying them and taking their people captive. Israel had been faithless and failed, but the covenant wasn't broken. Though they had dropped the line on their end, God faithfully kept the promise He had made to Abraham. God kept a remnant in Israel. God watched over His people in their new captivity. God would bring them back home to rebuild. No matter how many times they failed, God was always faithful and the covenant was never broken because it was God who had made it and God who kept it.

We are not much different than Israel. We struggle and fall even though we have a relationship with the God of the universe through His Son, Jesus Christ. Even though we mess up God never leaves us, He never casts us out, He always stays faithful.

Further Study:

- What do we learn about God?
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## December 12: Deuteronomy 11:26-28

*[26] "See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse: [27] the blessing, if you obey the commandments of the LORD your God, which I command you today, [28] and the curse, if you do not obey the commandments of the LORD your God, but turn aside from the way that I am commanding you today, to go after other gods that you have not known.*

The Mosaic Covenant is a conditional covenant. That differentiates it from the Abrahamic Covenant. In the Abrahamic Covenant, God singled out Abraham and chose to bless the world through his lineage. The initiation was by God and the sustaining of the promise and continuation of the promise was by God. The Mosaic Covenant is different. The promise of relationship, made through Abraham, is not negated through the Mosaic Covenant. Regardless of the Law, the Israelites are God's chosen people to bring the Messiah into the world. The Mosaic Covenant isn't about relationship but about worship. God gave the Law to the Israelites to separate them from the pagan nations and give them a way to show their love and devotion to God. If they obeyed God, He would bless them. This is not legalism or an early version of the prosperity gospel where if you do good then God gives you a bunch of stuff; but their obedience was their way to show God He was worthy and they valued their relationship with Him and the promises He had made. To disobey was to say they found more value in the gods and idols of others; this would bring a curse, or discipline.

This is true for us today as well. We don't cling to the Old Testament Law but application of obedience to God's word being how we show our love of God is still true. In John 14:21, Jesus tells His disciples that, "Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me." He follows that up in John 14:24 by saying, "Whoever does not love me does not keep my words." If we are Christians, if we have placed our faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ and repented of our sins, then we have a relationship with God in Christ based on the work of Christ and not our ability to obey. Our relationship with God is established on and held by the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Our obedience or disobedience does not create or negate our relationship with God, it reveals our love and worship of God. One of the ways we worship God and show our love for Him is through our commitment to Him and obedience to His command. To love God means to obey God.



Further Study:

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- What do we learn about people (humanity or myself)?
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## December 13: Galatians 3:23-29

*[23] Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. [24] So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. [25] But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, [26] for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. [27] For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. [28] There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. [29] And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.*

God gave the Law and the Law was good, but it was never meant to be the end. The Law was a placeholder of sorts until Christ came. Paul says it was a guardian. Among the Greeks and the Romans, guardians or tutors were trustworthy slaves who were charged with supervising the life and morals of boys belonging to the better class. The boys were not allowed to leave the house without them until they arrived at the age of manhood. In the same way, the Law had the positive functions of revealing and restraining sin and also prophesying the coming of Christ. The Law was never meant to bring about salvation; neither was the sacrificial system (Hebrews 10:4). They were meant to protect the Israelites from falling into sin and idolatry, help them understand their imperfections and their need for a savior, and to have faith in the promises of the coming Messiah.

Further Study:

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# **DAVIDIC COVENANT**

## RULE & AUTHORITY

## December 14: 1 Samuel 8:4–9

*[4] Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah [5] and said to him, "Behold, you are old and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now appoint for us a king to judge us like all the nations." [6] But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, "Give us a king to judge us." And Samuel prayed to the LORD. [7] And the LORD said to Samuel, "Obey the voice of the people in all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them. [8] According to all the deeds that they have done, from the day I brought them up out of Egypt even to this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are also doing to you. [9] Now then, obey their voice; only you shall solemnly warn them and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them."*

After the Exodus and 40 years of wandering in the desert, God led the Israelites to take the Promised Land. Once they had established their nation, God provided them leadership in the form of the Judges. It was not the best of times for Israel; they would chase idols and turn from God, and, in discipline, God would send a foreign nation to oppress them. The people would eventually call out to God in repentance for help and God would raise up a judge to lead the people. This cycle repeated itself throughout the book of Judges. It was one of the darkest times in Israel's history and it didn't have a happy ending.

God raised up the judges because God served as the King of Israel. He was the one who led and protected and provided for them. He fought their battles and did things for them no earthly king could possibly do, but the Israelites rejected Him as king. They said they wanted a king so they could be like all the other nations that surrounded them. God warned them what a king would mean for them; taxes, sons being conscripted to serve in an army, daughters being forced from home to work for the king, portions of their crops being given to feed the king and his household. The people didn't care, they wanted to be like everyone else. Though they were called of God to be His, though God had given His covenants and promises, though He had given them the law to be different, they found more value in living like the idolatrous nations around them than in loving and trusting God.

In 1 Peter 2:11, Peter calls believers "strangers and aliens." The reason is this is not our home. We have been saved for something greater. But, like the Israelites, we are surrounded by those who do not know God and worship other gods. There is temptation every day to find more value in temporary things

than we have in God. Those temptations are lies, but they are present none the less. We are just as susceptible as the Israelites to look elsewhere for safety, protection, joy, hope, peace, life, etc. Pray that God will help you stay focused on loving Him and following Him.

Further Study:

- What do we learn about God?
- What do we learn about people (humanity or myself)?
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## December 15: 2 Samuel 7:4-17, Psalm 89:1-4

[4] But that same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan, [5] "Go and tell my servant David, 'Thus says the LORD: Would you build me a house to dwell in? [6] I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent for my dwelling. [7] In all places where I have moved with all the people of Israel, did I speak a word with any of the judges of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, "Why have you not built me a house of cedar?"' [8] Now, therefore, thus you shall say to my servant David, 'Thus says the LORD of hosts, I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, that you should be prince over my people Israel. [9] And I have been with you wherever you went and have cut off all your enemies from before you. And I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. [10] And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may dwell in their own place and be disturbed no more. And violent men shall afflict them no more, as formerly, [11] from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel. And I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover, the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. [12] 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. [13] He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. [14] I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, [15] but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. [16] And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.'" [17] In accordance with all these words, and in accordance with all this vision, Nathan spoke to David.

[1] I will sing of the steadfast love of the LORD, forever; with my mouth I will make known your faithfulness to all generations. [2] For I said, "Steadfast love will be built up forever; in the heavens you will establish your faithfulness." [3] You have said, "I have made a covenant with my chosen one; I have sworn to David my servant: [4] 'I will establish your offspring forever, and build your throne for all generations.'" *Selah*

David was king of Israel. (He wasn't the first king, that was Saul and he failed miserably.) David was a good king who loved God. Samuel described David as being after the Lord's own heart (1 Samuel 13:14). David was not perfect

(i.e. Bathsheba) but he loved God and wanted to honor God. He saw that he lived in a palace adorned with gold and they still used the same tent Moses had made as the “house” for God. He wanted to build God a big, spectacular temple. Instead of having David build Him a house, God established a covenant with David that would establish his house (or lineage) forever. God established a covenant with David that said his son (relative) would sit on the throne forever. David wasn't perfect but he trusted God and He loved God. He wanted to honor God with all that he was. Because David's heart was set on knowing and loving God, God blessed with him with an incredible promise. David had his ups and downs, but He knew God was worthy. We aren't perfect. We struggle with sin and temptation, failure and victory, but no matter how much we struggle, we know God is worthy. Let it be our goal, as it was David's, to be people after God's own heart.

#### Further Study:

- What do we learn about God?
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## **December 16: Isaiah 9:6–7; Isaiah 11:1–10**

*[6] For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. [7] Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.*

*[1] There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. [2] And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. [3] And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear, [4] but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. [5] Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins.*

*[6] The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child shall lead them. [7] The cow and the bear shall graze; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. [8] The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den. [9] They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.*

*[10] In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples—of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious.*

When Isaiah prophesied about the coming Messiah, he spoke of his rule and his throne. Jesus, the shoot from the stump of Jesse (David's father), will rule over all creation. Revelation teaches us that there will come a time when Satan is defeated and Jesus establishes the new Heaven and new Earth, when sin and death are a thing of the past and we live in perfection with God. That is still to come in the future, but it was prophesied by Isaiah 2700 years ago and promised to David 3000 years ago. It can be easy to look at our world and see how broken it is and get discouraged, but the reality is it has always (since the Fall) been broken. The things of God have always been fought against, disease and death have always been present, hostility and perversion have always



defined the human condition. If all we had to look at was the here and now, there would be no reason for hope. BUT, we can and do have hope because of a promise made to David that will be fulfilled when Jesus is sitting on His throne for all eternity. He will reign over nations and He will usher in the peace man so desperately wants but cannot attain.

Further Study:

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# **THE NEW COVENANT**

## FULFILLMENT IN CHRIST

## December 17: Jeremiah 31:31–34

*[31] "Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, [32] not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. [33] For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. [34] And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."*

The New Covenant. Through the prophet Jeremiah, God promised to make a new covenant with His people. The Old Covenant was built on the promises of God and manifested in the law and the sacrifices. The New Covenant is built on the promise of God manifested in His son, Jesus Christ. The New Covenant is the promise of a changed heart through Christ. According to Hebrews 7:22, it is a better covenant guaranteed by Jesus. In Luke 22:20, Jesus says that the New Covenant is built in His blood. The New Covenant is built around the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. It is His death that covers the guilt of our sin. It is His resurrection that conquers sin and death. When we place our faith in Jesus and repent of our sin, we are made new creatures with new desires and a new purpose. Everything in the Old Covenant, the law and the sacrifices, covenants with Adam, Abraham, and David, find their culmination in Jesus. They all built to this point when Jesus came, died, and rose again. They do not work in opposition to each other, but the New Covenant is the continuation of the Old Covenant. He fulfills the perfection of the law. He is the sacrificial lamb. He is the king who will sit on the throne. He is the one who will crush the head of the serpent. The Old Covenant built to Jesus and the New Covenant is built on the person and work of Jesus.

Further Study:

- What do we learn about God?
- What do we learn about people (humanity or myself)?
- Is there a sin to avoid?

- Is there a truth to stand on?
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## **December 18: Luke 1:5–25**

[5] In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, of the division of Abijah. And he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. [6] And they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord. [7] But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years.

[8] Now while he was serving as priest before God when his division was on duty, [9] according to the custom of the priesthood, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense. [10] And the whole multitude of the people were praying outside at the hour of incense. [11] And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. [12] And Zechariah was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell upon him. [13] But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. [14] And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, [15] for he will be great before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. [16] And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, [17] and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared."

[18] And Zechariah said to the angel, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years." [19] And the angel answered him, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I was sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. [20] And behold, you will be silent and unable to speak until the day that these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time." [21] And the people were waiting for Zechariah, and they were wondering at his delay in the temple. [22] And when he came out, he was unable to speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the temple. And he kept making signs to them and remained mute. [23] And when his time of service was ended, he went to his home.

[24] After these days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she kept herself hidden, saying, [25] "Thus the Lord has done for me in the days when he looked on me, to take away my reproach among people."

400 years of silence. It had been 400 years since God spoke through Malachi, the last recorded prophet. After 400 years, what would He say when He finally spoke? What would be the message God would bring to His people? Be prepared. Get ready. That was His message. God sends His messenger to Zechariah, a priest in Israel and His message is that Zechariah will have a son and this son will have a purpose. The son, John the Baptist, would go before to prepare the hearts of people for the coming Messiah. The savior. Jesus. God was getting ready to do something that had not been seen before; He was going to change history by inserting Himself into it in a brand-new way, but before Jesus began His ministry, God wanted to get the people ready. It had been 400 years, He wanted to get the people ready to hear. He wanted to get their hearts ready to receive. Heaven was coming to Earth and God didn't want people to miss out so He sent a messenger.

Further Study:

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## December 19: Hebrews 2:14, 1 John 3:8

*[14] Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil... [8] Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.*

Jesus is the fulfillment of the covenants. Each covenant made by God with His people had two broad parts. One that dealt with them in the then and there. Adam and Eve would leave the garden and struggle with work and childbirth, Abraham would have a child who would have children, Moses and the Israelites would keep the law and David would have a son who would follow him on the throne and build a temple. The second part of the covenant looked toward the future. It looked to a fulfillment that was bigger and greater than what they could comprehend. It is the future aspect of the covenant that was fulfilled in Jesus.

When Adam and Eve sinned in the garden, God told the serpent that he would bruise the heel of Eve's son, but He would bruise the head of the serpent. This is not a reference to Cain or Able but to Jesus. He would die but He would rise again and destroy Satan and that is exactly what happened through the cross and the resurrection. He destroyed the one who has the power of death. He was victorious over the one who has been sinning since the beginning. He has conquered the power of sin and death. Jesus is a conqueror who brought life to those who would trust Him. The Adamic Covenant seemed to be full of consequences and judgment but in reality it was the first to look forward to the One who would restore all that was broken.

Further Study:

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## December 20: John 8:48-56

[48] *The Jews answered him, "Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?" [49] Jesus answered, "I do not have a demon, but I honor my Father, and you dishonor me. [50] Yet I do not seek my own glory; there is One who seeks it, and he is the judge. [51] Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death." [52] The Jews said to him, "Now we know that you have a demon! Abraham died, as did the prophets, yet you say, 'If anyone keeps my word, he will never taste death.'*

Jesus had a way of upsetting the Jews by making some bold statements. He does so here by comparing Himself to Abraham, or actually, by exalting Himself higher than Abraham. For the Israelites, Abraham held an esteemed place in their culture and their history. He was the first, the father of the Israelites. He was the one God had given the covenant of blessing of a nation to. The only one on par with Abraham was Moses, who had been given the law. Jesus makes two bold statements in this passage. First, He declares Himself the fulfillment of the covenant made with Abraham. In that covenant, God promised Abraham that through him all the families of the world would be blessed. When Jesus says Abraham is glad to have seen His day, this is what He is talking about. Abraham didn't get to see his promise fulfilled. He didn't see the nation or the number of people, but he believed anyway. By saying he saw it, Jesus is saying that the promise Abraham looked forward to in faith was being completed in Him. Jesus and the gospel are how the world is blessed through Abraham's family.

The second bold statement is that He says before Abraham was, I am. Jesus declares Himself to be greater than Abraham because He is the great I AM... He is God. Abraham was a faithful man who trusted God, but he was not God. The promise was not made by nor held by Abraham, it was made and kept by God. Jesus upset people by declaring Himself greater than their heroes, but



He is. He is God. He is the one Abraham looked forward to. He is the one who would fulfill the promises made by God. He is God and they missed it. They missed it because, unlike Abraham, they weren't looking with expectation for God to fulfill His promise. They had grown spiritually content and complacent. As we get closer to Christmas, let us not miss out on the majesty of God coming to earth as a man to offer the salvation He promised when man first fell. May we not be so content with the world that we miss out on the majesty of the fulfillment of the promise.

Further Study:

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- Is there a command to obey?

## December 21: Matthew 5:17-19

*[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. [18] For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. [19] Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.*

Not only did Jesus fulfill the covenants with Adam and Abraham, but He is also the fulfillment of the law. Jesus specifically says He did not come to do away with the Law or the Prophets (i.e. the Old Testament), but that He is their fulfillment. What does that mean? One of the purposes of the Law was to show God's holiness and righteousness. There are 613 commandments in the Old Testament. It was not God's intention that the Israelites should or even could keep them all. In fact, God knew it was not possible for them to keep the law perfectly. It was one of the reasons He gave them the law. They were to realize through their inability to keep that law that they were not perfect and that they were sinners. Whether they failed in small or big ways, they were still guilty before a perfectly righteous God. The law was not just their moral conduct but it was to show them that no matter how moral they were, they were not as good as God. This is also why they were given the sacrifices, so they could show sorrow and repentance over their sin.

Jesus fulfilled the Law and the Prophets not just by being the One they pointed to, but by keeping the Law perfectly. Jesus could and did keep those 613 laws perfectly. He never failed. Not once. He was sinless. To be the sacrifice for humanity, He had to be blameless... spotless. That's why we could never pay the penalty for our own sin, because we are sinners. Jesus came and perfectly followed the law and never sinned once so that He could be our perfect sacrifice. Jesus did what we could never do to give us what we could never earn.

Further Study:

- What do we learn about God?
- What do we learn about people (humanity or myself)?

- Is there a sin to avoid?
- Is there a truth to stand on?
- Is there an example to follow?
- Is there a command to obey?

## December 22: John 1:29–34

*[29] The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! [30] This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.' [31] I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel." [32] And John bore witness: "I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. [33] I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' [34] And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God."*

Jesus fulfilled the Law by keeping the law perfectly, but He also did so by being our sacrifice. Each year the Israelites celebrated the Passover, that time when they sacrificed a spotless lamb to place its blood on the doorposts of their houses so God would pass over them and their children would not die. When John declared Jesus to be the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, this is what was on his mind. Because of our sin we are all deserving of judgment and death. Without someone's interference we have no hope. By God's grace and love He has given us hope through His son. When we place our faith and trust in Jesus and repent of our sin, Jesus covers our life with His blood. He becomes our sacrifice. He satisfies the wrath and justice of God so we can be forgiven, and the punishment of death promised to Adam and Eve will pass over us. We aren't passed over because of who we are or what we do. The Israelites weren't passed over simply because they had Jewish ancestry. They were passed over because of the blood of the lamb. The only way our sins will be passed over is by the blood of the Lamb... the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

Further Study:

- What do we learn about God?
- What do we learn about people (humanity or myself)?
- Is there a sin to avoid?
- Is there a truth to stand on?
- Is there an example to follow?
- Is there a command to obey?

## December 23: Luke 1:26–33

*[26] In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, [27] to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. [28] And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" [29] But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. [30] And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. [31] And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. [32] He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, [33] and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."*

Adam, Abraham, and Moses. God had made promises to them all that were ultimately fulfilled in Jesus. Jesus would conquer sin and death, bless the world, and satisfy God's requirements of righteousness and sacrifice. But it doesn't stop there. Jesus doesn't only operate as our savior, He is also our king. When God sent His messenger to Mary, the message of her blessing and pregnancy culminated in her son being on the throne. He would receive the throne of David and reign over the house of Jacob forever. Jesus was not just one who suffered but one who would reign. Even now, if we have placed our faith in Jesus and repented of our sin, He reigns over our hearts and lives. There will come a time when He will reign over all creation. He is the promised savior and the promised king.

Every major covenant throughout scripture points us to Jesus. It is because He is God the Son and the creator of all things, but it is also because of our great need. Jesus kept all 613 commandments because we could not. We can't even perfectly keep 10. We are guilty, just like Adam and Eve. We try to cover our guilt and shame with good works or acts of kindness or by just being decent, but those are all fig leaves that do not offer lasting help. If we are to have any hope of having God's justice toward us satisfied, it could never be by our own doing. We need someone else. We have that in Jesus. He has provided the way back to God. The perfection man was kicked out of at The Fall is offered again in Christ. Not because we are perfect, but because He is.

We celebrate Christmas not just because of the story of a manger and a baby. We celebrate because of why that baby came. We celebrate because since man broke God's creation with sin, there has been a promise that it would be

restored. There has been a promise of blessing. There has been a promise of forgiveness. There has been a promise of a king. All of those promises are completed in the same person. Jesus, who came as a baby, to live as a man, to die as a savior, to reign as our king.

Further Study:

- What do we learn about God?
- What do we learn about people (humanity or myself)?
- Is there a sin to avoid?
- Is there a truth to stand on?
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- Is there a command to obey?

## **December 24: Luke 2:1–20**

[1] In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. [2] This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. [3] And all went to be registered, each to his own town. [4] And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, [5] to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. [6] And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. [7] And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

[8] And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. [9] And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. [10] And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. [11] For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. [12] And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." [13] And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

[14] "Glory to God in the highest,  
and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"

[15] When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." [16] And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. [17] And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. [18] And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. [19] But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. [20] And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Praise God for His faithfulness to fulfill His promises in the giving of His Son!!!