

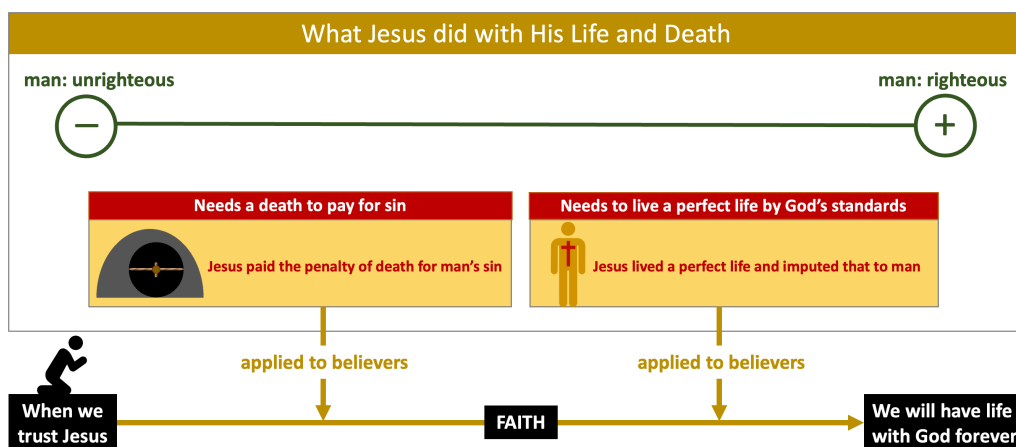
Lesson 36: Who Did Christ Die For?

Previously...

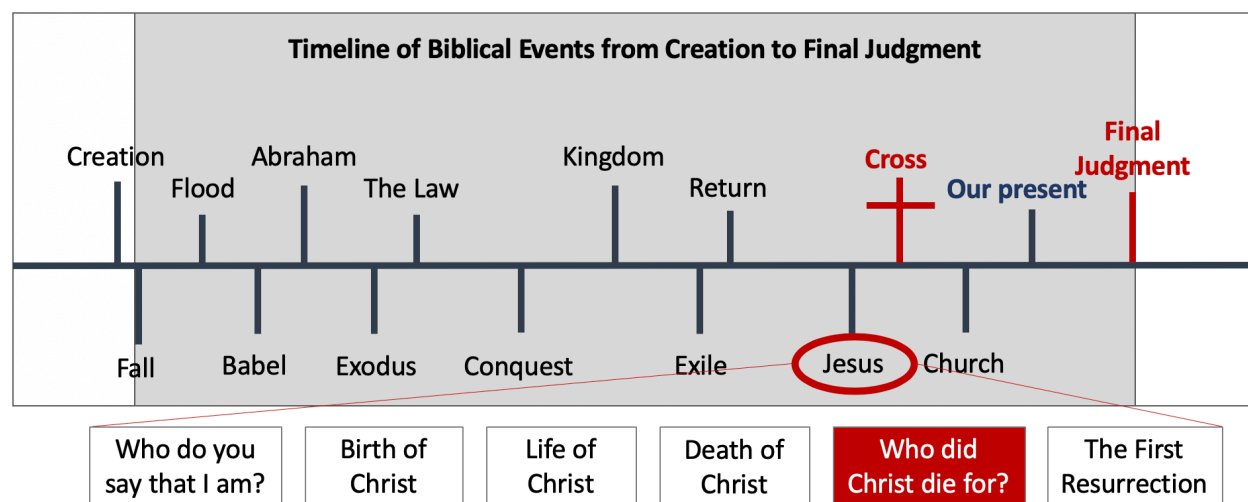
Because of man's rebellion at the Fall, the perfect world that Yahweh created was destroyed. Yahweh is perfectly holy and righteous and cannot just ignore the sin. So, throughout the Old Testament, God patiently explained how He views justice and restitution. And He also assured people through different events and prophecies that He would send a Messiah to save man. God Himself would provide the solution to mankind's sin because mankind cannot save themselves.

When the time was right, Yahweh sent God the Son, Jesus Christ, to live a perfect life and then die on mankind's behalf. Jesus' death on the cross was:





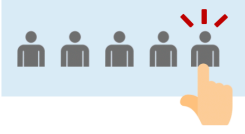
- the death that paid for man's sin as well as
- the way God "transferred" (imputed) Jesus' righteousness into mankind.



This is how every person who believes God will be declared righteous because of Jesus' death on the cross.



What Jesus did on the cross was an incredibly important event in history. Because of that, we want to be clear about the answers to some of these common questions.

<p>A</p> <p>Who did Christ die for?</p> 	<p>B</p> <p>Why must people believe in Jesus to be saved from eternal death?</p> 	<p>C</p> <p>Is mankind's personal response to Jesus the most important impact of the Cross?</p> 	<p>D</p> <p>How can God be so cruel to "send people to hell"?</p> 	<p>E</p> <p>The Bible talks about "election". Does this mean God alone decides who gets saved and who does not?</p> 
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A. Who did Christ die for?

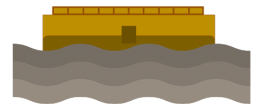
Did Jesus die only for the Jews? No.

Did He die only for certain groups of people? No.

When Jesus died as a substitute for man, it was for all mankind.

The Old Testament account of historical events teach this as well.

Flood: Before the Flood, God warned all people through Enoch and Noah that judgment was coming. For 120 years, **everyone** was given the opportunity to listen to Yahweh and turn from their wicked ways. But aside from Noah and his family, no one else did.



2 Peter 2:5

And God did not spare the ancient world—except for Noah and the seven others in his family. Noah warned the world of God's righteous judgment. So God protected Noah when he destroyed the world of ungodly people with a vast flood.

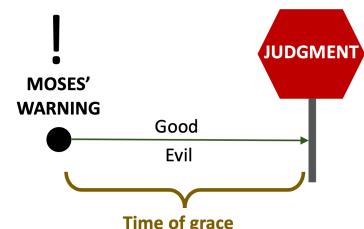
Exodus: Moses and Aaron warned the people about the plague judgments. **Everyone** was given the opportunity to respond. Some Egyptians did believe Yahweh's words and were saved from hail, the seventh plague.



Exodus 9:20

Some of Pharaoh's officials were afraid because of what the LORD had said. They quickly brought their servants and livestock in from the fields.

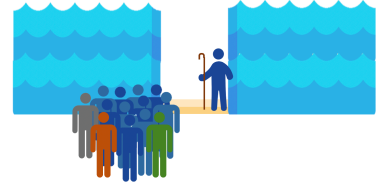
By the time God announced the final plague judgment, the death of the firstborn, everyone in Egypt had already experienced nine judgments. All had been warned and given sufficient time to believe Yahweh's words. How did the Israelites and the Egyptians respond?



We learnt that not only did all the Israelites believe, God also saved non-Israelites who believed Him. Together, they left Egypt.

Exodus 12:38

A rabble of non-Israelites went with them, along with great flocks and herds of livestock.



Jesus: When God sent Jesus to die on the cross to be the substitute and blood atonement, it was for **everyone**.

1 John 2:2

He himself is the sacrifice that atones for our sins—and not only our sins but the sins of all the world.

John 3:16

“For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.



Jesus Himself said that when He is “lifted up from the earth” (meaning when he dies on the cross), His death will be able to save people everywhere from every era, nationality, language and people group.

John 12:32–33

³² And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself.³³ He said this to indicate how he was going to die.

Jesus is not saying that the whole world will be saved. He is saying that all people are “saveable” by Him and that if they believe, they would be saved because of His work on the cross.

The apostle Paul also taught that Jesus died for everyone:

1 Timothy 2:1–7

¹ I urge you, first of all, to pray for all people. Ask God to help them; intercede on their behalf, and give thanks for them. ² Pray this way for kings and all who are in authority so that we can live peaceful and quiet lives marked by godliness and dignity. ³ This is good and pleases God our Savior, ⁴ who wants everyone to be saved and to understand the truth.

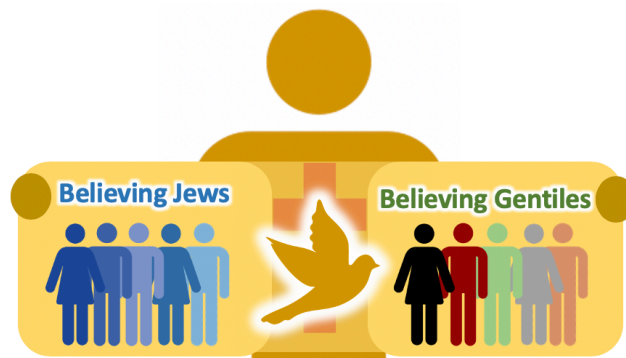
⁵ For, There is one God and one Mediator who can reconcile God and humanity—the man Christ Jesus. ⁶ He gave his life to purchase freedom for everyone. This is the message God gave to the world at just the right time. ⁷ And I have been chosen as a preacher and apostle to teach the Gentiles this message about faith and truth. I’m not exaggerating—just telling the truth.

Paul says that all people, both Jews and Gentiles, are included in this “everyone” that God wants to save.

Paul also explains what Jesus did when He died on the cross:

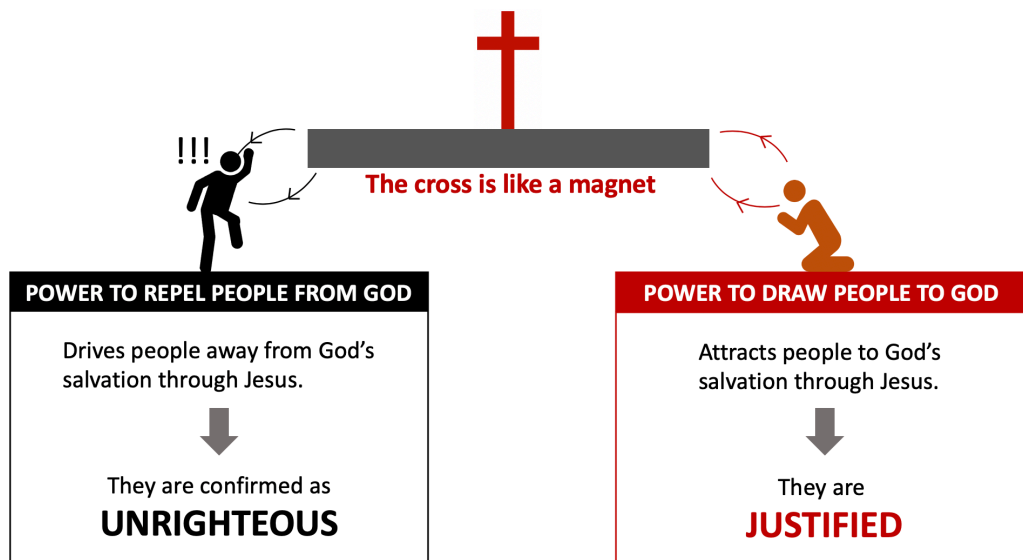
Ephesians 2:15b–17

¹⁵ He made peace between Jews and Gentiles by creating in himself one new people from the two groups. ¹⁶ Together as one body, Christ reconciled both groups to God by means of his death on the cross, and our hostility toward each other was put to death. ¹⁷ He brought this Good News of peace to you Gentiles who were far away from him, and peace to the Jews who were near.



The cross is God's rescue plan: this is the way God saves sinful man from eternal death. People of all ethnicities everywhere have the opportunity to individually accept or reject God's solution.

But there will be two responses.

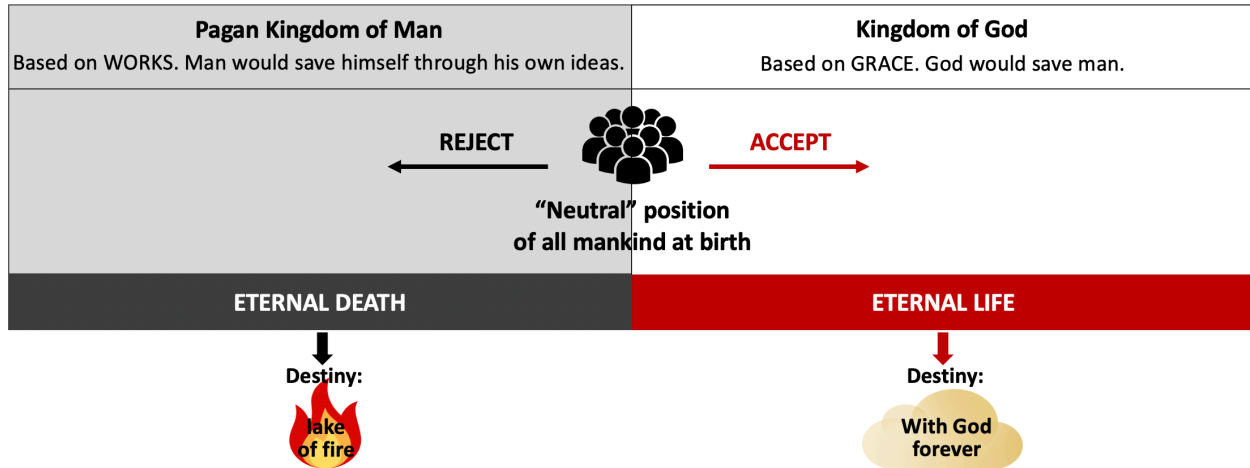


People have only these two choices. There is no other choice.

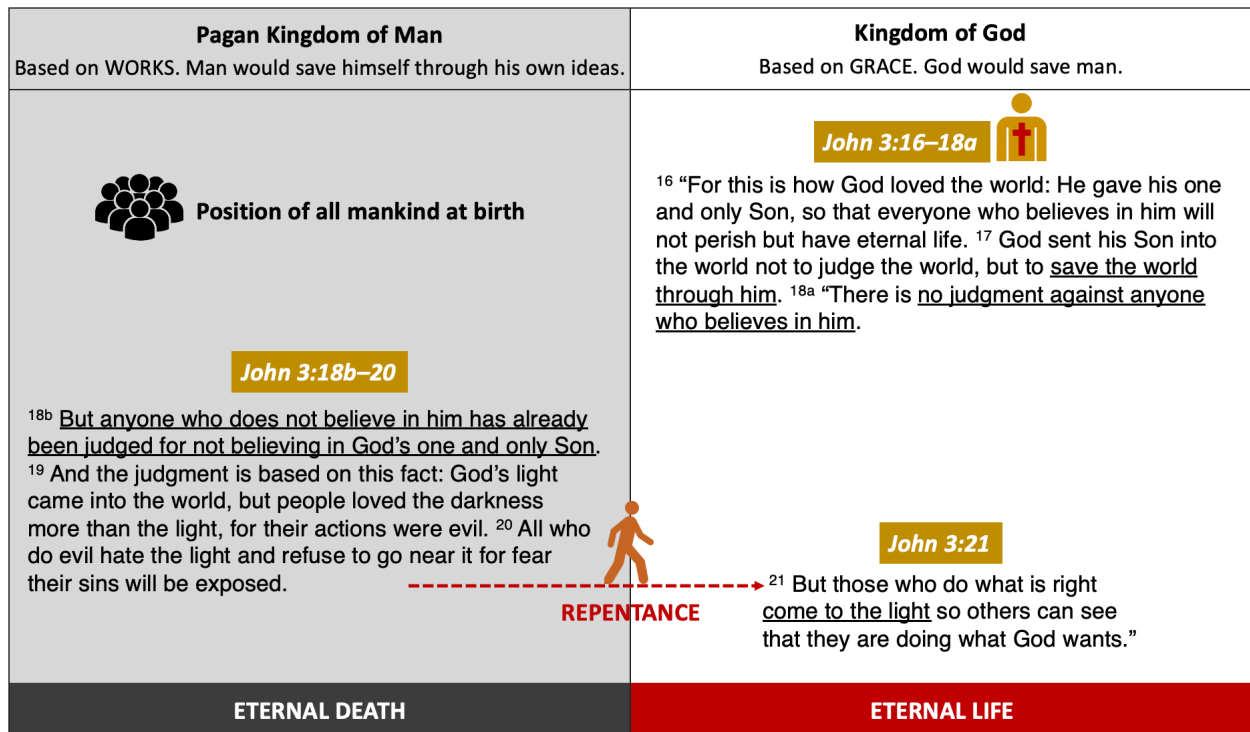
There is no "neutral" or in-between state.

Some people think that when we are born, we all start at the “neutral” state, and then we can decide to accept or reject God’s plan of salvation.

This is what some people think, but not what the Bible teaches



Instead, the Bible teaches that because of our sin nature, all mankind starts life in the sinful pagan kingdom of man. This is how the apostle John explains it:



a. Those who accept Jesus are justified (made right with God) by faith.

When a person chooses to believe in Jesus, they are saved from eternal death. They do not need to “do” anything. It is not man’s work. It is the work of God alone.

Ephesians 2:8–9

⁸ God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can’t take credit for this; it is a gift from God. ⁹ Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it.



b. What happens to people who choose to reject the cross?

God’s solution to man’s sin problem is the cross. It is not that there is no solution.

God’s Judgment:

Death because of sin



EITHER...

Man dies for own sin



OR...

a substitute dies



But for those who choose to reject God’s solution, that is, those who reject Jesus and the cross, they are permanently separated from God and the eternal life that He offers. Why?

- Because they have not allowed Jesus to take their place as their substitute.
- Their sin has not been paid for.
- God’s justice has not been satisfied.

So they have to pay the punishment of eternal death themselves.

Does this mean that Jesus did not die for them? No. Jesus died for everyone. Jesus’ death payment is big enough to pay for the sins of everyone who has ever lived. The reason not everyone is saved is because people reject the cross of Christ.



B. Why must people believe in Jesus to be saved from eternal death?

Some people wonder why Christians are so fussy and insist that people must believe in Jesus to be reconciled to God and receive eternal life. They wonder why it’s not enough to just believe:

- there is a god or
- believe in Yahweh (as the Jews today do).

In fact, there are people who get very offended with what Jesus Himself says.

John 14:6

Jesus told him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me.

Here is one way to understand this:

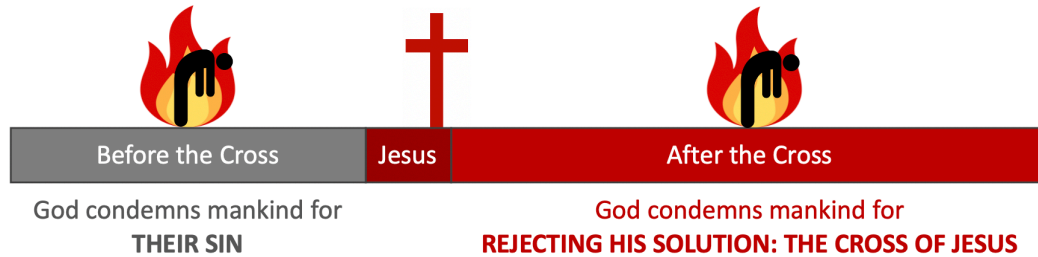
God's Judgment on the Pagan Kingdom of Man	God's Only Solution for Salvation
<p>Global Flood</p>  <p>Death of the Firstborn</p>  <p>Eternal Death</p> 	<p>The Ark</p>  <p>The Passover Lamb</p>  <p>Jesus Dying on the Cross</p> 

- At the global Flood, God provided His solution: the ark.
 - ➡ Those who refuse to get into the ark, meaning those who reject God's solution, would die in the Flood.
- In the Exodus account, God provided a way for the firstborn to live: kill the Passover lamb.
 - ➡ Those who refuse to kill a substitute lamb, meaning those who reject God's solution, would lose their firstborns.
- Likewise, for the problem of eternal separation from God and eternal death: God provided Jesus to die as a substitute for mankind.
 - ➡ Those who refuse to believe in Jesus' work on the cross as their substitute, meaning those who reject God's solution, would face eternal death.

When people reject the loving Creator-God's **one and only solution for sin**, which is Jesus, they are judged.

In fact, the Bible says that the cross changed the reason why God condemns mankind.

Before the cross, God condemns mankind specifically for their sin.



But today, all unbelievers are judged not just because of their sin, but specifically because they reject the cross of Jesus!

John 3:36 (NIV)

Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them.

John 3:18

"There is no judgment against anyone who believes in him. But anyone who does not believe in him has already been judged for not believing in God's one and only Son."

There is a massive shift in how God condemns unbelief! This means unbelieving mankind everywhere is now condemned by the cross.

God provided the way of salvation but unbelievers reject it. This makes Jesus' death on the cross the great separator of mankind.

- Those who believe in the cross are saved.
- Those who reject the cross are judged.

Christians are therefore not being "fussy" when we insist on sharing the good news of Jesus and His work on the cross for all mankind as the only way for salvation.

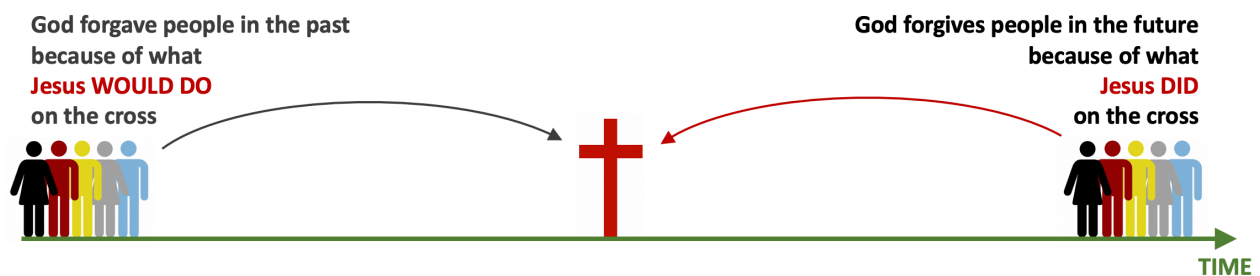
Just as Noah told people that the only way to be saved was through the ark, and as Moses said the only way for firstborns to be saved was through the slaying of the lamb, so today, the only way to be saved is through believing in Jesus and His work on the cross for us.

But then how did God save people in the Old Testament when Jesus had not yet lived and died on the cross?

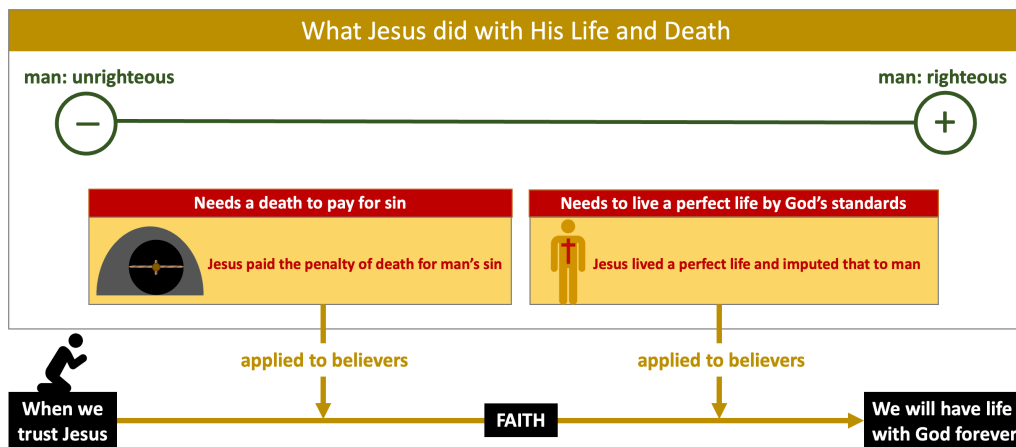
This is what God said through the apostle Paul.

Romans 3:25–26

²⁵ For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. People are made right with God when they believe that Jesus sacrificed his life, shedding his blood. This sacrifice shows that God was being fair when he held back and did not punish those who sinned in times past, ²⁶ for he was looking ahead and including them in what he would do in this present time. God did this to demonstrate his righteousness, for he himself is fair and just, and he makes sinners right in his sight when they believe in Jesus.



In the past before Jesus died, when a person trusted Yahweh for salvation, God reached forward in time to place that person's sin on Jesus at the cross, and at the same time God took Jesus' righteousness and credited it to that believer.



This was how Yahweh could forgive people in the Old Testament and count them as righteous. In fact, this is how God forgave and saved every Old Testament believer!

So the reason why God can show such great loving patience for sinners who do not deserve it is because of Jesus' death on the cross. This means that whenever God is gracious or merciful to anyone throughout human history, it is because of the cross.

God did not throw away His justice and righteousness. Rather, the cross shows God's amazing grace side by side with His righteousness!



Similarly, today, whenever anyone puts their trust in Yahweh for salvation, God reaches back in time to place their sin on Jesus and take His righteous life to credit it to the believer. That is how we became justified because God looks backwards into the past to apply the work of Christ onto us.

The cross then is our source of God's grace throughout all time: past, present and future.



C. Is mankind's personal response to Jesus the most important impact of the cross?

It is true that what Jesus did on the cross affects many believers personally and emotionally. It causes people to believe, feel grateful towards God and also want to live for Him.

However, we must not think that is all there is. The cross has a direct effect on the whole universe! In fact, the angelic realm is affected too.

The apostle Peter, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, wrote about something that is not easy to understand. He mentioned what Christ did in the spiritual realm after He died on the cross.

1 Peter 3:18–20 (NIV)

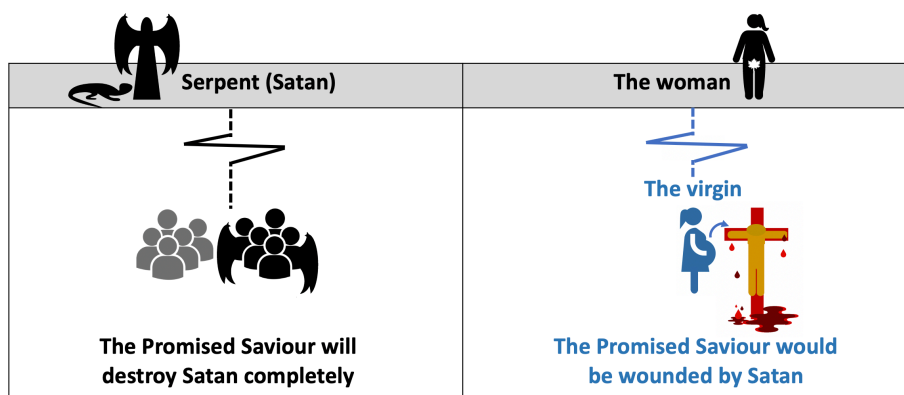
¹⁸ For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit. ¹⁹ After being made alive, he went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits— ²⁰ to those who were disobedient long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water,

Bible scholars do not all fully agree on what Peter is talking about here. However, many share this common understanding: Jesus went down to where a particular group of evil spirit beings (demons) had been imprisoned by God for something they did during the time of Noah.



Jesus proclaimed a message of victory to them, saying He had defeated them and Satan permanently. So Satan's attempts throughout history to thwart God's plan of salvation had failed.

All throughout history, we see Satan trying to destroy the Jews to prevent the promised Saviour from coming as God had announced in Eden (Genesis 3:15). Perhaps Satan thought he could stop Yahweh's plans.



But with Jesus' birth, life, death and resurrection, Satan had lost forever. This is what the writer of Hebrews explains.

Hebrews 2:14–15

¹⁴ Because God's children are human beings—made of flesh and blood—the Son also became flesh and blood. For only as a human being could he die, and only by dying could he break the power of the devil, who had the power of death. ¹⁵ Only in this way could he set free all who have lived their lives as slaves to the fear of dying.

Jesus' death on the cross disrupted, or affected, the supernatural world of the spirit beings! Jesus permanently defeated Satan and his power over death!

Paul also mentioned how Jesus' death on the cross is a victory over Satan.

Colossians 2:13–15

¹³ You were dead because of your sins and because your sinful nature was not yet cut away. Then God made you alive with Christ, for he forgave all our sins. ¹⁴ He canceled the record of the charges against us and took it away by nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵ In this way, he disarmed the spiritual rulers and authorities. He shamed them publicly by his victory over them on the cross.

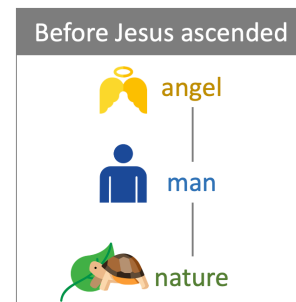
By His death, Jesus overpowered the spiritual forces! This is significant because for all of history up to this point, mankind has lived under the influence of the invisible realm of angels.

Psalms 8:4–6 (NIV)

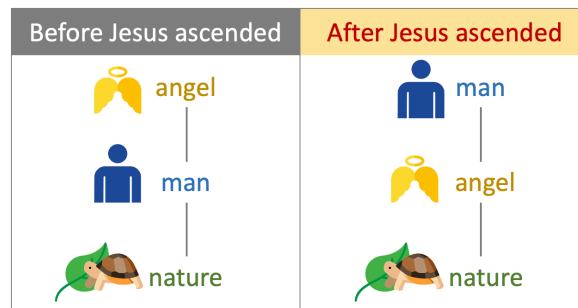
⁴ what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?

⁵ You have made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honor.

⁶ You made them rulers over the works of your hands; you put everything under their feet:



While Yahweh is the sovereign Ruler of the universe, under Him were the spirit beings and under them were humans. But when Christ died and rose again, God overturned the order of the universe!



Hebrews 2:5–9

⁵ And furthermore, it is not angels who will control the future world we are talking about.

⁶ For in one place the Scriptures say,

“What are mere mortals that you should think about them,
or a son of man that you should care for him?

⁷ Yet for a little while you made them a little lower than the angels
and crowned them with glory and honor.

⁸ You gave them authority over all things.”

Now when it says “all things,” it means nothing is left out. But we have not yet seen all things put under their authority. ⁹ What we do see is Jesus, who for a little while was given a position “a little lower than the angels”; and because he suffered death for us, he is now “crowned with glory and honor.” Yes, by God’s grace, Jesus tasted death for everyone.

With His death, Jesus destroyed the controlling influence of the spirit beings over mankind. And after Jesus’ resurrection, God caused Him to ascend physically through the heavens up to a position at His right hand, above all spirit beings.

Ephesians 4:10

And the same one who descended is the one who ascended higher than all the heavens, so that he might fill the entire universe with himself.

Hebrews 4:14 (ESV)

Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.

Jesus is known as the Second, or Last Adam.

1 Corinthians 15:45

The Scriptures tell us, “The first man, Adam, became a living person.” But the last Adam—that is, Christ—is a life-giving Spirit.

This title tells us that He is a fully physical human being who is perfectly righteous. And this human is now physically in heaven in control of all creation!

Ephesians 1:19–22

¹⁹ I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God's power for us who believe him. This is the same mighty power ²⁰ that raised Christ from the dead and seated him in the place of honor at God's right hand in the heavenly realms. ²¹ Now he is far above any ruler or authority or power or leader or anything else—not only in this world but also in the world to come. ²² God has put all things under the authority of Christ and has made him head over all things for the benefit of the church.

For the first time in history, Yahweh has placed a human, a representative of the human race, in charge of the universe! God has completely changed mankind's position through the death and resurrection of Christ! This act that God did was never previously mentioned in the Old Testament but is revealed in the New Testament.

So we must not be mistaken to think that the cross of Christ just affects people personally. It's not just a private thing that happens in our heart. No, it has massive universal impact in the physical realm and in the supernatural spiritual realm of angels and demons. The cross of Christ impacts all of the universe.

**D. How can God be so cruel to “send people to hell”?**

Some people think that God **actively** “sends people to hell”. And they get angry with Him for that. However, this is not true.

Actually, according to the Bible, the way God saves and judges is not the same. His mercy is greater than His wrath. How do we know this? Look at what He said to Abraham.

Genesis 12:3 (ESV)

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.”

God blesses “those” (plural or many) who bless Abraham but curses “him” (singular or one) who dishonours Abraham. God is more keen to bless than to curse. Again, here is what God said when He gave the Ten Commandments.

Exodus 20:5–6

⁵ You must not bow down to them or worship them, for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God who will not tolerate your affection for any other gods. I lay the sins of the parents upon their children; the entire family is affected—even children in the third and fourth generations of those who reject me. ⁶ But I lavish unfailing love for a thousand generations on those who love me and obey my commands.

God will lavish love for a thousand generations on those who obey Him but for those who disobey Him, only their third and fourth generations will be affected! God is genuinely concerned for people and He would rather bless than curse!

Similarly, we see this same character of God when He saves and judges.

How God saves

Yahweh is directly and personally responsible for doing good to man. To save a person, **God actively does** some very important things:

- He offers His grace, meaning His love, to people who do not deserve it.
- He provides payment of sin (atonement) through Jesus.
- He gives guidance through the Holy Spirit to help people understand His message of salvation so that they can believe.



Based on this, people decide if they will accept God's solution.

But this is very different from how God judges.

How God judges

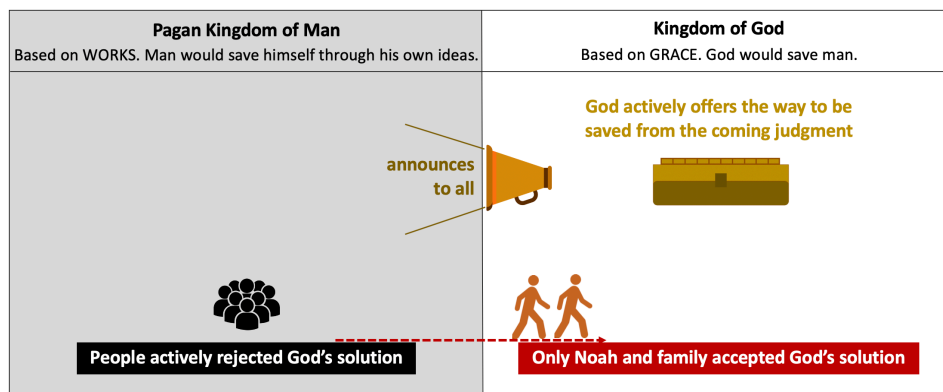
God judges when **people actively reject** His solution to their sin problem and the salvation that Jesus gives. People choose for themselves to reject. So people are directly and personally responsible for their own eternal death.

How do we know this? Again, we understand this better because of the Flood and the Passover.

At the global Flood

God told all people of the coming global judgment and graciously provided a way to be saved from the Flood.

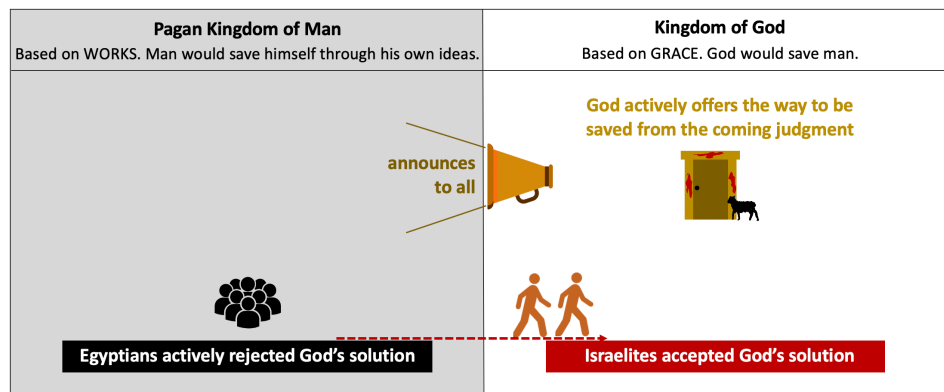
- The people **actively rejected** God's solution and were judged in the floodwaters.
- Only Noah and his family **believed** and entered the ark.



At the Passover

God told the people about the coming judgment of the death of the firstborn in all households. He graciously provided a way of escape.

- The Egyptian families **actively rejected** God's solution and their firstborns were judged.
- The Israelites **believed** and killed the lamb and entered the house covered by the blood.



In both these events, Yahweh lovingly provided salvation from the coming judgment. It is the same when Jesus saves mankind.

At Jesus' second coming

Jesus Himself explains the difference between how He judges and saves.

In Matthew 25, Jesus describes what will happen when He returns to earth to judge the Gentile nations. At this judgment, Jesus will separate good and evil.

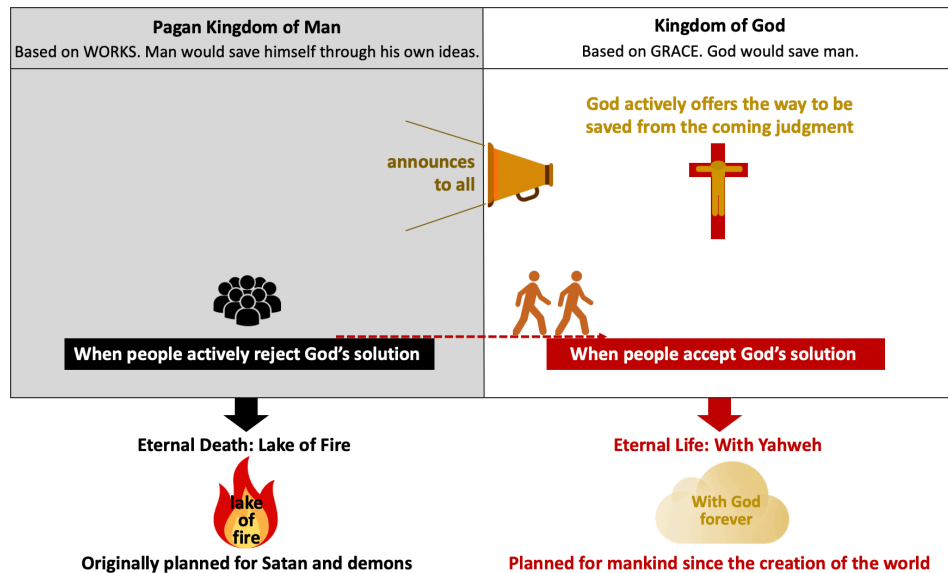
Matthew 25:31–34, 41

³¹ “But when the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit upon his glorious throne. ³² All the nations will be gathered in his presence, and he will separate the people as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³ He will place the sheep at his right hand and the goats at his left.

³⁴ “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the creation of the world.

⁴¹ “Then the King will turn to those on the left and say, ‘Away with you, you cursed ones, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his demons.

The important detail we want to notice is that from the creation of the world, Yahweh had prepared the Kingdom of God for everyone! That was His plan for all mankind—that everyone should live with Him in His Kingdom.



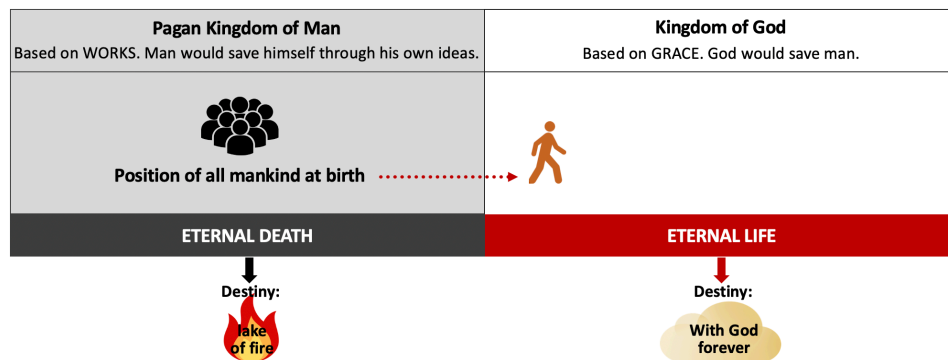
The “eternal fire” or lake of fire is God’s way of permanently separating evil from good forever. Yahweh had **originally** prepared this lake of fire for “the devil and his demons”. He did this when the devil rebelled, along with the fallen angels who followed him. The lake of fire will be their eternal prison for the crime they had committed against Yahweh.

This lake of fire was not meant for mankind! In other words, in Yahweh’s original plan, **He did not intend to send people into the lake of fire.**

But because of their rebellion, anyone who rejects God’s gracious offer of salvation will be thrown into the lake of fire to join the devil and his fallen angels. This will also be their eternal prison.

How will they end up there? By their own personal choice to reject God. No one can say that God planned for them to be thrown there.

Put another way, even at birth, sinful people are already on their way to eternal death. And that’s where they would go if they continue to actively reject God’s solution for sin. But if they accept God’s solution, they will be saved from eternal death and placed into eternal life.



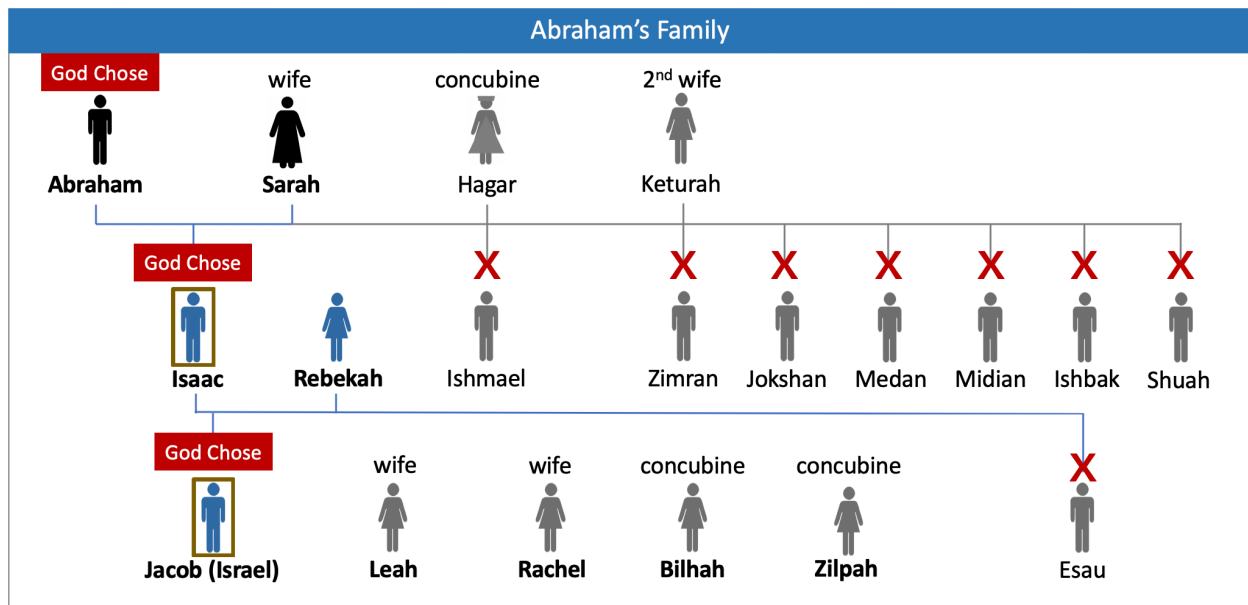
So, God does not actively “send people to hell”. God actively works to save people from eternal death!



E. The Bible talks about “election”. Does this mean God alone decides who gets saved and who does not?

In the Bible, we do see that God “chooses”. For example:

- **God chose** Abraham and his descendants for a very special job: they were supposed to share His good news of how to be saved with the whole world.
- But by specifically choosing Abraham’s descendants, Isaac and Jacob, **God did not choose** Ishmael, the sons of Keturah or Esau.



So what does this mean that Yahweh chose some and not others?

God knew that people would have trouble understanding this, so the apostle Paul wrote to explain more. He said that some people would feel that Yahweh is unfair in His electing choices. They say this because God still expects those He did not elect to also respond to Him and believe Him.

Romans 9:19–20a

¹⁹ Well then, you might say, “Why does God blame people for not responding? Haven’t they simply done what he makes them do?” ²⁰ No, don’t say that.

Paul then starts to give His answer by asking some important questions.

Romans 9:20b–21

²⁰ Who are you, a mere human being, to argue with God? Should the thing that was created say to the one who created it, “Why have you made me like this?” ²¹ When a potter makes jars out of clay, doesn’t he have a right to use the same lump of clay to make one jar for decoration and another to throw garbage into?

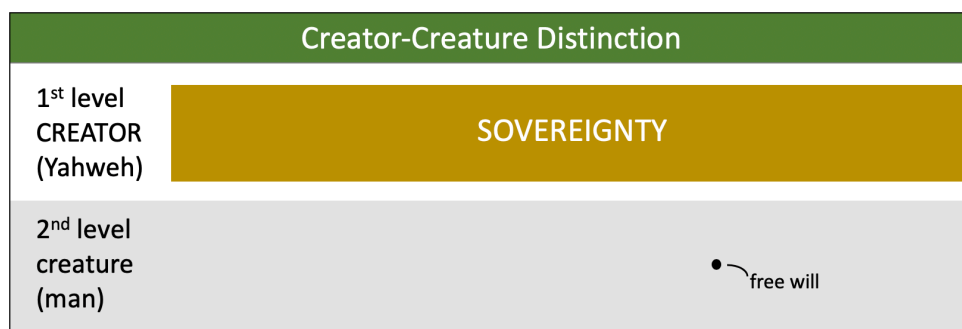
Question 1	Who are you, a mere human being, to argue with God?
Question 2	Should the thing that was created say to the one who created it, "Why have you made me like this?"
Question 3	When a potter makes jars out of clay, doesn't he have a right to use the same lump of clay to make one jar for decoration and another to throw garbage into?

Paul didn't come up with this pottery example.

Instead, he got it from two Old Testament passages where God Himself explained the relationship between His election and man's genuine free will.

When Paul wrote:	Paul was quoting from:
Romans 9:20c Should the thing that was created say to the one who created it, "Why have you made me like this?"	Isaiah 45:9 "What sorrow awaits those who argue with their Creator. Does a clay pot argue with its maker? Does the clay dispute with the one who shapes it, saying, 'Stop, you're doing it wrong!' Does the pot exclaim, 'How clumsy can you be?'"
	Isaiah 29:16 How foolish can you be? He is the Potter, and he is certainly greater than you, the clay! Should the created thing say of the one who made it, "He didn't make me"? Does a jar ever say, "The potter who made me is stupid"?

Paul is saying that as Creator-Owner, Yahweh has every right to decide what to create. That is what it means that God is sovereign.

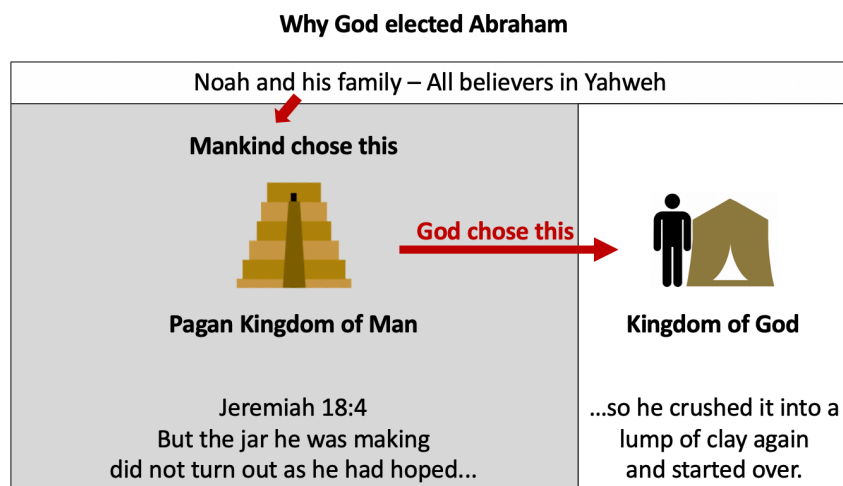


When Paul wrote:	Paul was quoting from:
Romans 9:21 When a potter makes jars out of clay, doesn't he have a right to use the same lump of clay to make one jar for decoration and another to throw garbage into?	Jeremiah 18:1–6 ¹ The LORD gave another message to Jeremiah. He said, ² “Go down to the potter’s shop, and I will speak to you there.” ³ So I did as he told me and found the potter working at his wheel. ⁴ <u>But the jar he was making did not turn out as he had hoped, so he crushed it into a lump of clay again and started over.</u> ⁵ Then the LORD gave me this message: ⁶ “O Israel, <u>can I not do to you as this potter has done to his clay? As the clay is in the potter’s hand, so are you in my hand.</u>

Paul uses the picture of the potter who has complete control and right to decide what to do with the clay. He uses this to explain that God has complete control over mankind and He had every right to choose Abraham and his descendants for a special job.

This was what happened that led to God choosing Abraham:

- The clay did not turn out as the potter was hoping, meaning that mankind turned rebellious.
- So the potter took a portion of it and remoulded it to suit his purpose. This is referring to God’s electing (choosing) of Abraham and his family.



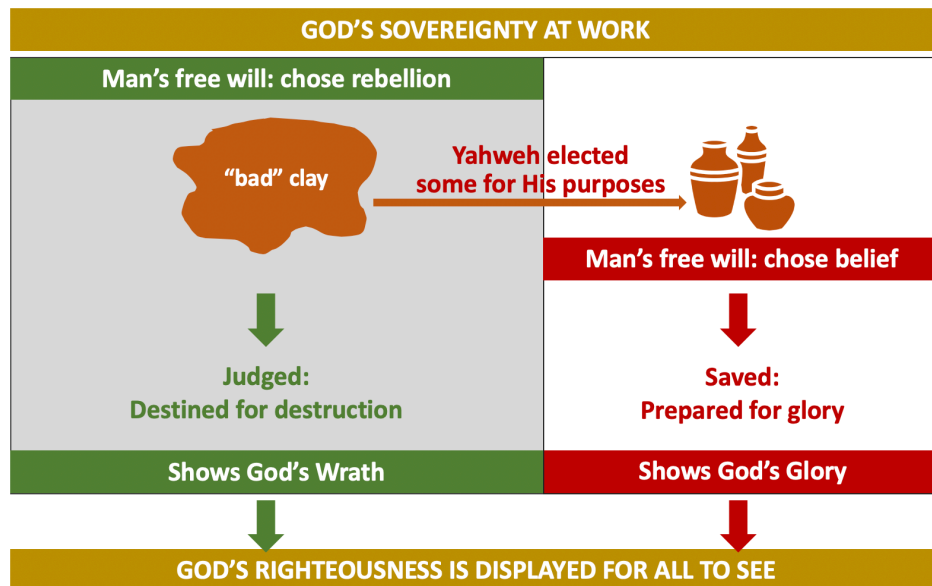
Then Paul finishes his explanation with this:

Romans 9:22–23

²² In the same way, even though God has the right to show his anger and his power, he is very patient with those on whom his anger falls, who are destined for destruction.

²³ He does this to make the riches of his glory shine even brighter on those to whom he shows mercy, who were prepared in advance for glory.

- **All mankind** has chosen rebellion and are headed for judgment (we are all clay that did not turn out the way Yahweh intended).
 - ➔ So we (the “bad” clay) have made ourselves ready to receive God’s judgment (“who **are destined for destruction**”). Yet, God is patient and does not destroy us immediately.
- But in His sovereignty, Yahweh interrupts and steps in to **choose some people** (took some of the clay) for a special purpose while leaving all others in their rebellion.
 - ➔ These whom God has selected and who **have chosen to believe** in Him are saved and go on to fulfil God’s purposes (“**who were prepared in advance for glory**”).



The difference looks small, but it is important:

1. **The “destined for destruction” group:**

They are headed for judgment because **they actively choose to rebel**.

2. **The “prepared for glory” group:**

- **God actively saves by electing** some people.
- If they choose to believe, He works diligently with them to fulfil His purposes. **We must not forget that these elected or chosen people still need to show personal trust in God.** For example, when Yahweh called Abraham, Abraham still had to choose to believe Yahweh’s words. Only after Abraham believed, then God’s plan for him could go ahead.

This is how God Himself explains “election”. He chooses. But man also has free will. Both are true.

However, it seems that God “calls” differently to different people.

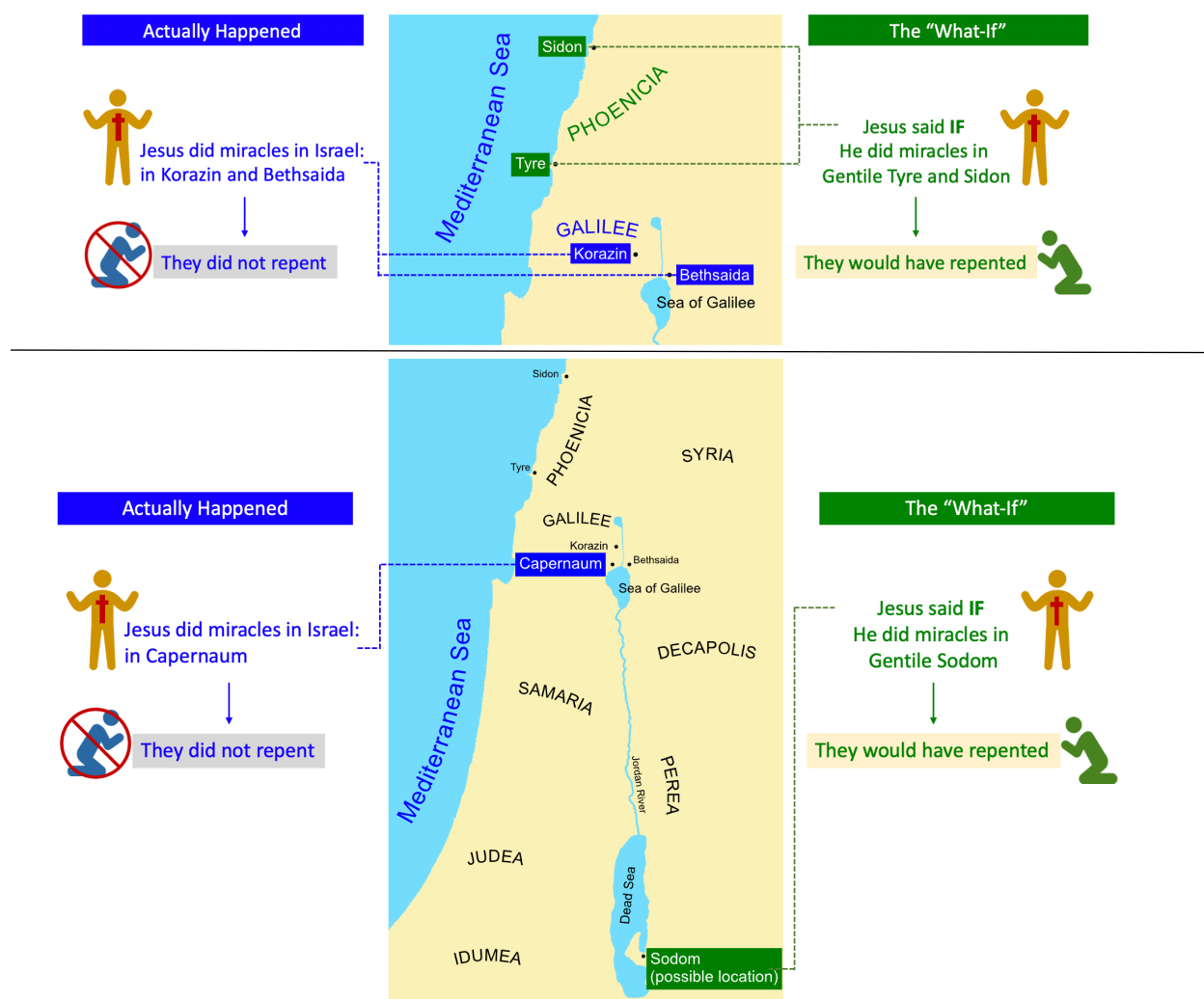
This is what Jesus said:

Matthew 11:20–24

²⁰ Then Jesus began to denounce the towns where he had done so many of his miracles, because they hadn't repented of their sins and turned to God.

²¹ “What sorrow awaits you, Korazin and Bethsaida! For if the miracles I did in you had been done in wicked Tyre and Sidon, their people would have repented of their sins long ago, clothing themselves in burlap and throwing ashes on their heads to show their remorse. ²² I tell you, Tyre and Sidon will be better off on judgment day than you.

²³ “And you people of Capernaum, will you be honored in heaven? No, you will go down to the place of the dead. For if the miracles I did for you had been done in wicked Sodom, it would still be here today. ²⁴ I tell you, even Sodom will be better off on judgment day than you.”



Jesus said these words part way through His ministry on earth, when the nation of Israel was beginning to reject Him. But what exactly was He saying?

- Jesus was saying that **God decides how and when He will call to people**.
 - He will call to some people “loudly”: for example, He used miracles to call to Korazin and Bethsaida, Jewish cities.
 - But He didn’t call as loudly to others: for example, He did not use miracles to call to Tyre and Sidon which were Phoenician (non-Jewish) cities.
- Whether Jesus calls “louder” or “softer”, **each person has a responsibility to respond** to His call. They have a choice to accept or reject.
 - When it comes to the final judgment, the Gentiles from Tyre and Sidon are going to scold the Jews from Korazin and Bethsaida for rejecting the message and grace that God gave them.
- God knows all the “what-ifs”**. If God had called to Tyre and Sidon “louder”, using the miracles He did at Korazin and Bethsaida, Jesus said that they would have repented and believed.

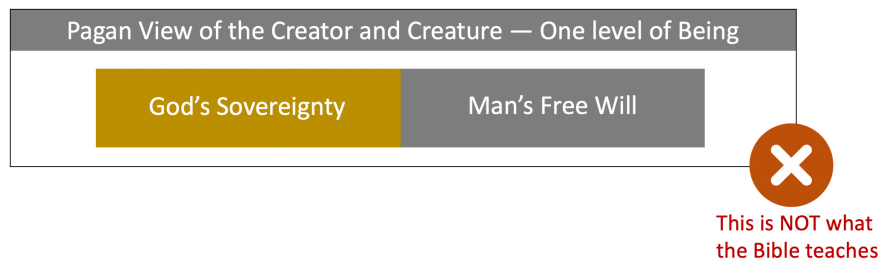


Some questions naturally come to our minds:

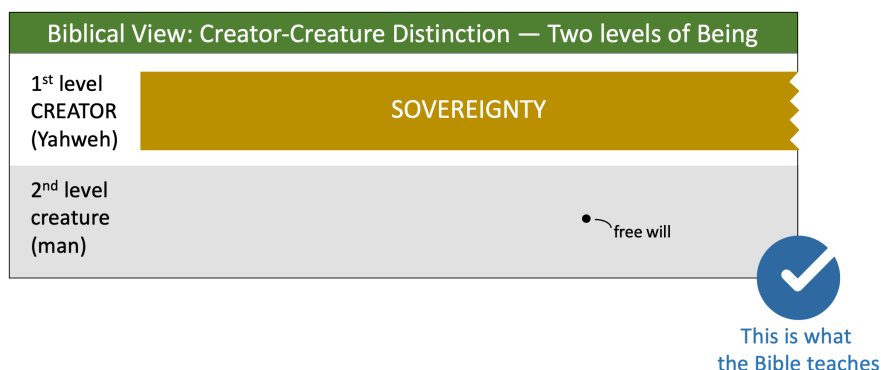
Question 1: Does this mean that God is sovereign and man does not have real free will?

Answer: No. We need to remember how the Creator-creature distinction works.

The Creator-creature distinction helps us understand how God can be sovereign and yet mankind has genuine free-will choices. Both are not operating at the same level, meaning that God and man are not equal “partners” in decisions.



God's sovereignty and mankind's free will operate on different levels that never clash, conflict or contradict each other.



God's sovereignty allows Him to choose a group of people for His purposes. At the same time people have God-given free will to make real choices. This means:

- mankind is held responsible for their free-will choices of rebellious acts.
- God is to be praised for interrupting and actively stepping in to save people.

Question 2: If God knew that Tyre and Sidon would repent with a “louder” call, why didn't He call louder?

Answer: We don't know. Scripture does not give the answer.

However, this was what Jesus said after He condemned Korazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum:

Matthew 11:25–30

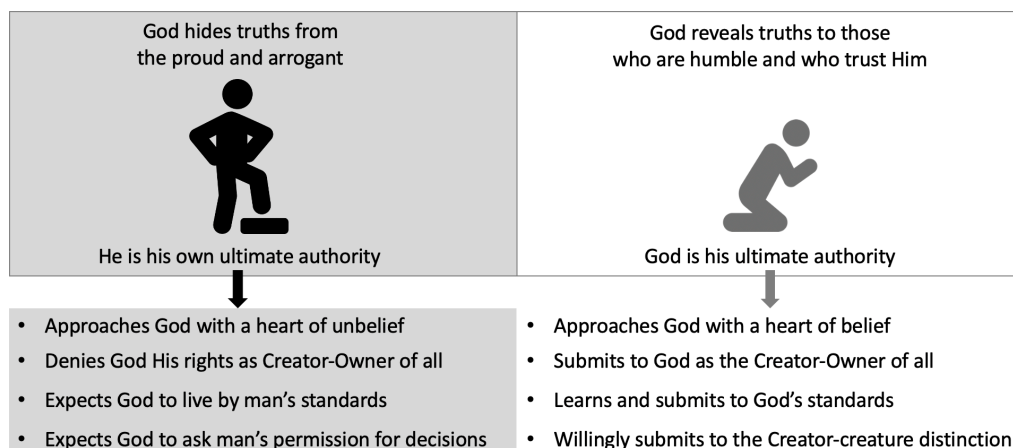
²⁵ At that time Jesus prayed this prayer: “O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, thank you for hiding these things from those who think themselves wise and clever, and for revealing them to the childlike. ²⁶ Yes, Father, it pleased you to do it this way!”

²⁷ “My Father has entrusted everything to me. No one truly knows the Son except the Father, and no one truly knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.”

²⁸ Then Jesus said, “Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.” ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light.”

Jesus said that God has hidden the mysteries of why He does certain things from “those who think themselves wise and clever”, meaning proud and arrogant people. God has every right to do that because He is Yahweh, the Creator-God of the universe. He does not need to tell mankind all His reasons or ask mankind's permission to do certain things.

But more importantly, Jesus then goes on to graciously invite everyone to “come to me” and to “find rest” in Him. Jesus is saying that only those who come to Him in childlike faith, relying on Him and not on themselves will find peace, security and assurance.



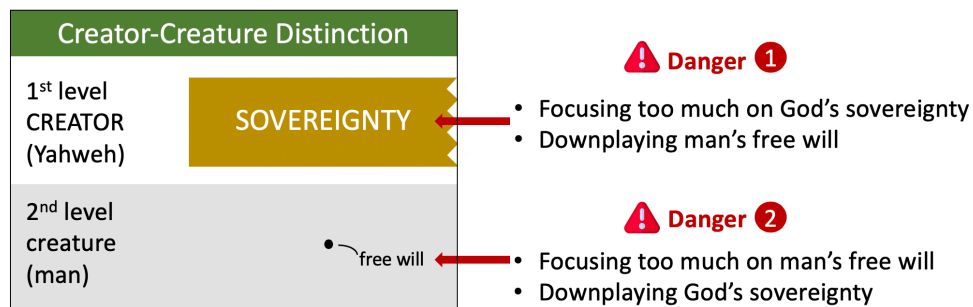
Softly or loudly, Jesus calls to all people everywhere to come to Him for salvation. We are all personally responsible for our response to His calling.

- For those of us who have believed in Christ for salvation, we should be thankful that God called us loudly enough that we responded! We should be immensely grateful and never take His call for granted!
- For all the people whom we care about who have yet to trust God, we need to pray that Yahweh will have mercy on them and call them in a way that would help them respond positively.

How can it be that Yahweh is sovereign and mankind also has genuine free will at the same time? Isn't it one or the other?

In learning the relationship between God's sovereignty and man's free will, we need to be careful not to push Scripture too far and make it say what it does not say. We need to be careful not to thoughtlessly disrespect the Creator-creature difference that the Bible teaches from Genesis 1:1 right to the very end.

Examples of pushing Scripture too far to make it say what it does not say



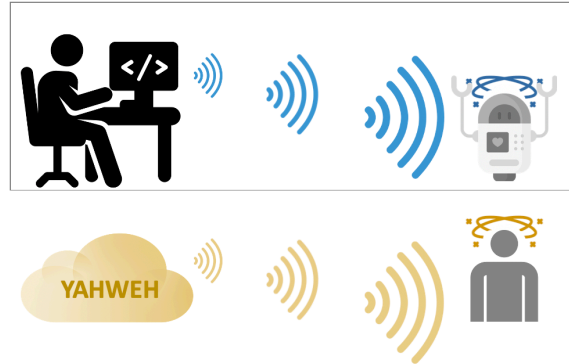
Danger 1: Focusing only on God's sovereignty.

Some people think that because God is sovereign over everything and everyone, He decides who will believe and who will reject. It's not up to mankind at all but is totally up to God.



More...

This way of thinking takes away people's genuine free will. It makes God out to be some kind of heavenly computer programmer who programs people in the same way that a human programs a computer to control a machine.



This type of thinking disregards the difference between the infinite Creator and finite human creatures. It thinks that God's control and human control operate at the same level and in the same way.



If we think this way, we would end up believing that God has to take control and override peoples' choices to get His way. He would have to program their decisions. In other words, people would not actually have free will.



But we do not see this teaching in the Bible.

God gave mankind the ability to make a real choice to believe or reject God. This is why there are many passages in the Bible where God is encouraging people to make the right decision. This was what Yahweh Himself said to the prophet Zechariah.

Zechariah 1:3

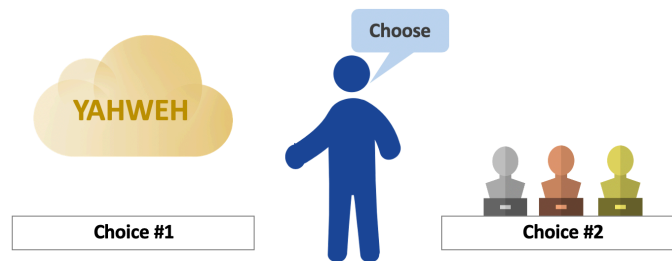
Therefore, say to the people, 'This is what the LORD of Heaven's Armies says: Return to me, and I will return to you, says the LORD of Heaven's Armies.'

Why would He have to say this if His sovereign will overrules everything and He can “make” people do what He wants?

In fact, the leaders Yahweh put in place also understood that mankind has free will or responsible choice. This was what Joshua said to the Israelites:

Joshua 24:15

But if you refuse to serve the LORD, then choose today whom you will serve. Would you prefer the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates? Or will it be the gods of the Amorites in whose land you now live? But as for me and my family, we will serve the LORD.”



Joshua knew he had free will and could choose, and he knew the people could choose also. And they would each be responsible for the choices they made. In other words, they had to answer for their decisions.

The idea that God just runs through the universe doing whatever He wants without giving man free will is not what the Bible teaches.

Danger 2: Focusing too much on man's free will.

Other people think that God allows man to decide everything without Him interfering. They think that God's sovereignty just means He looks into the future to see who will believe and who will not. Then He only calls those who will believe.



This idea gives man the ultimate control because God leaves decisions to man and just goes along with what man decides. We also do not find this teaching in the Bible.

Rather, God tells us that He is the Creator and He is sovereign. He is totally in control of world history. He never loses control of the universe nor lets anyone else take control.

Isaiah 46:9–10

⁹ Remember the things I have done in the past.

For I alone am God!

I am God, and there is none like me.

¹⁰ Only I can tell you the future

before it even happens.

Everything I plan will come to pass,

for I do whatever I wish.

Some people think it has to be one or the other: either God has sovereignty or mankind has free will. They think these two are in conflict with each other. Actually, it is because God is **completely sovereign** that He can give mankind free will.

Why? Because no one can stop Him from fulfilling His plans. This means He can offer mankind genuine free will and people can make whatever decisions they want, but they can never threaten or endanger God's plans and will.

Whereas, a God who is not sovereign would act to block people from making certain choices. He would have to intentionally limit mankind's free will to ensure that people never make choices that would mess up His plans! Or He would need to force them (or program them) to make certain choices so that His plans would succeed.

This means that only a sovereign, all-knowing, all-powerful Creator-God can allow people the genuine freedom to make choices.

God's sovereignty and man's free will (that is, responsible choice) are both true. And that is where we must leave it, because the Bible does not explain more than that.

Often, many of us want so much to understand these mysteries that we push our thinking too far and we fail to remember the central truth of the Bible. Reality does not work at just one level where God and mankind wrestle for control. Rather, the Bible tells us there are two levels of existence:

- At the first level is the infinite, eternal, sovereign, all-knowing, all-powerful, all-righteous, all-just and loving Creator.
- And at the second level is all of finite creation.

INFINITE GOD

All-knowing. All-powerful. All-wise. All-righteous. All-just....

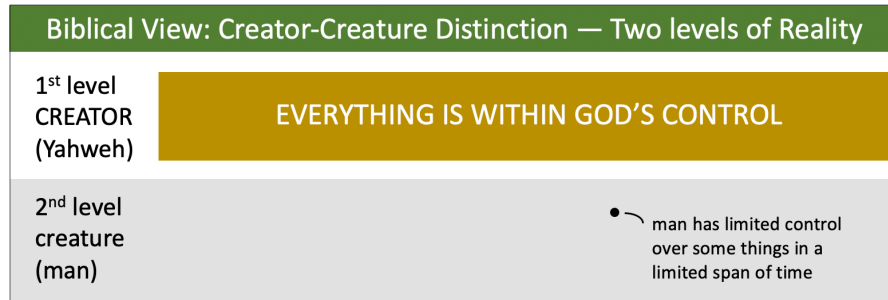
Infinite. Never Runs Out.

FINITE MAN

understanding

limited

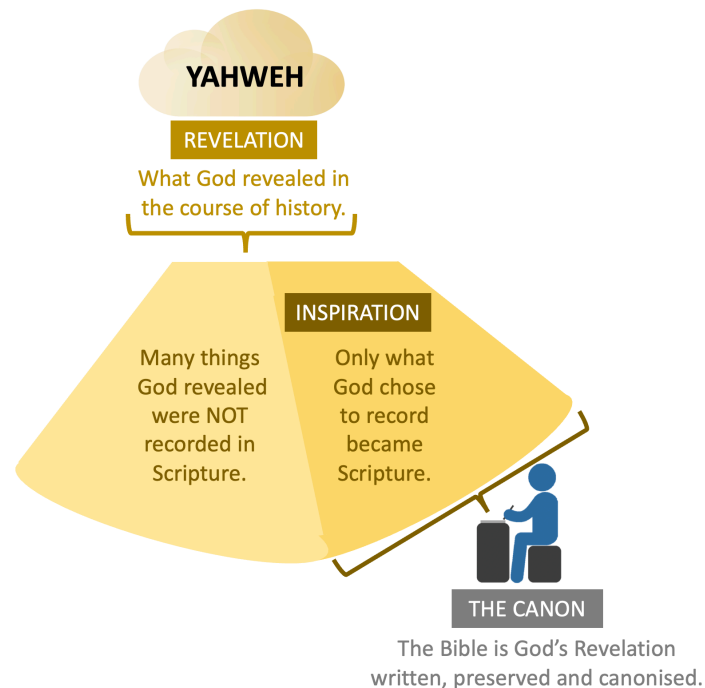
Both levels of reality are true and both work at the same time without one overriding the other. God is sovereign and fulfils all of His plans. Mankind makes real choices and is responsible for the consequences.



How can this be so? God did not explain this mystery fully to us. This is what Moses said:

Deuteronomy 29:29

“The LORD our God has secrets known to no one. We are not accountable for them, but we and our children are accountable forever for all that he has revealed to us, so that we may obey all the terms of these instructions.



Yahweh has not revealed everything to mankind and He doesn't want us to be overly concerned about those secrets. We should not come up with man-made ideas, guesses or answers that God did not give. We must not push the Bible beyond what God has told us. There are many things about the infinite Yahweh that are beyond our finite understanding.

The apostle Paul tells us:

Romans 11:33–35

³³ Oh, how great are God's riches and wisdom and knowledge! How impossible it is for us to understand his decisions and his ways!

³⁴ For who can know the Lord's thoughts?
Who knows enough to give him advice?

³⁵ And who has given him so much
that he needs to pay it back?

On the other hand, Yahweh has taught us enough in the Bible that we might live obediently in a way that pleases Him.

2 Timothy 3:16–17

¹⁶ All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. ¹⁷ God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work.



Sufficient to
equip us for
every good work!

Whatever God has taught us in the Bible are the truths that we need to focus on. Those are the truths that we will be held accountable for. God will ask us what we have done with the truth and knowledge He has given to us.

We must never think that we can know everything about God. This is what Yahweh Himself said:

Isaiah 55:8–9

⁸ "My thoughts are nothing like your thoughts," says the LORD.
"And my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine.

⁹ For just as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so my ways are higher than your ways
and my thoughts higher than your thoughts.

Because of this, we have to be satisfied with whatever God has revealed and explained to us. And in matters that we can't understand fully, like why God calls louder to some and softer to others, we need to trust His character and track record.

We have seen so much evidence throughout the Bible that Yahweh is all-good, all-loving and all-wise. He is not malicious. He's an ever-loving Father.

Psalms 145:17

The LORD is righteous in all his ways
and kind in all his works.

When Yahweh was about to judge Sodom, Yahweh spoke to Abraham about it (Genesis 18:16–33). During their conversation, Abraham said that because Yahweh was righteous,

surely He would not put the righteous people in Sodom to death along with the wicked. Then Abraham added:

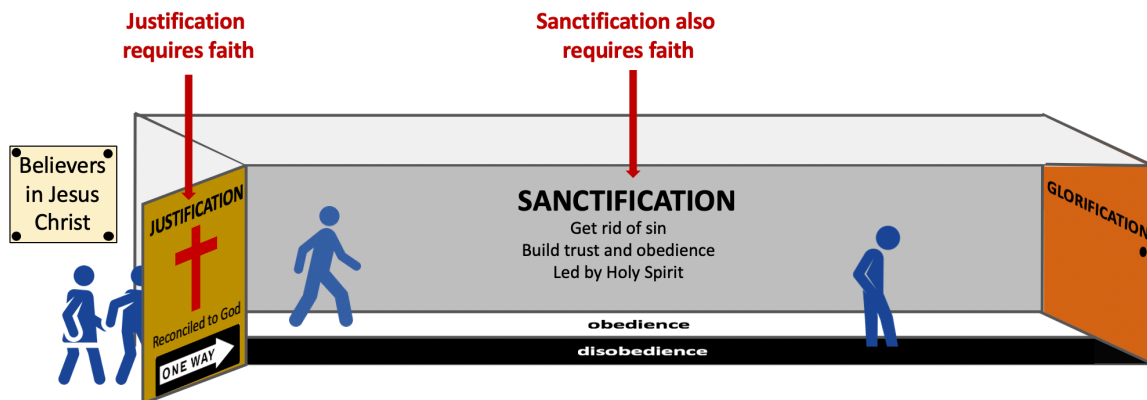
Genesis 18:25b

Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?

Abraham knew that the answer to his own question was “yes”. Yahweh would always do what was just. Even when Abraham didn’t know nor understand everything, he trusted in the righteousness of God. We need to do the same.

Based on Yahweh’s amazing track record of faithfulness and how He relates to man, each of us made the decision to put our faith in Him to become believers. That took faith. Importantly, it was not “blind faith”. It is faith in a God who has a credible track record.

However, living the Christian life also takes faith. Do we trust that God knows best what He wants to reveal to us? Can we be satisfied with that? Both becoming a believer and living the Christian life are by faith.



The Messiah's Works are Prophesied in the Jewish Calendar

There is one more remarkable aspect we should appreciate about Yahweh's plan of salvation. We know that the death of Christ is a very significant event for mankind because it is through His death that God can justify anyone who believes in Him.

While many parts of Scripture prophesied about Messiah's death, what is fascinating is that God also gave exact timings of when the events surrounding Jesus' death would occur! Specifically, God had built it into Israel's national calendar!

Exactly what did God do? Recall that at Mount Sinai, God gave the Jewish nation their calendar. For perspective, the following table shows how Israel's calendar lines up with our modern one.



The Jewish months are based on the lunar calendar

Nisan	Iyyar	Sivan	Tammuz	Av	Elul	Tishrei	Heshvan	Kislev	Tevet	Shevat	Adar
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Compared with the Gregorian solar calendar

Mar-Apr	Apr-May	May-Jun	Jun-Jul	Jul-Aug	Aug-Sep	Sep-Oct	Oct-Nov	Nov-Dec	Dec-Jan	Jan-Feb	Feb-Mar
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In Leviticus 23, God put in place seven annual feasts (the word "feast" in Hebrew actually means "appointed time").

There are:

- four feasts in the spring

SPRING FEASTS			
14 NISAN  Passover (Leviticus 23:5)	15 NISAN  Unleavened Bread (Leviticus 23:6)	16 NISAN  First Fruits (Leviticus 23:10-11)	50 days after First Fruits  Weeks or Pentecost (Leviticus 23:15-17)

- three feasts in the fall (or autumn).

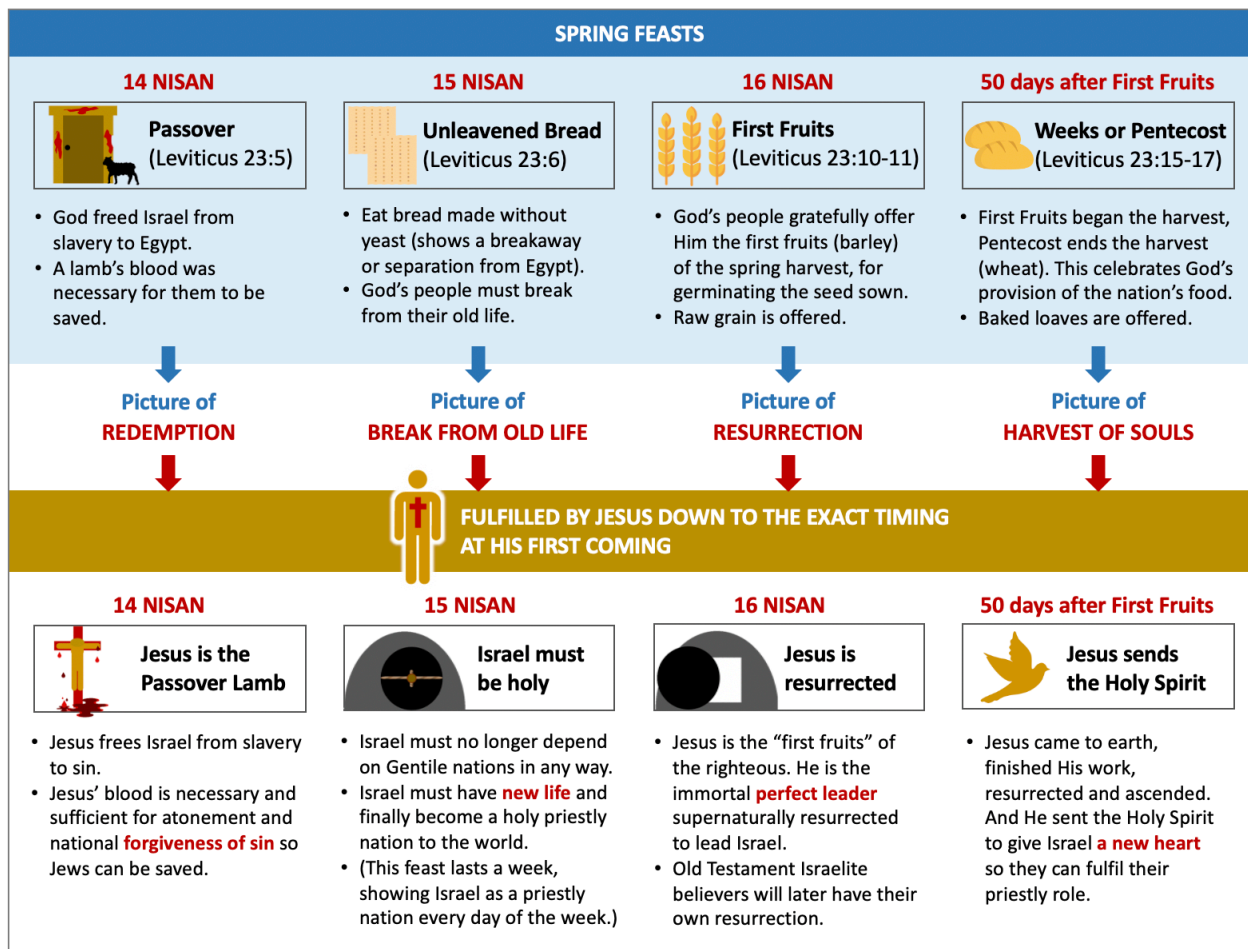
FALL FEASTS		
1 TISHREI  Trumpets (Leviticus 23:24-25)	10 TISHREI  Day of Atonement (Leviticus 23:27-32)	15 TISHREI  Tabernacles or Festival of Shelters (Leviticus 23:34-43)

Israel observed these “appointed times” each year and were reminded of God’s actions in saving them from Egypt and God’s continuous actions of securing them in their land and providing them food.

But there was more to Israel’s calendar. These feasts were also prophetic in nature.

The following diagram shows the dates and meaning of each of the spring feasts. But they also show how these “appointed times” were specific pictures of what Jesus would do. These spring feasts focus upon God’s redemption of Israel.

And indeed, Jesus fulfilled these pictures right down to the exact day, at His first coming!



God gave Israel their feasts as a picture of what their Messiah would do for them! In upcoming lessons, we will learn how Jesus’ actions at His first coming provided all that Israel needed spiritually to fulfil the mission that God had called them to do.

And we shall also see how the fall feasts look ahead to the work of the Messiah when He returns at His second coming.

FALL FEASTS		
<p>1 TISHREI</p> <div>  <p>Trumpets (Leviticus 23:24-25)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The blowing of trumpets calls Israel to gather. • It is a day of complete rest and to present an offering to God. </div>	<p>10 TISHREI</p> <div>  <p>Day of Atonement (Leviticus 23:27-32)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is the most solemn day for Israel. • The high priest presents animal sacrifices for all Israel to pay for the nation's sins. </div>	<p>15 TISHREI</p> <div>  <p>Tabernacles or Festival of Shelters (Leviticus 23:34-43)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Signals the time of the fall harvest. • For seven days, they live in booths or temporary shelters in the fields. It reminds them of the years living in the wilderness after leaving Egypt. • It also reminds them of being able to dwell in their land securely with God. </div>

The fall feasts focus upon Israel's confession and restoration. And the gap of time between the spring and fall feasts is a picture of the gap between the 69th and 70th week of Daniel's prophecy about the period of seventy sets of seven (Daniel 9:24–27).

Israel's prophetic calendar really shows how meticulous and sovereign Yahweh is in the way He makes His plans and directs history. It shows He never panics nor makes hasty decisions in response to mankind's actions. He is ever ready!

Discussion Questions

Discuss the following questions as a group or use them for personal reflection.

1. What are your thoughts on the interaction between God's sovereignty and man's responsibility for their personal choices?
2. How would you respond to someone who asks why can't God just forgive our sins? Why must He insist on an exclusive way that involves such a bloody atonement?
3. How easy is it to understand or explain what happened at the cross if we were to ignore the Old Testament? Think back to the lessons on Christ and take away all the Old Testament Scriptures used to explain the birth, life and death of Christ. Also take away all New Testament passages that are quotes of the Old Testament. Then try explaining the meaning and impact of the cross.



Pre-reading for next lesson: Matthew 28; Mark 16; Luke 24; John 20–21; Acts 1:1–11; 1 Corinthians 15