



# Truth

## On Tough Texts

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### *We Preach Christ: The Bible Story*

#### 1 Corinthians 1:23–24

**B**ut we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.

This expanded issue is a little different. Instead of examining a *tough* text, we focus on a *crucial* text, one that is essential, pivotal, and critical to Christianity. Our study is based on a recent sermon and also available in audio and booklet form (p. 8).<sup>1</sup> Its purpose is two-fold: *First*, it is an encouragement to Christians to understand the central theme of the Bible, in contrast to the prevailing ideas in our day of what the Bible is about. While short, we pray it is comprehensive enough to challenge each of us with what our message and mandate are. *Second*, we also pray that God will use this little work in the lives of readers who are not yet believers, as it includes a clear Gospel presentation. We pray they will see what the Bible is truly about and how it addresses their real need. We also pray that this material will have wide distribution.<sup>2</sup>

*What is the Bible about?* By listening to some preachers and teachers today, one might think that the core message of the Bible is how to be prosperous or how to get what we want from God. Listening to others would lead us to believe it's all about personal fulfillment. Still others view the Bible's central message as one of social activism that addresses the physical and emotional needs of people and helps them "find purpose." Still others don't look even that deeply, viewing the Bible as just mythology and allegory, or at most just stories with a moral lesson much like Aesop's Fables.

*So what is the Bible really about?* An analogy will help introduce our theme. In the Library of Congress there is a unique copy of the U. S. Constitution. It was beautifully penned by an artist but has an odd characteristic: for no apparent reason some of the words are cramped together while

in other places they are spaced far apart. If one stands back and looks at it from a distance, however, the artist's real design emerges. He did not just write out the Constitution, but he did so in a way that portrays the face of George Washington, the cramped and spaced-out words forming lights and shadows on the page.

This well illustrates the Bible. For example, while a mere five words in Genesis 1:16 describe the incomprehensible creation of the stars, 50 chapters are devoted to explaining the Tabernacle.<sup>3</sup> Likewise, a single page of Scripture tells us all we know of the life of Jesus between His birth and baptism, while there is page after page of genealogies that seem to us today totally irrelevant. Why such irregularities in the narrative? The answer becomes clear when we step back from the specifics and look at the whole. It is then we see the portrait of Jesus Christ. While the specifics—words, doctrines, and history—are certainly critical, we must always keep them in the perspective of the whole picture.<sup>4</sup>

So again, *what is the Bible about?* It is about **Christ**, what He has done, is doing, and will do. And it is our text that underscores this central theme. That is why the Apostle Paul declares **we preach Christ** (emphasis added). The word **preach** is the Greek *kērussō*, which literally means "to announce or to publicly herald" (cf. 2 Tim. 4:2). The noun form *kērux* (1 Tim. 2:7; 2 Tim. 1:11; 2 Pet. 2:5) refers to the imperial herald who represented the emperor or king and announced his wishes. This word is formal, grave, serious, and authoritative. The herald was not like an ambassador who might "negotiate"; he was a representative of the king and would simply announce the king's decrees. That is our mandate: to **preach Christ**. As Puritan William Perkins observed, the heart of all preaching is to "preach *one* Christ by Christ to the *praise* of Christ."<sup>5</sup>

But how do we preach Him? As a moral example? A wise sage? A social activist? A religious revolutionary? A genie who grants our wishes? Paul answers: **we preach Christ crucified** (emphasis added). This message was offensive to the **Jews** because they could not accept a Messiah who would be **crucified** like a common criminal. Similarly, **Greeks** (i.e., Gentiles) could not accept this because it was utter foolishness to think anyone who was crucified, which was usually a criminal slave, could be the savior of anything. The same attitudes prevail today. Many shy away from—and some even deliberately avoid—mentioning sin, righteousness, judgment, the Cross, blood, repentance, and other themes, lest they offend people’s sensitivities.

But quite the contrary, Paul says, **Christ is the very power of God, and the wisdom of God**. As he goes on to write in 1 Corinthians 2:1–5, he “determined not to know any thing among [them except] Jesus Christ, and him crucified” and refused to mix man’s ideas, philosophies, and traditions with God’s Word, for such things make God’s Word useless. He adds again that both Jews and Gentiles mock this approach. Jews want signs and wonders (as do many today who want something exciting and entertaining), and Gentiles want philosophy, debate, rationalism, and scientific empiricism. But **Christ Himself** is the power of God. Paul declared the same truth in Romans 1:16: “I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.” Again, while many today want to resort to rational arguments, scientific evidences, and other approaches, God uses the gospel, which is *in and of itself* “the power of God unto salvation.” Simply preaching Christ accomplishes exactly what God ordains, nothing more and nothing less. **We preach Christ** and He does the rest by His sovereign will.

And so it is that from Genesis to Revelation, that is, from the beginning to the end, the Bible is all about **Christ**, and it is He who we **preach**. To underscore this critical theme, let us briefly tell the Bible story in a seven act drama: the creation, the curse, the comfort, the calamity, the contract, the coming, and the consummation.

### Act 1: The Creation

While we might think the story starts in Genesis, it actually begins in John 1:1–3, which looks back before the beginning: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.”

*First*, then, we see Christ at the birth of all that now is. When we then turn to Genesis 1, we see Him there as the Word who spoke it all into existence. Ten times we read the words, “And God said.” So, since He was there *in* the beginning, He had to have been there *before* the beginning.

*Second*, we then read in Genesis 1 that He made everything there is: light, the firmament, the earth, the objects in space, the animals, and man. No logical arguments are offered, no empirical proofs, just a statement of fact: “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth” (1:1). All three basic elements of the physical universe—space

(“heaven”), matter (“heaven and earth”), and time (“beginning”)—are brought into existence by the Word of God.

Even more specifically, in chapter 2 He planted “a garden eastward in Eden,” and “out of the ground” He made “to grow every tree that [was] pleasant to the sight, and good for food.” A beautiful water vapor supplied the moisture for all this. He also made “a river [that] went out of Eden to water the garden” and from there flowed into a delta and fed four tributaries. Also in that garden, among the unimaginable variety of plants, He planted two special trees: “the tree of life” in the center of the garden as well as “the tree of knowledge of good and evil.”

*Third*, the Creator then took the man—whom He had created out of the elements of the earth and into whom He had breathed life—and “put him into the garden of Eden to dress and . . . keep it.” The Creator repeatedly said that everything was good, except for one thing: it was “not good that man should be alone.” So He caused a deep sleep to come over the man and created from his own flesh and bone a helper that was the perfect complement for him. So perfect was this match that when Adam looked at her, he called her *’Ishshah* (“Woman”) because she was taken out of *’Iysh* (“Man”). This perfect creation was purposeful, designed so that a man would “leave his father and his mother and [be glued] unto his wife” so they would “be one flesh” and could thereby function to the fullest. So pure was this, in fact, that “they were both naked . . . and were not ashamed.”

And so it was in the beginning. Everything was a good and perfect gift from the Creator (Jas. 1:17). Man, the head of the creation, was created with a right relationship to God, his wife, and every single aspect of the earth. The plants thrived at his tending and no animal either feared or attacked him.

*Fourth*, as if this design and environment were not glorious enough, Genesis 3 tells us that in the gentle breeze of the evening, the Creator Himself would walk through the garden. This is not symbolism or anthropomorphism, but clearly indicates an actual Christophany, that is, the Lord Jesus Himself in His preincarnate state as He regularly appeared in the garden for fellowship with these two who were actually one. Think of it! What anticipation it must have been! Throughout each busy day of tending the garden, *’Iysh* and *’Ishshah* would look forward to the moment when Jesus would come walking through the garden with the express purpose of being with them.

Dear Friends, *that* is how we started. That is what God designed us for. But, alas, something horrific happened.

### Act 2: The Curse

We know the rest of the story of Genesis 3. Adam and Eve sinned. Satan accused God of being selfish, not wanting them to have all knowledge for then they would also be gods. Deceiving Eve, Satan persuaded her to eat of the forbidden tree and she in-turn persuaded Adam to follow her and do likewise.

But consider a moment: what exactly did they all violate? *They all violated the Word of the Creator*. The Creator, the Word who became flesh, the one who communed with *’Iysh* and *’Ishshah* in the garden, commanded them not to eat of the

forbidden fruit. But what did they do with His words?

*First*, with the words “Yea, hath God said?” (v. 1), Satan *cast doubt* on what God said, and later (v. 4) openly *denied* what God said. In other words, as does both the textual critic and historical critic in our own day, Satan asked, “Is that what God *really* said?”

*Second*, based on Satan’s challenge, Eve *distorted* what God said, claiming that God said they shouldn’t even *touch* the tree (v. 3), thereby making God to appear unreasonable.

*Third*, have you ever considered what Adam’s position was on all this? We would submit that Adam simply *disregarded* what God said. When Eve gave him the forbidden fruit, he just ate it with no apparent thought to what God had commanded (v. 6). So, in the end, they all *disobeyed* the direct command of the Word, the Creator, Christ Himself.

Have you then ever noticed the first and immediate reaction of Adam and Eve? They instantly realized they were naked. *As soon as rebellion against God came, so did shame*. What did they do then? They tried to cover their shame by making crude aprons out of fig leaves. What a picture of man’s futile effort to cover himself! Just as those leaves would quickly dry up and disintegrate, all man’s “righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away” (Isa. 64:6).

Only God could provide them with suitable clothing. But have you ever thought about that scene as well? Yes, God could have simply created clothing out of nothing, but He didn’t. Blood had to be shed for sin (Heb. 9:22). Did He perhaps even slay an animal(s) in front of Adam and Eve so they could see the consequences of sin? What horror such slaughter surely was to once-innocent eyes! Death had never occurred before, but now “by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned” (Rom. 5:12).

And so the *curse* came upon the entire race because the entire race violated the Word of the Creator. For the woman, instead of childbirth being easy, it would now be agony, and instead of co-ruling with the man as co-regent, she would now have to submit to him. For the man, because he failed to lead, the ground itself was cursed and once pleasant, even invigorating exertion would now turn to exhausting labor just to survive each day.

As if that scene were not sad enough, we also read that God “drove” them from the garden. This is the same word used for cattlemen driving their herd. What once was the place of indescribable communion with the Creator, is now the place of forbidden entrance. Guarding the entrance were Cherubims and a flaming sword to prevent them from partaking of the “tree of life” and living forever. There would now have to be another provision for eternal life.

But in spite of those horrible scenes, hope was on the horizon, and that leads us to the third Act.

### **Act 3: The Comfort**

Ponder a moment: What else did *Iysh* and *Ishshah* do after realizing they were naked? They heard the Creator walking in the garden so they hid among the trees. Isn’t it amazing that they *ate* from a tree, they’re *wearing* tree leaves, and are now

*hiding* under a tree? The “tree” consistently symbolizes life, nature, joy, and well-being in Scripture. Is there any doubt as to why that is true? It is all because the Creator, the Chief Shepherd, would one day *hang* on a tree for His sheep.

That, in fact, is the *comfort*, for we read the words of the Creator in Genesis 3:15: “And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.” Since the 2<sup>nd</sup>-century, commentators have called this the *Protevangelium*, Latin for the “first preaching of the gospel” (Proevangel). It has also been described as “the Bible in embryo, the sum of all history and prophecy in a germ” and describes in a nutshell the conflict of the ages. The “seed” of Satan is comprised of all his followers and forces. But in the “seed” of the woman we see the first announcement of the Virgin Birth of the Creator/Savior who will come. While in biological conception the seed is delivered by the man, in the miraculous conception of the Messiah, the seed would be the woman’s as she is overshadowed by the Holy Spirit (Gal. 4:4). Further, while Satan will bruise Christ’s heel (cause Him to suffer), Christ will deliver the death blow to Satan’s head at the cross.

Before that comes, however, the next Act in this drama is again despairing.

### **Act 4: The Calamity**

What did sin bring? In the outworking of the *curse*, sin brought terrible *calamity* upon the race. In Genesis 4, we see the first family shattered. As a result of arrogance, jealousy, and bitterness, Cain murdered his brother Abel, a man of faith made in the image of God. We then see the beginning of human culture. Cain took a wife and went on to build a city, naming it Enoch after his son. We learn from Genesis 4 and 5 that as those two lines developed—the line of Cain and the line of Seth, the substitute seed in the place Abel—Cain’s line became so dominant that the whole earth was full of violence and “every imagination of the thoughts of [man’s] heart was only evil continually” (6:5). So grieved was God that He had even made man, He sent a catastrophic judgment, the worldwide flood, which destroyed every human except the eight on the Ark. The Ark itself was a hopeful picture of the coming Deliverer. “As there was but one Ark to save the world from drowning,” wrote Puritan Thomas Watson, “so there is but one Jesus to save sinners from damning.”<sup>6</sup>

But in spite of this new beginning, all was not well. After sacrificing to God one-seventh of the flocks and herds of clean animals that were on the ark in an offering of thanksgiving and faith (Gen. 9), Noah drank too much wine, and in his drunkenness uncovered himself and lay shamefully naked in his tent. His son Ham, delighting in his father’s sin, gazed upon him with satisfaction. Later, knowing what had happened, Noah pronounced a curse not on Ham himself, but upon Canaan, Ham’s youngest son. These Canaanites would become the inhabitants of Palestine and would populate such cities as Sodom and Gomorrah and would eventually be subjugated by Joshua and later Solomon (cf. 1 Kings 9:20–21).

Among Ham’s descendents, his grandson Nimrod is especially significant. He was a mighty hunter and built five cities, the most notable being Babel, the first Mesopotamian “king-

dom” and the civilization that became known as Assyria and Babylonia. The first occurrence of the word “kingdom” in Scripture is here in Genesis 10:10. Nimrod perverted the concept of God ordained government for the purpose of restraining evil (cf. Rom. 13) and built the first world system characterized by idolatry and opposition to the Creator. Out of Babylon, in fact, paganism and idolatry slithered to even the smallest corners of the earth. As a monument to their pride and centralized power, the inhabitants of the Babel Metroplex built a tower dedicated to pagan worship and sacrifice (Gen. 11). In judgment, and in some incomprehensible way, as one commentator well puts it: “God altered the brain/nerve/ speech apparatus of the Babylonian rebels to give each family unit (possibly the seventy families of Gen. 10) its own distinctive vocabulary [and] phonology.”<sup>7</sup>

And with that mankind was scattered over the whole earth as God had originally intended. But men’s hearts remained unchanged. The Creator was nowhere in their thoughts. Something was needed.

### Act 5: The Contract

In Genesis 12, God reached out to a pagan named Abram in Ur of the Chaldees, a wealthy, populous, and even sophisticated city in southern Mesopotamia. Modern archaeological excavation has uncovered a great library containing thousands of clay tablets. It is clear that long before Abram’s day, practically everyone knew how to read. Also there, however, and reminiscent of the Tower of Babel, was a great ziggurat, a massive, multi-leveled terraced structure dedicated to pagan worship and serving as a shrine of the moon god Nanna, the patron deity of Ur. Indeed, the Creator was not there.

So God called Abram unto Himself and made a covenant with him. He promised him land and that He would make a great nation out of him and would not only indescribably bless him but also bless all the people of the earth through him. In a remarkable display of faith—and demonstrating that obedience is a result of true saving faith (cf. Heb. 11)—Abram obeyed, leaving paganism behind and following the Creator unconditionally.

Later, in Genesis 15, God promised Abram something even more remarkable. While he and his wife Sarah were far past the age of bearing children, the Creator promised that they would have a son. Sadly, in their impatience and lapse into unbelief, Abram conceived a son by Sarah’s handmaid Hagar (Gen. 16). That son was Ishmael, who would become the progenitor of the Arab nations and the enemy of the Jewish people through the millennia. The so-called Prophet Muhammad, in fact, the founder of Islam (7<sup>th</sup>-century), came from the line of Ishmael, and precisely because Islam is rooted in this perverted offshoot of Abraham, it is the hardest religion in the world to penetrate with the Gospel of Christ and appears to have a pivotal role in the end times.

But God was still faithful to His promise. Despite the old age of the parents, Isaac, the promised seed, was born. God tested Abraham, however, in Genesis 22 to provide us a picture. He commanded Abraham to offer Isaac as a sacrifice. While this was inconceivable—not only because it would nullify the covenant but also because human sacrifice was utterly

pagan—Abraham was willing because He loved the Creator more than the creation.

The striking picture this provides us lies in the fact that Genesis 22:2 is the first occurrence of the word “love” in the Bible, as in the love of a father for his son. The story of Abraham and Isaac, therefore, is a type of the heavenly Father and His only begotten Son, depicting the coming sacrifice at Calvary. Also striking is the fact that the first occurrence of “love” in each of the three synoptic Gospels (Matt. 3:17; Mk. 1:11; Lk. 3:22) records the Father calling out from heaven, “this is my beloved Son,” at the baptism of Jesus (which, of course, also speaks of death and resurrection). Also significant, in contrast, in John’s Gospel, where “love” occurs more often than in any other book of the Bible, its first occurrence is in John 3:16. God loved the world so much that He, like Abraham, was willing to sacrifice His “only begotten son.”

Also in this incident we should focus on the substitute for Isaac. The ram offered as a substitute illustrates the substitutionary sacrifice of the Lamb of God. As John the Baptist would announce centuries later: “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).

From Isaac, then, came Jacob and Esau (Gen. 25), and from Jacob came twelve sons whose descendants ended up in bondage in Egypt (Ex. 1). There they cried out to God for deliverance, and the Creator heard them and sent Moses. In the last of twelve plagues upon that pagan land, God redeemed His people through the blood of the Passover, the most graphic foreshadowing in the Old Testament of the blood Christ would shed for His people (Ex. 11–12).

Redeemed from Egypt, the people departed into the wilderness, all the while being led by the Creator’s cloud and fire. After three months they came to a place called Sinai (Ex. 19). There the people trembled at the thunder, lightning, and thick smoke on the mountain as Moses brought them out of the camp to meet with God. While the people were forbidden to go up on the mountain, Moses and Aaron alone were permitted to go up. And there, in the presence of God, they heard Him say (Ex. 20:2–17):

I am [Yahweh] thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

[1] Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

[2] Thou shalt not make any idols.

[3] Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain;

[4] Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.

[5] Honour your father and mother:

[6] Do not murder.

[7] Do not commit adultery.

[8] Do not steal.

[9] Do not lie.

[10] Do not covet

Those were the words of the Creator, the very words of the Word Himself. Here was God’s “law written in [men’s] hearts [and] conscience” (Rom. 2:15) to show him his need and God’s demands for righteousness. While the people promised they would obey whatever God said, when Moses descended the mountain with the two tablets in his hands, he found them worshipping a golden calf, even claiming it was for God’s

glory. In His anger, God threatened to consume the whole nation and raise up a new one descending from Moses. But Moses interceded and “reminded” God of His covenant. Passing God’s test, Moses foreshadowed the intercession Christ Himself would make from the Cross: “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Lk. 23:34).

The *Tabernacle* was built (Ex. 25–31), which means “dwelling place” and foreshadowed the dwelling of God with man through the person of Christ. In the Tabernacle was the *Altar of Burnt Offering* (27:1–8), where animal sacrifices were offered and which pointed to the atonement that Christ would make for sin. The *Bronze Laver* (30:17–21) was the place for the cleansing of the priests and pictured the cleansing that could come only in Christ (1 Jn. 1:7). The *Table of Showbread* (Ex. 25:23–30) was where 12 loaves of bread representing the 12 tribes was always present and foreshadowed Christ as the Bread of Life (Jn. 6:35, 48). The *Golden Lampstand* (Ex. 25:31–40) provided light for the ministering priests and provides us with the picture of Christ as the Light of the World (Jn. 8:12). The *Altar of Incense* (Ex. 30:1–10) was for the perpetual burning of incense as a picture of prayer and a reminder that prayer is to be offered in Jesus’ name (Jn. 14:13; cf. Rev. 5:8). The *Ark of the Covenant* (Ex. 25:10–22) contained a copy of the Ten Commandments, which summarized the whole covenant and pictured the covenant ground of our access to God. And finally, on the cover of the Ark was the *Mercy Seat*, literally the “atonement covering,” the place where alienated parties were reconciled. It was here that the sins of the people were covered on *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement, which pointed forward to the ultimate, once-for-all atonement of Christ on the Cross (Heb. 7:27; 10:12). When the Tabernacle was completed, “a cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle” (Ex. 40:34). So brilliant, so radiant was God’s glory that not even Moses, who had had a glimpse of God’s glory (Ex. 33:18–23), was able to enter the Tabernacle. That Shekinah glory was there as a pillar of a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night, and whenever it moved the people moved.

We also should not forget the Levitical Offerings: there was the sin offering, the burnt offering, the grain offering, the peace offering, and the trespass offering. Each was designed to bring God’s people close to Him, and each pointed them to the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ that was to come (Heb. 10:12).

While the wilderness wandering is another sad saga, the people finally entered the land of promise (Num. 32, 34), and Solomon ultimately built the Temple (1 Kings 5–6), where God would have a permanent dwelling place among His people in Jerusalem. At the dedication, when the Ark was put in place, the Shekinah glory of God was again so brilliant that not even the priests could get near (1 Kings 8). And like the Tabernacle, it all pointed to the Christ who would come.

Alas, in spite of such blessing and privilege, the people turned to sin and even pagan idolatry. The prophets warned and warned and warned of coming judgment. They prayed, preached, and pleaded, but to no avail. The Northern Kingdom (Israel) went into captivity in Assyria in 722 BC, and in

spite of the object lesson this provided for the Southern Kingdom (Judah), she became even worse and was taken into Babylon beginning in 605 BC.

Far more tragically, because God does not remain where He is not wanted, His Shekinah glory was seen departing from the Temple by way of the east gate, the main processional gate (Ezek. 10–11). It then went over the center of the city and stopped over “the mountain which is on the east side of the city,” a reference to the Mount of Olives (2 Sam. 15:30; Zech. 14:4), the same mountain where Jesus, the Word Himself, would one day weep over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41), from which He, the manifestation of the Shekinah, would ascend into heaven, and to which He will return again (Zech. 14:4). Perhaps the Shekinah stopped because it did not really wish to leave, but was compelled to do so, and in an instant it was gone. *Ichabod*—the glory is departed. God’s judgment and departure are always the end for those who reject the Word of God, the Word who would become flesh and dwell in human form among His creation.

It was then, for the next 400 years, there was not a single word from heaven. Nothing is sadder than the silence of God. But thankfully, the story does not end there.

### Act 6: The Coming

The birth of Jesus Christ, the Word who now became flesh and came to save His people from their sin, was unlike any other birth. He could not be born of a man, else He inherit Adam’s sin. So an angel appeared to a virgin and told her she would conceive a child by the Holy Spirit and call His name JESUS, for He would be the Son of God (Lk. 1:31–35).

While the man she was engaged to was understandably troubled when she became pregnant and chose to quietly break the engagement to avoid public disgrace, the thought had barely taken shape in his mind when the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said: “Joseph, thou son of David, Fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins” (Matt. 1:19–21).

My Dear Friend, think of it! Here is the beginning of the new creation as the Creator Himself comes to earth. While the first Adam brought *sin*, the second Adam brought *salvation*. While the first brought *death*, the second brought *life*. While the first brought *bondage*, the second brought *liberty*. While the first brought *despair*, the second brought *hope*.

Even the gifts given by the Magi from the east declared who He is (Matt. 2:11; cf. Isa. 60:3). *Gold* confirmed Him as a King who would one day reign in glory. *Frankincense* declared His priestly office and the perfect intercessor He would be for His people, and *myrrh* foreshadowed His death for those very people, those He knew before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4; cf. 1 Pet. 1:2, 18–20; Rev. 13:8).

There was another child born at this time (Lk. 1). Reminiscent of Abraham and Sarah, Zacharias (a priest) and Elisabeth had prayed for children for years but were now too old, and she was barren. But the angel Gabriel appeared to Zacharias as he burned incense in the Temple. When fear struck him, Gabriel said: “Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is

heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John.” This child grew to become the fore-runner and herald of Christ.

Wanting to share their joy together, Mary traveled to the hill country of Judea, about 25 miles south of Jerusalem, to visit Elisabeth. When Elisabeth heard Mary’s greeting as she entered the house, the baby in Elisabeth’s womb leapt for joy. Here we see not a “fetus,” as so many want to call it, but a living being that could know joy. Would that we all had joy when God’s Word is present.

It was then during John’s circumcision on the eighth day that Zacharias, now fully understanding his son’s significance, was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied. His song, which has been titled the *Benedictus* (“Praise be,” Lk. 1:67–79), focused on Jesus as the promised Redeemer as much as on his own son John who prepared the way. “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,” he proclaimed, “for he hath visited and redeemed his people, And hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David.”

Likewise, when Mary’s 40-day purification period was fulfilled, Jesus was brought to Jerusalem for His dedication as the firstborn. There was a man there named Simeon, a just and devout man who had long been awaiting the coming of Messiah. Taking Jesus in his arms, he “blessed God, and said, Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel” (Lk. 2:28–32).

John the Baptist, when asked who he was, answered, “I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet [Isaiah]” (Jn. 1:23). He began preparing the way for Jesus’ arrival by preaching, “Repent . . . for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt. 3:1). Seeing Jesus coming toward him one day, John exulted, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (Jn. 1:29), combining two wondrous theological truths: the “Lamb of God” (i.e., the Passover lamb idea from Ex. 12:3), and the scapegoat of the Day of Atonement (from Lev. 5:16). While the first goat on *Yom Kippur* was killed, the second was anointed with the blood of the first and sent into the wilderness, all a picture of what Messiah would do in dying for His people.

In the Creator’s great Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5–7), He masterfully expounded the Law and pointedly attacked the legalism of religion, declaring, “Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven” (5:2). The Law derails every attempt to reach God through works or human merit and leaves the sinner dependent on divine grace alone for salvation. He closed with a call to true faith and salvation (7:13–29).

Everywhere He went, Jesus preached the same message, be it to the woman at the well and other Samaritans, the rich young ruler, a paralytic, Nicodemus, the religious leaders, or everyone in His own home town. His message was not an easy one, however. He did not soft-peddle the Gospel to make it more palatable or change the message depending upon the

listener. He, like the prophets who foretold of Him, spoke of sin, righteousness, judgment, and repentance, and that He alone was the way to salvation. With the greatest clarity possible, in fact, He declared, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (Jn. 14:6). Sadly, after His discourse on the Bread of Life (Jn. 6:22–66), the multitudes that had once thronged after Him went away because all this was a hard saying.

So hated was such a Gospel, in fact, that they crucified Him. But that, of course, was why He came. He was “made . . . to be sin for us . . . that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2 Cor. 5:21). He was resurrected, ascended to the right hand of the Father, and coronated King of kings, and Lord of lords. As He promised, He then sent His spirit on the Day of Pentecost to form the Church, His own spiritual body. Throughout the New Testament epistles we see *Him exalted*, *His Gospel explained* and *His Truth examined*. Over and over again we see that salvation comes by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone (e.g., Eph. 2:1–22).

This is what we should be proclaiming. We should not be “appealing to seekers,” culturally relevant, reevaluating our methods, and certainly not entertaining anyone. We should not be carrying on academic debates, apologetic discussions, or philosophical disputes. *We should be proclaiming Christ*. That, and that alone, is the power of God unto salvation. Neither should our focus be on music, merriment, or money. Our focus should be on Christ.

This compels us to ask: is Christ really the focus of our churches? Every time a pastor stands in the pulpit and opens this book, the people need to see the Lord Jesus Christ, the Creator, the Word who became flesh. Likewise, when those people come to that gathering, they had better desire and expect to see Christ alone.

Ah, but *history*, that is, *His Story*, does not end there. We see one more Act in the drama.

## Act 7: The Consummation

In one of the most glorious passages in Scripture (Rev. 5:11–13) we read that as the Apostle John gazed upon the opening scenes of what is yet to come, he

heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.

What a scene, indeed! All creation will join in praise to God and the Lamb. The entire universe will reverberate with praise for the only One who is worthy of such honor and glory. The chapters that follow delineate the final events of God’s sovereign plan, which He laid out before the foundation of this universe. Judgment will come upon those who have rejected the Creator. When that is fulfilled, Satan himself

will be chained while Christ rules with a rod of iron for a thousand years. Then, with the Great White Throne now past, the Apostle John once again described what he saw:

I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. (21:1–4)

How can these things be? How is anything like this possible? Because the one on the throne declares in the next two verses (4–5): “Behold, I make all things new. . . . I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely.”

Finally, in Revelation 22, we read of the eternal city that is to come. In it there will be a river of absolutely pure water flowing out of the throne of God and the Lamb. On each side of the river there will be the Tree of Life, which will bear 12 different kinds of fruit, as well as leaves that will heal the nations. There also will be no more curse.

But wait a moment! Does all this not sound familiar? Have we not already seen the Tree of Life, a garden, a river, fruit, leaves, and a curse? Think of it—*Creation* will be restored in the *Consummation*. What man *tainted* by his sin God will then *transform* by His grace. Eden will be restored.

Additionally, his servants will serve him in that place. And perhaps the most wonderful words in the Bible follow: “And [we] shall see his face; and his name shall be in [our] foreheads.” The Bible says that no man has seen God (Jn. 1:18; 1 Jn. 4:12), and in ancient times no man did, seeing only theophanies, physical manifestations of His presence. But once we have put off this corruptible humanity, everything that was lost in the garden, and even much more, will be restored. Forever we will belong to Him, worship Him, and gaze upon His presence. No sunlight will be needed because His own Shekinah glory will light the universe.

### Conclusion

Please ponder this as we close: None of what we have seen—from *creation* to *consummation*—is an *event*; it is a *person*. History is not random events; it is *His Story*; it is about what He has been doing through the ages. It is He alone who saves, sanctifies, secures, and sends out for service. It is He alone who is the hope of mankind. There are really only two kinds of people in the world: those *with* hope and those *without* it. As Paul wrote to the Ephesians (2:11–13): “In time past . . . ye were without Christ . . . having no hope, and without God in the world: But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.” *That* is what we preach. But there is more, as Paul wrote to Titus:

For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath ap-

peared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ. Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. (Titus 2:11–14)

Dear friends, the Gospel is not just something we *preach*; it is something we *possess*. It is not just something we *talk about*; it is something we *live*. It is not just something *external* that we *wear*; it is something *internal* that *shines forth*. So, if I may encourage us all: our *eyes* must ever be on Christ; our *ears* must ever be listening to His Word; our *lives* must ever be a holy evidence of His presence in us; and our *mouths* must be ever proclaiming His grace.

*So, what is the Bible about?* It is about **Christ**. No one has said it better than did Puritan Thomas Adams:

Christ is the sum of the whole Bible, prophesied, typified, prefigured, exhibited, demonstrated, to be found in every leaf, almost every line, the Scriptures being but as it were the swaddling bands of the child Jesus.<sup>8</sup>

### Closing Prayer

*Our gracious Father, we stand amazed at your Word. We marvel at its unity of thought and consistent message. We thank you for its central theme, that of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We pray that this short overview will encourage each of us to proclaim that central message. Allow us not to be drawn into modern thinking, into any alternate view of Scripture, rather remind us every day of the only hope that is within us.*

*We pray also that if the reader of this booklet is not a believer, that You will use this study to show them the real heart of the Bible and save them for your glory.*

*We thank you again for your Word, for the Truth that You have given us in these days of growing uncertainty and confusion. We give you all the glory in the name of our Lord and Savior, the Word who became flesh and dwelt among us, and who is coming again, Amen.*

Dr. J. D. Watson  
Pastor-Teacher

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Available in MP3 format on our website; see p. 8 for booklet.

<sup>2</sup> We hope you will make copies of this article and/or order several copies of the new booklet; it is priced at the bare minimum.

<sup>3</sup> 13 in Ex.; 18 in Lev.; 13 in Num.; 2 in Deut.; 4 in Heb.

<sup>4</sup> Analogy adapted from John Phillips, *Exploring the Scriptures* (Moody Press, 1965), 11.

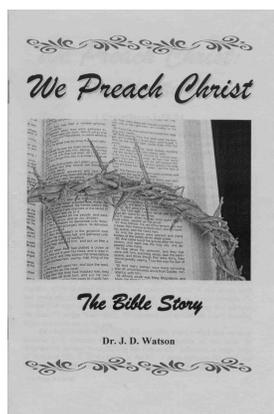
<sup>5</sup> “The Arte of Prophecyng” in *The Works of William Perkins* (London: John Legate, 1609), 2:762.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Watson, *A Body of Divinity* (Banner of Truth Trust, 1992 reprint from 1692), 161.

<sup>7</sup> Henry Morris, *The Defender’s Study Bible* (World Publishing, Inc., 1995), note on Gen. 11:7.

<sup>8</sup> “Meditations upon Some Part of the Creed,” in *The Works of Thomas Adams* (Eureka, CA: Tanski, 1998 reprint from 1862), 3:224.

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