

*Twelve
Assorted
Essays*

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Forward

Jesus is both the source and object of our faith, and I hope these essays encourage you in your walk with him. They are intended to be devotional, not doctrinal. If the tone is one of too much certainty, it is because I have avoided the overuse of the words *perhaps* and *maybe*, which could have preceded nearly every thought expressed here. Many of these thoughts lean more toward the literary than the theological, but all are given to bring to mind God's merciful work in our lives.

Preface

The gospel is on every page of the Bible. While Jesus brings us the Good News in the New Testament, the message of God's patience and grace precedes the incarnation of his Son and fills the Old Testament as well. It contains hundreds of prophecies about Jesus, detailing key moments of how he would live and die for us. Many messianic passages, such as Psalm 23, reveal his struggles, joys, and relationship with his Father. But Jesus's presence in the Old Testament goes beyond a few passages.

In the final verse of the gospels, John says, "Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written" (John 21:25). The same could be said of the Old Testament. When Jesus "opened their minds to understand the scriptures" (Luke 24:45), he invited the disciples and us to see him more fully in the promises and pictures of him in the Old Testament. In it we can also see the miraculous "knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Colossians 2:2-3).

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Overview

Part One: The Father and The Son

Essay One. Love God. The Father gives us the first tablet of the Ten Commandments; the Son gives us the Lord's prayer.

Essay Two. Love our neighbor. The Father gives us the second tablet of the Ten Commandments; the Son confirms them.

Essay Three. Our righteousness is in the Son alone.

Essay Four. The glory of the Father and the glory of the Son on two sets of poles.

Part Two: The Son and the Holy Spirit

Essay Five. Queen Vashti prefigures Jesus as tempted, innocent, and rejected in a fallen world.

Essay Six. The Brook Kidron reveals what it cost Jesus to leave heaven for this mortal, earthly life.

Essay Seven. In the four horns on the Altar, we see the four points of the cross.

Essay Eight. The Temple pillars Jachin and Boaz point to the cross and describe the Passion of the Christ.

Part Three: The Holy Spirit and the Church

Essay Nine. Noah's dove speaks of the Holy Spirit's presence in Eden, Jesus, and the Church.

Essay Ten. Job names his daughters as a testimony to his enlightenment.

Essay Eleven. Moses strikes the rock in the wilderness to speak of Jesus' singular sacrifice, sealing us in the Holy Spirit.

Essay Twelve. Paul is a missionary for the long-anticipated Messiah, whom he now knows is the Lord Jesus Christ.

Introduction

Love God and love your neighbor are shorthand for God's message to the world. The revelation of this merciful message is on page after page of the Bible. For example, Leviticus links them together early on: "You shall not wrong one another, but you shall fear your God, for I am the Lord your God" (Leviticus 25:17). One does not exist without the other. All scripture demonstrates the consistent evidence of God's faithfulness and mercy, but it all comes down to these two principles. Two of the most famous passages, one in each Testament, reveal much about both.

The first four essays explore the connections between God the Father and God the Son, particularly in the Ten Commandments and two key passages in the Sermon on the Mount and then our place amid God's glory. The following four essays look at the object of our faith, the incarnation of the Son filled with the Holy Spirit to enable his ministry. The final four essays consider the Holy Spirit's transformation of God's people from ancient to the present day.

PART ONE

The Father and The Son

“I and the Father are one.”

John 10:30

Essay One

First Tablet

For most of us, the most well-known Old Testament passage is likely the Ten Commandments. It is not only a holy writ for three major religions but is also foundational to the laws of many nations and reflects basic principles that govern societies. The first five commandments—one God, no idols, a holy name, a sacred day, and how we love and honor God—speak of our relationship with God. The last five commandments—murder, adultery, stealing, false witness, coveting—speak of our relationship to each other, and in as much as we can avoid these sins, we can love our neighbor.

Again, for most of us, the most well-known New Testament passage is probably The Lord's Prayer. Taught from childhood in all Christendom and recited weekly in liturgical congregations, it may be the only New Testament scripture that Christians know by heart, even among the unchurched. Like the Ten Commandments, the first part—our Father, heaven, a holy name, his kingdom, and his will—emphasizes our relationship with God. The second part—daily bread and forgiveness—highlights our earthly and relational concerns.

One of the earliest and widely accepted divisions of the Ten Commandments is described by the Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria (30 BC–50 AD), who says that the “Decalogue [is] divided into two groups of five oracles each.”¹ Josephus and

early Church father Irenaeus (130–202) support this division.² Even more specifically, Anglican priest Arthur Penrhyn Stanley (1815–1881) suggests that the “Commandments were probably divided into two equal portions, so that the Fifth Commandment, instead of being at the top of the second table, was at the bottom of the first.” And the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* says that “it is commonly assumed that they stood five over against five.”³

Suggesting parallels between the Ten Commandments and the Lord’s Prayer, early 20th century Pastor A. W. Pink writes that the Lord’s Prayer is “divided into two groups of three and four, respectively: the first three relate to the cause of God; the last four relate to our daily concerns. A similar division is discernable in the Ten Commandments: the first five teach us our duty toward God; the last five teach us our duty toward neighbors.”⁴

A comparison of the first tablet and the Lord’s Prayer reveals how closely they are connected. It is not surprising that these foundational passages from the Old and New Testaments are broadly similar because they come from the same God—God the Father on Mount Sinai and God the Son on another unnamed mount. English author and preacher Thomas Watson (1620–1686) compares them this way: “The ten commandments are the rule of our life, and the Lord’s prayer is the pattern of our prayer. As the moral law was written with the finger of God, so [The Lord’s Prayer] was dropped from the lips of the Son of God.”⁵ These two communications from God form the setting for our relationship with him and each other.

The First Commandment

“I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall

have no other gods before me.” (Exodus 20:2–3)

and

“Our Father” (Matthew 6:9)

There is one God. The pronoun *our* is used to identify a group’s possession of a single person or thing. *Our house* means that we all share one house. To say *my house* implies I have one house, and you have another. When we say *our Father*, we collectively call on just one God. Praying *Our Father* encapsulates the first commandment, to have just one God in our midst; when we pray, he is the only one we pray to. Arthur Stanley says this: “OUR Father, not my father. He is the God not of one man, but of all who can raise their thoughts towards him.”⁶

The word *our* also points to the community and the Church to which we belong, “For where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am among them” (Matthew 18:20). We say *our Father* because we have the privilege to acknowledge the body of Christ to which we belong. We all pray, but the one listening is the only God, the Father. Moses says, “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one” (Deuteronomy 6:4). So it is for his Church that “there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist” (1 Corinthians 8:6).

The word *Father* has a similar emphasis on singularity. Each of us has only one biological father. Jesus uses the words *our* and *Father* to start the Lord’s Prayer to reiterate the force and preeminence of the first commandment. Jesus gives fuller meaning to this and all the commandments in the Sermon on the Mount and throughout the gospels. For instance, he later says, “call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven” (Matthew 23:9)

Though at the top of the first tablet and from which all the

others flow, *our* in the Lord's Prayer, intrinsic in the first commandment, previews our obligation to our neighbor in the second tablet. James asks, "What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? Submit yourselves therefore to God" (James 4:1). He traces second-tablet sins to a first commandment concern: not keeping God first.

It is said that the transgression of any other commandment is a *de facto* transgression of the first because every other sin puts the self before the One God, who is before all. English minister William Ames (1576–1633) writes, "in God, and for God only, we ought to perform all other duties; and so the duties of the second tablet are thus virtually contained in the first Commandment."⁷ This first commandment and this opening of the Lord's Prayer underpin all commandments and the gospel.

The Second Commandment

"You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth." (Exodus 20:3–6)

and

"Father in heaven" (Matthew 6:9)

The word *Father* is doing double duty here, as we have not only one Father, but our heavenly Father is a person, not an object. A carved image is an object, not a person. When Jesus says, *Our Father*, he combines God's unique nature—there are no others like him—with God as a living being. Further, praying to a Father in heaven is the opposite of praying to an idol from the

earth.

“He plants a cedar, Half of it he burns in the fire, And the rest of it he makes into a god, his idol, and falls down to it and worships it.” (Isaiah 44:12–17)

“Woe to him who says to a wooden thing, ‘Awake;’ to a silent stone, ‘Arise!’ Can this teach? Behold, it is overlaid with gold and silver, and there is no breath at all in it.” (Habakkuk 2:19)

How distant an inanimate object is from a loving Father who gives us the gift of the Holy Spirit as a comforter. Jeremiah minces no words when he says, “Every man is stupid and without knowledge” (Jeremiah 51:17) who makes and worships an idol that Paul later says, “has no real existence” (1 Corinthians 10:4). The idolater says to a tree, “You are *my father*” (Jeremiah 2:27), but we say to God, *Our Father*.

We worship a living God and a loving Father, not a silent stone and not a God who sleeps or is distracted. “And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you” (Luke 11:9) is an offer from a very personal God. He gives, he opens, and he lets us find him. “I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me” (Micah 7:7). The Father offers a personal relationship made available for us to “draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16), where we say, “Abba, Father” (Romans 8:15). He is *Our Father* and *in heaven*. Living—and personal.

The Third Commandment

“You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes

his name in vain.” (Exodus 20:7)

and

“hallowed be your name.” (Matthew 6:9)

Both texts are about the holiness of God’s name. One is his command to us, the other our confession to him. In one, God says, *Don’t dishonor me*; in the other, we say, *I honor you*. This is an attitude of the heart we have toward him. This asks for more than not misusing his name but understanding his holiness so that we might live in the right relationship with a holy God. This commandment and this prayer are generally thought to be about not using God’s name in a curse. But, as in other commandments, this is more than rash words from our lips. Instead, it is about an attitude in our hearts that honors God and draws us closer to him.

Jesus takes the third commandment beyond courtroom perjury or general lies. Rector W. C. Green (1832–1911) points out that Jesus is broadening the meaning of Jesus from “not *swear* falsely” to “not *speak* falsely.”⁸ Psalm 15 describes a person who “walks blamelessly and does what is right and speaks truth in his heart; who does not slander with his tongue and does no evil to his neighbor” (Psalms 15:2-3). Proverbs extends this to our behavior when the writer prays not to be tempted, “lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of my God” (Proverbs 30:9). And Jesus says, “out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks” (Luke 6:45).

Ezekiel says false prophets are claiming to speak for God and, as such, are using his name for their purposes, not God’s. This is using God’s name in vain. “Have you not seen a false vision and uttered a lying divination, whenever you have said, ‘Declares the LORD,’ although I have not spoken?” (Ezekiel

13:7). We should be wary of justifying our actions by claiming God's approval of them. James says, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that" (James 3:15), warning us not use his name for selfish purposes.

God's command for us to honor him springs wholly from mercy. He tells Moses, "And you shall not profane my holy name, that I may be sanctified among the people of Israel. I am the LORD who sanctifies you, who brought you out of the land of Egypt to be your God" (Leviticus 22:32). Only he can save and sanctify us, and, if we don't honor him, we cut ourselves off from this hope.

The Fourth Commandment

"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God." (Exodus 20:8–11)

and

"Your kingdom come" (Matthew 6:10)

The Sabbath is a day of rest, but there is one Sabbath that all other Sabbaths point to as the most important—the one when God provides a permanent and eternal rest by the realized promise of a kingdom led by the King of Kings. The Passover foreshadows this historic Sabbath in the Israelite Exodus from Egypt, wherein all the Egyptian firstborn—and none of God's chosen people—die. The lamb's blood on the doorposts and lintels foreshadows the death of God's one and only Son on the cross. God's will *is* done, and his kingdom *does* come when we are saved on that Passover Sabbath.

From "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand"

(Matthew 3:2) to “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36), Jesus accomplishes God’s will to gain what we cannot achieve for ourselves: entrance into his kingdom and a true Sabbath rest. The exchange with the criminal on the cross brings them together: “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” And Jesus replies, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:42-43). That very day, the criminal gains salvation and an eternal Sabbath rest. Much earlier in his ministry, Jesus said, “there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:27), indicating the kingdom is not just for the dead but the living, who see the proof of it when Jesus is resurrected. Every Sabbath celebrates this victory.

In an earlier encounter Jesus says to one who seeks to follow him, “It is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to the needy” (Luke 12:33). We gain entrance to his kingdom the moment we give up all to follow him. As a host of GriefShare and Respite Retreats, Nancy Guthrie says, “God’s kingdom comes now as people bow to Jesus as King. At its simplest, the kingdom is where the King is; it’s where he rules and reigns. As he rules and reigns in your life, that is the kingdom.”⁹

The Old Testament contains many beautiful provisions for God’s people to rest in him. It begins with a daily rest of the body and the soul, for “in peace I will...lie down and sleep” (Psalms 4:8). Then, one day a week, “you shall do no work. It is a Sabbath to the Lord” (Leviticus 23:3). In addition, the Israelites observe seven yearly feasts with additional holy days of rest in each. Every seven years, they celebrate a full year of Sabbath rest. Finally, every fifty years, a year of Jubilee rest is added, a time in which all debts are forgiven and, as God instructed Moses, “each of you shall return to his property and

each of you shall return to his clan” (Leviticus 25:8).

For a person living a lifespan of “seventy years, or even by reason of strength eighty” (Psalms 90:10), this fifty-year cycle provides each a chance to experience this Jubilee rest at least once. Having experienced it once, one would yearn for it again, even for eternity, with all debts forgiven and a return to our home in heaven. While we lost our Edenic home to sin, in the final Jubilee, we gained a new heavenly one.

Jesus frequently references our being at rest in him. “Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls” (Matthew 11:29-30). In seven parables in Matthew 13, Jesus says, “The kingdom of heaven is like...” and relates how God is constantly pursuing us like a hidden treasure and a pearl of great value. He is keen to bring us into his fold.

The day we accept the call of Jesus is when we both enter his kingdom and enter his Sabbath rest. “Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation” (2 Corinthians 6:2). Pastor Richard Villodas uses the term “monastic spirituality,” which he describes as “slowing our lives down to be with God.”¹⁰ An attitude of restfulness in Jesus, not just scheduled rest stops on the calendar, benefits our souls. This is a continual Sabbath rest as we enjoy his peace with the Holy Spirit.

The Fifth Commandment

“Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.” (Exodus 20:12)

and

“[Y]our will be done, on earth at it is in heaven.” (Matthew 6:10)

God's *will on earth* is often accomplished in and through people obeying his will and being attentive to the Holy Spirit. Philo of Alexandria says this commandment is "the last of the sacred duties inculcated in the first [tablet], and links on with the duties toward men contained in the second [tablet]." ¹¹ How the child honors the parents is the foundation for how the adult will honor God, for as Philo continues, "a man who is imperious towards his immediate and visible parents cannot be pious towards his invisible Father." ¹² The responsibility to teach piety rests with the parents. Parents who prayerfully petition the Lord for guidance on modeling obedience, respect, and honor, combined with grace and unconditional love for their children, will create a foundation for their relationship with Jesus.

At twelve years of age, Jesus asks his parents, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" (Luke 2:49). Joseph and Mary ask Jesus to honor them by leaving the temple and coming with them, and even Jesus, the Son of God, obeys despite his deep desire to be in the temple. "How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts! My soul longs, yes, faints for the courts of the Lord" (Psalms 84:1-2). To leave that place had to be difficult, but "he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them" (Luke 2:51).

Following this, "Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man" (Luke 2:52) until eighteen years later when he heard his Father say at his baptism, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased" (Mark 1:11). Jesus chose to obey his parents and "learn obedience through suffering" (Hebrews 5:8), which wasn't just the persecution at the end of his life but submissiveness to his parents and his heavenly Father's will throughout his life. Jesus says, "I have a

baptism to be baptized with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished!” (Luke 12:50). He knows of this burden throughout his three-year ministry, for this is the entire reason for his ministry.

But before this, Jesus made the most difficult choice of “becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:8), even before he took on human flesh. Earlier still, Jesus was “foreknown before the foundation of the world” to ransom us (1 Peter 1:20,18) and, immediately after the Fall, was prophesied to be crucified for us when Satan would “bruise his heel” (Genesis 3:15) on the cross. He follows God’s will entirely and perfectly on earth as in Heaven. Our obedience is to accept his work for us, believe in his name, love one another, and glorify God’s obedient servant as our King.

Again, the first tablet and the Sermon on the Mount are linked. Honoring our parents “is the first commandment with a promise, that it may go well with you” and “that your days may be long in the land” (Ephesians 6:2). To teach our children by example to love God and each other and, as a result, to have them join us for *long days* in eternity is the greatest gift a parent can give a child. The first four commandments tell us to honor God, and the fifth would have parents teach their children to honor that they might know *how* to honor God. The first tablet forms a unified piece to lead us to him and down the path to love our neighbor.

The Sixth through the Tenth Commandments

Murder, adultery, stealing, false witness, coveting.
(Exodus 20:13–17)

and

“Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our

debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” (Matthew 6:11–13)

The final section of the Lord’s Prayer broadly addresses the second five commandments. To be satisfied with “our daily bread” is to be happy with God’s provision. To be dissatisfied with what God provides leads us to the temptation to violate these commandments. And when we sin, we ask forgiveness from God and seek forgiveness from our neighbor. However, the rest of the Lord’s Prayer does not have a similar one-for-one correspondence with the second tablet. However, turning back one page to chapter five of Matthew shows five well-known parallels corresponding to the second tablet commandments.

Essay Two

Second Tablet

Jesus came to fulfill the Law and Prophets and uses the phrase, “You have heard that it was said” five times in Matthew 5. In doing so, he reiterates the second tablet commands and expands on their implications regarding the condition of our hearts and our difficulty fulfilling these commandments.

The Sixth Commandment

“You shall not murder.” (Exodus 20:13)

and

“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire” (Matthew 5:13).

God values us more than we possibly imagine. To take a life is to take what belongs only to God. But God also knows our hearts, “You discern my thoughts from afar” (Psalms 139:2), and he wants to redeem those, too. To not take a life is a low bar to strive for, but to love our neighbor as ourselves is the

highest. Jesus comes to save us and to share this good news with others, which won't be accomplished through those whose hearts are filled with anger and hatred. John says, "Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer" (1 John 3:15). Destroying God's creation begins with hating his creation. "Cain was very angry. Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him" (Genesis 4:5, 8). Anger comes first.

In war propaganda, one must demean the enemy aggressively to defeat the enemy enthusiastically, even if this means tapping into falsehoods and exaggerations. We often do this in more ordinary circumstances by creating an atmosphere that belittles and smears our neighbor. Solomon notes how common this attitude is when he says, "Do not take to heart all the things that people say, lest you hear your servant cursing you. Your heart knows that many times you yourself have cursed others" (Ecclesiastes 7:22). We tend to speak about each other in unkind ways. While this may seem inconsequential in the moment, it starts us down the path of not loving our neighbor, which, not surprisingly, also breaks our fellowship with God. When it comes to the sixth commandment, we all fall short.

The Seventh Commandment

"You shall not commit adultery." (Exodus 20:14)

and

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart." (Matthew 5:14)

Adultery violates two vows; one made to a person, and another made to God. As such, adultery breaks both of the great

commandments, damaging our relationship with another person and damaging our relationship with God. Both weaken our faith and diminish the Church's testimony to the world.

The idolatry of the Israelites is often presented as adultery against God, "With their idols they have committed adultery" (Ezekiel 23:37). Hosea is even told to marry a wife who committed adultery as a picture of God's people being unfaithful (Hosea 1:2). Paul reverses the order. He calls adultery idolatry: "Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, *which is idolatry*" (Colossians 3:5). The equivalency of the two is consistent in both testaments.

Regarding lustful intent today, church members commonly expose themselves to so-called adult online content. Studies show that two-thirds of Christians view this inappropriate content regularly, as well as half of their churches' pastors.¹³ Pastor Chuck Swindoll calls this "the greatest cancer in the Church" today.¹⁴ But then, this issue precedes the Internet. Job says, "I have made a covenant with my eyes; how then could I gaze at a virgin? Does not he see my ways?" (Job 31:1). Yet this sin persists, for we do look, and God does see. Our lustful passions are idolatry because they are thoughts and emotions we put between God and us. When it comes to the seventh commandment, we all fall short.

The Eighth Commandment

"You shall not steal." (Exodus 20:15)

and

"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right

cheek, turn to him the other also. And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.”
(Matthew 5:38-42)

Both passages are about stealing. One says don’t steal; the other says don’t stop someone from stealing—from us! This turns our view of ownership upside down. We think all we have belongs to us, including our body (*cheek*), our possessions (*tunic*), and our time and effort (*two miles*). But all that we have belongs to God, “Behold, to the Lord your God belong heaven and the heaven of heavens, the earth with all that is in it” (Deuteronomy 10:14). An Egyptian Pharaoh said, “The Nile is mine, and I made it”—and Egypt became “an utter waste and desolation” shortly after he said this (Ezekiel 29:9, 10). Nothing is ours, and God will reveal this continually to us throughout our lives.

Deuteronomy says, “Beware lest you say in your heart, ‘My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth’” (Deuteronomy 8:17-18). If everything belongs to God, a *mine* attitude puts us in control of God’s possessions. In this way, we become the thief, denying God the use of his possessions. And if God intended these possessions for someone else, we are also stealing from them. As Job says, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return” (Job 1:21). We all begin and end this life with equal status. Only our imagination makes us think we are better off than others based on what we own.

Jesus tells the rich young man, “Go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me” (Mark 10:21). To love our neighbor is to not

withhold from anyone what is rightfully God's to give. "For all things come from you, and of your own have we given you" (1 Chronicles 29:14) and "A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven" (John 3:27). Whatever we give to another originates from God's store. When the Psalmist says, "The one greedy for gain curses and renounces the Lord" (Psalms 10:3), he foretells Jesus' teaching, "You cannot serve God and money" (Matthew 6:24). If possessions have a hold on our hearts, God cannot.

The parable of the Good Samaritan illustrates this attitude when the Samaritan says to the innkeeper, "Take care of him, and *whatever more you spend*, I will repay you when I come back" (Luke 10:35). This is a blank check if there ever was one. This could only come from a person who doesn't value his wealth as his own but considers it meaningless, or rather, purely to serve God's purposes alone.

Our attitude about ownership affects our attitude toward God and others. Possessiveness and generosity are incompatible. God's mercy to us through Jesus is the most extraordinary generosity ever shown. Luke's account of this passage in the Sermon on the Mount ends this way: "Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful" (Luke 6:36). Only when we know God's mercy can we let go of our possessions and be merciful to others.

This is not impossible, for in the early church, "no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common, [and] there was not a needy person among them" (Acts 4:32, 34). This is why they grew to over 5,000 so quickly. People see lives transformed by Jesus and so are transformed, too. We cannot worship God while stealing from our neighbor, a condition that only comes from a transformed heart when we see our need for a Savior. Yet, we all fall

short when it comes to the eighth commandment.

The Ninth Commandment

“You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.” (Exodus 20:16)

and

“Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.’ But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. Let what you say be simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything more than this comes from evil.” (Matthew 5:33)

In direct contrast, Proverbs says that “when words are many, transgression is not lacking” (Proverbs 10:19). The fewer words, the better. In the strictest sense, a *false witness* could be considered legal testimony under oath in a court of law. But as in all matters, Jesus sees our heart and applies it in a much broader manner. Participating in gossip or exchanging unsubstantiated rumors is likely included. Thomas Watson expands the definition: “It forbids anything that may tend to the disparagement or prejudice of our neighbor.”¹⁵

Truthfulness is not simply not lying. It extends to not hiding what is known to be true. Leviticus says that if someone knows the truth “yet does not speak, he shall bear his iniquity” (Leviticus 5:1). And this is how it all began to go wrong when Satan says, “Did God actually say?” (Genesis 3:2). Satan casts doubt

on God's word not by saying it is untrue but by indirectly questioning its premise, leaving out the essential truth: God did say it. Aaron and Miriam try the same tactic when they say, "Has the LORD indeed spoken only through Moses?" (Numbers 12:2). Miriam's ensuing leprosy is cured only because of Moses' desperate plea.

Jesus says, "I have come into the world to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice" (John 18:37). Pilate's dismissive "What is truth?" (John 18:38) is the culmination of Satan's long misdirection to hide the truth. If there is no truth, then there are no lies, and the "father of lies" (John 8:48) can freely reign, saturating the world with lies no longer recognized as such. We should not be a part of this.

Jesus adds more to this commandment than meets the eye when he reiterates that you shall perform what you have sworn to the Lord. Leviticus says a man "shall not break his word. He shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth" (Leviticus 30:2). When we say we are going to do something, whether for God or our neighbor and don't follow through, we are also bearing false witness.

Truth matters. Our faith and hope are based on this historical truth: an empty tomb on Easter morning. "And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile" (1 Corinthians 15:17). When we tell lies or share unfounded rumors, we bring a false witness into the conversation. "You shall not spread a false report" (Exodus 23:1) could be reworded as "You shall only spread a true report." Sharing the latest purported news that we don't know to be true *or* false would also be a false witness. Speaking this way harms our credibility in defending the resurrection to a world that does not trust what we say. This, then, is the most disastrous effect of bearing false witness: we become an unreliable messenger, and we doom our ability to witness to the

essential truth of all, the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ, the world's hope for salvation. And yet again, when it comes to the ninth commandment, we all fall short.

The Tenth Commandment

“You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor’s.” (Exodus 20:17)

and

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven.” (Matthew 5:43–45)

To covet is to wish we could have what someone else has. Often others, particularly *enemies*, have the most significant possession we don’t have and often wish we did: the power to do to us as they please. Solomon says, “All this I observed while applying my heart to all that is done under the sun, when man had power over man to his hurt” (Ecclesiastes 8:9). The Psalmist thanks God that he “has not shut me up into the hand of the enemy” (Psalms 31:8, KJV). Charles Spurgeon remarks, “To be shut up in one’s hand is to be delivered over absolutely to his power.”¹⁶ Not coveting is more than not wanting what another has. It also does not covet the position and power that another may have over us.

C.S. Lewis writes, “Greed may drive men into competition if there is not enough to go round; but the proud man, even when he has got more than he can possibly want, will try to get still

more just to assert his power.”¹⁷ Pilate exhibits this when he says, “Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?” (John 19:10). Or put another way, *Don’t you covet the power I have over you?* Jesus does not Pilate’s power because he knows, “You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above” (John 19:11). Professor Raj Raghunathan’s recent book, *If You’re So Smart, Why Aren’t You Happy?* explains that “chasing superiority is not some shallow or superficial trait that only those with an unusually big “ego” or with a narcissistic personality exhibit. Rather, it is a deep-seated need that almost all of us have.”¹⁸ As common as the hate and lust of the sixth and seventh commandments, pridefulness creates a barrier between us.

To love our neighbor is not to covet what is rightfully theirs and not to covet what God gives them. But, as always, Jesus goes further. Our concern should be his prayer for *all people* and salvation for *all people* because he offers himself as a ransom for *all people* (1 Timothy 2:1-6). He “makes the sun rise” and “sends rain” to everyone (Matthew 5:45). So, rather than want what they have, we ought to rejoice that they have what we have—our cloak, effort, and love.

When we covet a thing, our heart cannot help but make the owner of that thing our adversary. These thoughts inevitably lead to undesirable behavior. The *Encyclopaedia Judaica* says, “The traditional legal exegesis understands ‘hamad’ [covet] to involve action: one who exerts pressure to get something.”¹⁹ But this bad action can be replaced with a good action: to pray for those who persecute us. Timothy asks that “prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people” (1 Timothy 2:1-4), especially our enemies, as they need them most. This requires a change of heart!

Coveting fills the space between us and others with our

needs, concerns, and desires, leaving little room for theirs. When Jesus *emptied himself*, he made room for his Father to do his will in his life for our benefit. This is consistent with the Father's commandment not to covet and the Son's later admonition for us to walk the extra mile and give away our coats. Paul emphasizes this in the Church age, "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests but also to the interests of others" (Philippians 2:3-4). The Father *prohibits* coveting, the Son *exhibits* what it looks like not to covet, and the Holy Spirit *inhibits* coveting by teaching us to *count others more significantly*.

Finally, to covet what those around us have is the most transparent communication to God that we're not satisfied with his provision. "But godliness with contentment is great gain" (1 Timothy 6:6). If we aren't content in God, we can never be content with less than what others have. But if we are content with God alone, we have no desire to compare ourselves to others. Paul says, "You joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one" (Hebrews 10:34) and "I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content" (Philippians 4:11). *Give us this day our daily bread* is our prayer. Contentedness with God inevitably leads to a generous heart toward our neighbor, not wanting what they have.

The Ten Commandments on the two tablets are not merely the foundation of legal systems or archaeological relics of an ancient age. Today, they are more than simply relevant; they are bound up in the very nature of our being. They are both an unattainable standard and a mirror through which we see our failures. But Jesus provides another mirror to look at, one in which we see a new creation through his sacrifice for us.

Essay Three

His Righteousness

So Much Guilt, So Little Time

Jesus bookends these five *you have heard that it was said* statements with what are a preface and a conclusion to this section.

Before,

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 5:17–20)

and after,

“You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” (Matthew 5:48)

In the first passage, the standard of righteousness is as high as

that of the scribes and Pharisees. They—and we—think this is achievable if we try very hard and are very good, though all have tried, and none have succeeded. We believe obedience to the Law is a way to garner favor with God, but instead we only see our failure, which points us to our need for a Savior. “For if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin” (Romans 7:7). It becomes crushingly apparent that no one can obey all the law or even any of the law, “For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it” (James 2:10).

When Jesus says that he has not come to abolish the Law and even elaborates on the negative consequences of diminishing it—to be *called least in the kingdom of heaven*—it is not good news. But when Jesus says he has come to fulfill the Law, that is good news indeed. If the Law is fulfilled, we will not be under it anymore. However, in each *you have heard that was said*, there follows, *but I say to you*. Contrary to the diminishment of these commandments, Jesus amplifies them. Now, sin is not only seen in our outward and visible actions, but in the unseen activities of the heart and mind as well. As he later says, “First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean” (Matthew 23:26).

In the second passage, Jesus goes further when he says we must be *perfect*, as perfect as God himself. Even if we were able to uphold the entire law, it would not be good enough. “Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins” (Ecclesiastes 7:20). While the law required external and visible obedience, the standard is now not just outer perfection but inner perfection, to be as perfect as God himself! Proverbs says, “All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the spirit” (Proverbs 16:2). Like Nebuchadnezzar, we “have been weighed in the balances and found wanting”

(Daniel 5).

One standard of righteousness is obeying all the rules, but this attempt to be God-like in perfection removes all doubt of our spiritual poverty. When a man addresses Jesus as “Good Teacher,” Jesus replies, “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone” (Mark 10:18) and reiterates several of the Ten Commandments. He says, “The one who receives a righteous person because he is a righteous person will receive a righteous person’s reward” (Matthew 10:41). As Christians, we receive the reward only because another righteous one gains it for us.

To the crowd that day on the mount, for Jesus to say we must be as perfect as God would be understood to be an unachievable standard, so much so that it continues to point us to our need for a Savior to do what we cannot do for ourselves. David is “a man after God’s own heart” (1 Samuel 13:14), not because he is sinless—far from it—but because he continually repents of his sins, never allowing his heart to become hard toward God despite his sins. His penitent spirit is found throughout the Psalms. “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise” (Psalms 51:17).

Jesus says, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Matthew 5:8), but only he who sees to the “joints and marrow” (Hebrews 4:12) can “declare me innocent from *hidden* faults” (Psalms 19:10). The disciples ask Jesus, “Who then can be saved?” and he says, “What is impossible with man is possible with God” (Luke 18:27). When we humble ourselves, he gives us his Holy Spirit and sanctifies us. We are washed in his blood and will be raised with him. Even the patriarchs, “though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised” (Hebrews 11:39-40). But now we, with them, “have come to Mount Zion, and the spirits of the righteous made perfect,

and to Jesus, to the sprinkled blood” (Hebrews 12:22-24).

“Oh that salvation for Israel would come out of Zion!” (Psalm 14:7) because it’s not coming from us or our worldly philosophies or good works, for “there is none who does good, who seek after God, not even one” (Psalms 53:2, 3, 6). Before God destroys the world in flood, “The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Genesis 6:5). After the flood, Noah makes sacrifices. Even though the “pleasing aroma rises,” God does not now say, “they have learned their lesson, and they’ll do better.” Instead, he reiterates his observation from before the flood, that “the intention of man’s heart is evil from his youth” (Genesis 8:21).

We didn’t change, but in his mercy, he will not destroy the world again by flood but instead plans to redeem us through the one who went through the flood of abuse and rejection to be called “The Lord is our righteousness” (Jeremiah 23:5-6). When John counterpoints our sinfulness with the necessity for us not to sin, he says, “when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure (1 John 3:2-3). As Oswald Chambers wrote, “Jesus Christ is the only One who can fulfill the Sermon on the Mount.”²⁰ Only in keeping our eyes on Jesus are we sanctified day by day.

“And Who Is My Neighbor?”

“And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” He said to him, “What is written in the Law? How do you read it?” And he answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your

neighbor as yourself.” And he said to him, “You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live.” But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, ‘*And who is my neighbor?*’ Jesus replied, ‘A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, ‘Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.’ Which of these three, do you think, *proved to be a neighbor* to the man who fell among the robbers?’ He said, ‘The one who showed him mercy.’ And Jesus said to him, ‘You go, and do likewise.’” (Luke 10:29–37)

To test Jesus, a lawyer asks, *And who is my neighbor?* If we can identify who our neighbor is—a specific person or narrow group—we can work to fulfill the second great commandment at arm’s length without it costing us too much. This is yet another way to justify ourselves through actions by others and credit them to us. The only purpose of the lawyer’s question is not to discover how he can *expand* his responsibilities to other people but how he can *limit* his responsibilities. As the parable progresses, it becomes increasingly clear that the answer to the

lawyer's question *should* be that his neighbor is *the one who received help*. But an odd transformation happened on the way to that answer.

In its conclusion, Jesus reverses the premise and asks, "Who proved *to be* a neighbor to the man?" The neighbor is the one who delivers mercy, not the one who receives it. If the man who was attacked is the neighbor, then we need only help those who are attacked. But if the Good Samaritan is the neighbor, then it is an attitude of our heart, not a calculation in our mind. Who am I to others, *all* others? Who owns my time, *all* my time? Who owns all my money, *whatever you spend*, to help others? This involves a transformation inside us, not to check off another box but to change our hearts. As Luke says, "The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good" (Luke 6:45). Is *our* heart good?

Disarmed by Jesus' question, the lawyer stops testing Jesus and replies honestly, perhaps meekly. When Jesus reverses the premise, the lawyer, aware of patterns of legal argumentation, realizes how far he has drifted from the spirit of the commandment he thought he knew so well. In answering by way of a question, Jesus indicates that the lawyer's responsibility to his neighbor is unlimited, for he is the continual neighbor to everyone he encounters. This, then, is to *love your neighbor as yourself*.

This abrupt revelation is not unlike Nathan's stunning David with, "You are the man!" (2 Samuel 12:7) after he confronts David about his adultery with Bathsheba and his murder of her husband, Uriah. The lawyer is beginning to see the fundamental error in his reasoning. If he is the neighbor, then his responsibility is endless, for it is first a responsibility to God who sees our hearts and from which nothing is hidden. It is now not a handful of actions for a particular group but a transformation of

the heart to see the world differently. All people are God's creation; therefore, all are our neighbors.

After Jesus asks, *Who was the neighbor to the man?* The lawyer answers *the one who showed him mercy*. In this reversal, the lawyer has stopped trying to bicker over finer points of the law. Earlier, the lawyer had *stood up* to ask his question, presumably because he was in a crowd of people listening to Jesus preach, so his humiliation was public. Yet Jesus does not make this a gotcha moment and condemn the lawyer, personally or publicly. Instead, he sees the lawyer's change of heart as he surrenders the pretense of trying to trick this wise teacher. Jesus gives him a meaningful task in his great mercy and kindness: *You go and do likewise*. Jesus always shows us mercy, even in our most prideful moments.

As this parable emphasizes, though, his mercy is purposeful for us to be merciful to others. "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy" and "Should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?" (Matthew 5:7, 18:33) are just two of his many teachings about this. Jeremiah also provides a picture of mercy when God rebukes his people because God had said, "At the end of seven years each of you must set free the fellow Hebrew who has been sold to you and has served you six years" (Jeremiah 34:14). In a callback to the nation's year of Jubilee, when God cancels all debts, and the Israelites could return to their original family homestead, this is a Jubilee in miniature. Each encounter we have with another can be like a localized, personalized Jubilee in which we can be as merciful to others as God has been merciful to us and set our neighbor free from the clutch of our judgment, exaggerated expectations, and their slights, perceived or real.

Like the lawyer, we all want to answer correctly and be right before our teachers, parents, family, and God. But as the

Psalmist says, “As the eyes of servants look to the hand of their master, as the eyes of a maidservant to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look to the Lord our God, till he has mercy upon us” (Psalms 123:2). Our fulfillment comes in God's approval, which we only have through Jesus.

Romans “7:26”

No such verse exists—Romans 7 ends with verse 25. But when I was new in faith and read Romans for the first time, I thought the publisher had left a verse out of my Bible. How do we get from the discouraging final words of Romans 7, “with my flesh I serve the law of sin,” to the triumphant first verse of Romans 8, “There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus”? How can a Christian who does the *not do what I want* and does *what I do not want to* in Romans 7 get to *no condemnation* so quickly? Christ alone. And while those who had ears to hear and eyes to see had understood this in the Old Testament, now in the gospel, it is more evident than ever. This is an extension of the same grace received when we first turned to Jesus as our Lord, “the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe” (Romans 3:22).

Yet, we tend to suffer under the idea that the Sermon on the Mount's reiterations of the second tablet commandments are even more strident admonitions to do better, dig deeper, and be more obedient and purer to gain God's favor. We *must be perfect, as [our] heavenly Father is perfect*, so we make this another, even higher, and utterly impossible Law to achieve. But can this be the lighter yoke? “O foolish Galatians! Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected in the flesh?” (Galatians 3:1, 3).

Instead, this section of the Sermon on the Mount is the best of the Good News when we read it considering a God “merciful

and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness” (Exodus 34:6). Even though the sins of our hearts will be with us until death, *there is now no condemnation* because the blood of Christ covers all of them. God says, “How long will they be incapable of innocence?” and “How long shall your wicked thoughts lodge within you?” (Hosea 8:5, Jeremiah 4:14). Without his redemption—always. The jump to *no condemnation* in Romans 8 is not *because* we have overcome Romans 7 but despite us *not* conquering Romans 7.

These second-tablet sins of mind and heart will always be with us. This is not an excuse to give up and “continue in sin that grace may abound” (Romans 6:1). Just the opposite. “In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood” (Hebrews 12:4). Shedding of blood may allude to more than persecution, but death. Indeed, our struggle against sin will persist until we are no longer in this “tent that is our earthly home” (2 Corinthians 5:1).

English minister William Ames (1576–1633) says the second tablet “not only requires the works themselves, but also the most perfect way of working them; namely, that they come from the whole heart, and the bottom of the heart; that is, from the entire strength of the whole man, and with perfect purity and sincerity; and that they be directed to the glory of God.”²¹ So, we always strive to do right and please God while realizing *there is no condemnation* when we fail—and we do fail.

Paul highlights this tension in Philippians when he says, “as to righteousness under the law blameless,” yet knowing this earned blamelessness is but “rubbish, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ” and, knowing that he is not “already perfect,” he commits to “press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:14).

Theologian and pastor John Owen (1616–1683) writes, “believers, who are assuredly freed from the condemning power of sin, ought yet to make it their business all the days to mortify the indwelling power of sin, Indwelling sin always abides whilst we are in this world; therefore, it is always to be mortified.”²² More recently, Oswald Chambers wrote, “This experience of our attention being directed to our concentration of personal sin is true in everyone’s life, from the greatest of saints to the worst of sinners.”²³ And theologian Richard Foster writes, “Frankly, this side of eternity we will never unravel the good from the bad, the pure from the impure. But what I have come to see is that God is big enough to receive us with all our mixture. We do not have to be bright, or pure, or filled with faith, or anything. That is what grace means, and not only are we saved by grace, we live by it as well.”²⁴

These are reminders to contemplate how completely we need Jesus, both at that first moment in our lives when we open our hearts to him and then at every moment after. But it also reminds us to rejoice in how completely his blood covers all our sins from that one moment of salvation and then for all moments until we are reunited with him. Therefore, we must not despair of the sin that ever nips at our heel but rejoice that all is forgiven, bringing us joy and gratefulness in his rest. This, not earning perfection, allows Jesus’ gift of holiness to fill our lives. *There is now no condemnation* because we now have a righteousness not “from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith” (Philippians 3:9).

Divorce

“It was also said, Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce. But I say to you that

everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.”
(Matthew 5:31–32)

Instead of the *You have heard that it was said* that begins the explanations of the five second-tablet sins, Jesus begins this one differently: “It was *also* said.” The inclusion of divorce here, in the Sermon on the Mount, and especially in a list of sins of the heart that we will ever be dogged with, indicates that divorce is collateral damage from which we all suffer because of the Fall. Jesus says of divorce, “but from the beginning it was not so” (Matthew 19:10). Of course, *none* of the second tablet’s sins were there from the beginning. However, they are here now, and the consequence of our fallen nature affects all our relationships, not the least of which is seen in the most intimate marriage relationship.

“The Finger of God”

“And he gave to Moses, when he had finished speaking with him on Mount Sinai, the two tablets of the testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God.”
(Exodus 31:18)

and

“Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. And once more he bent down and wrote on the ground.” (John 8:6, 8)

God the Father and God the Son write on different occasions; the former when he gives us the Law, and the latter when he is presented with someone violating that very Law. Augustine (354–439 AD) makes this connection: “For the law was written

with the finger of God; but written on stone because of the hard-hearted. The Lord now wrote on the ground because He was seeking fruit.”²⁵ Jesus sees in the adulterous woman’s accusers the greater hidden sin of pride and assuming God’s place in judgment. He seeks any hint of mercy in them. What Jesus writes down, we don’t know, yet it was enough to shame the men into leaving her alone with Jesus, who does not condemn her. Seeing an expression of true mercy can shame us into realizing how unmerciful we are.

Ezekiel also records a similar shame of a group who were confronted with God’s writing. In that instance, they are given a detailed description of God’s law regarding the temple, “the design, its arrangement, its exits and with its entrances, all its statutes, its whole design, all its laws” (Ezekiel 43:11). Forty-five times in chapters 40 to 48, Ezekiel uses a form of the word *measure*. And the purpose of this review was to see “if they are ashamed of all that they have done” (Ezekiel 43:11).

Why would a recollection of blueprint-level details of the temple dimensions cause shame? Perhaps they would be ashamed of their failings in temple rituals. Maybe they would be ashamed of their pride after being reminded of the temple’s intricacies and glory. Perhaps they would be ashamed of the simple fact that a sovereign God would be so concerned with them and so personal with them that he writes instructions with his finger that point to a Savior. As such, with each measurement of God’s glorious work, they realize that they do not measure up to the perfection and holiness expected of them. They are overcome by their sinfulness and humbled by the great mercy of the one who loves them so much as to approach them through the intricacies of that temple. For similar reasons, the adulterous woman’s accusers are also ashamed.

Jesus is the true temple, with infinite measurements of his

perfection. Jesus says of himself, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (John 2:19). In what Ezekiel accomplished in 260 verses over eight chapters, Jesus accomplishes with two inscrutable scribbles on the ground. These men are in the presence of the divine and living temple. When Jesus writes with his finger on the ground, the woman’s accusers become ashamed, too, that somehow, they also aren’t measuring up. This isn’t only a measurement of their perfection, however. It is a measurement of their mercy or lack of it.

We cannot fix our imperfections outside of Jesus, but in his mercy, it is our choice by the power of the Holy Spirit to let him cover them for us. Jesus says elsewhere, “But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you” (Luke 11:20). The woman’s accusers are in the presence of the King, and we would be well advised to consider our own motives when we judge others as they did.

The scribes and the Pharisees had come to Jesus “to test him, that they might have some charge to bring against him” (John 8:6) shortly after the people had begun saying, “This is the Christ” (John 7:41). These religious leaders bring a woman caught in adultery and ask, “So what do you say? (John 8:5). If he fails to adhere to the Mosaic Law of stoning her, they can undermine his claim that he is the Christ. Ironically, they are confronting the God who wrote this Law, whom they ought to love with all their heart, souls, and minds (as the first tablet demands).

When their accusations go unanswered, their words falling to the ground in a manner of speaking, Jesus writes in the sand as if erasing those hollow words from existence. This image is seen in the prophet Samuel’s early life when he “grew, and the LORD was with him and let *none of his words fall to the ground*” (1 Samuel 3:19). Samuel spoke truthfully and

mercifully about God's will and our proper relationship with him. His words were meaningful, hanging in the air, so to speak, achieving their fully intended effect. The religious leaders before Jesus speak duplicitously to undermine him and unmercifully condemn the woman. Their ineffective words fall to the ground. Failing in their first attempt to trip him up, they again accuse the woman, at which point Jesus says, "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her" (John 8:7).

Jesus writes in the sand a second time, as if erasing their fallen words from existence. This pause gives them time to compare their behavior against the second tablet and, in summary, to love our neighbor as ourselves. And they depart with nothing accomplished. *They came to prove Jesus wasn't the God of the first tablet, and they departed realizing they weren't people of the second tablet.* The finger of God, twice on the tablets, twice in the sand, exposes our complete failure to love God and love our neighbor, but this is mercifully so that we must turn to him alone for salvation.

Jesus shows a depth of mercy they were unfamiliar with. This mercy comes as predicted when God says, "I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in my statutes and keep my rules and obey them" (Ezekiel 11:19–20). So now the Word which became flesh is written *in* us, "not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts" (2 Corinthians 3:3).

One final foreshadow of these moments Jesus had with this small crowd is seen in the third plague in Pharaoh's Egypt. It is the first plague which the magicians cannot duplicate, so they warn Pharaoh, "This is the finger of God" (Exodus 8:19). What further connects this event to Exodus is the command God gave

to initiate this plague, “Stretch out your staff and strike the *dust of the earth...*” (Exodus 8:16). God owns it all and his mark is over all, even the dirt beneath our feet, the very dust that Jesus wrote in.

Jesus came to die on our behalf and now lives forever “interceding for us” (Romans 8:34) because he “has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf” (Hebrews 9:24). And it’s because of that temple a new Jerusalem will come to this world: “And the name of the city from that time on shall be, The Lord Is There” (Ezekiel 48:35). This is the most humbling gift of all, but “Those who look to him are radiant, and their faces shall *never be ashamed*” (Psalms 34:5). Jesus alone is our righteousness.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus connects the second tablet to the Old Testament in Matthew 5 before the first tablet in Matthew 6, perhaps because being incarnated among us he sees our plight from a different perspective. For he, “made like his brothers in every respect” (Hebrews 2:17), is not “unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15). In the thirty years leading up to his ministry, Jesus comes to understand our sins, our struggle with the things of the world, and how the second tablet sins dominate our lives. At the beginning of his ministry, he leads with that message: “God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but so that the world might be saved through him” (John 3:17). He demonstrates this repeatedly in his ministry.

In Matthew 5, Jesus’ message about the second tablet is not different from Exodus 5, but the perspective and where we stand is changed. God speaks the Ten Commandments to Moses alone. Everyone else “stood at distance trembling with fear”

(Exodus 20:18). In this sermon, Jesus talks to us personally with no intermediary, that we will “draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16). When we fall upon Jesus, he can declare us “innocent from hidden faults” and “blameless of great transgression” (Psalms 19:12-13) because of his sacrifice. Dr. Carmen Joy Imes aptly says, “Jesus is not simply a conduit of God’s teachings the way Moses was. He is the *source* of those teachings”²⁶ (author’s emphasis).

A Third Great Commandment?

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:34)

In Matthew, Mark, and Luke, several people ask Jesus what the most important commandment is, and each time, he replies with two: love God and love your neighbor. However, this story is not told in the Gospel of John, and the two great commandments don’t appear directly in this gospel. Instead, Jesus magnificently displays his love for us when he washes his disciples’ feet and shares a supper with them. Afterward, he gives them a *new commandment*. Anglican priest Arthur Stanley (1815–1881) even refers to this as an “Eleventh Commandment,”²⁷ but a more apt description is that it is a third great commandment.

The two great commandments are all-inclusive in our relationship with God and our neighbor. Therefore, for a *new commandment* to be needed, there would need to be something unique and different, some entirely third concern requiring another commandment. And because Jesus gives it, isn’t it

necessarily great?

“This cup that is poured out for you is the *new* covenant in my blood.” (Luke 22:20, 1 Corinthians 11:25)

“Our sufficiency is from God, who has made us sufficient to ministers of a *new* covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit.” (2 Corinthians 3:6)

“I will establish a *new* covenant with the house of Israel.” (Hebrews 8:8) (emphasis added in all three)

A new commandment goes with the new covenant. We experience love amongst us, and the Holy Spirit releases it in us. We become the Body of Christ, his Church until he returns. “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation” (2 Corinthians 5:17). These new creations form a fellowship with others who will serve one another as Jesus did us when he washed the disciples’ feet. “By *this*, all people will know that you are my disciples” (John 13:35). Here, Jesus distinguishes between *all* people of the Second Great Commandment and, within that group, the *redeemed* people of his Church.

Just as the Israelites were a people set apart to honor God and from whom a Branch would come to save us; the Church is a place where Jesus glorifies himself through us to bring light into a dark world. We “are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession” (1 Peter 2:9). We “are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit, Christ Jesus being the cornerstone” (Ephesians 2:22, 20).

This does not break us off into an insulated tribe and create an us/them in the world. On the contrary, one of the reasons for love within the Church is to be “the light of the world” (Matthew 5:14), that “all people will know” that Jesus is among us, for “where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am

among them” (Matthew 18:20). Jesus is here for his Church for the world. Paul seamlessly combines these when he says, “Let us do good to everyone, and *especially* to those who are of the household of faith” (Galatians 6:10). The two great commandments are not curtailed in any way. Still, this new commandment is our joy and a necessity in the Body of Christ.

We can see our new role in this fallen world through a milestone event for the Israelites. After many kings, wars, and national unfaithfulness, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, defeated the Israelites. After plundering the temple, he “carried away *all* Jerusalem and *all* the officials and *all* the mighty men of valor, and *all* the craftsmen and the smiths. *None* remained *except the poorest people of the land*” (2 Kings 24:14).

When is *all*, not all? When is *none*, not none? When those being counted are invisible, *the poorest in the land*. Like a nation hidden within a nation, a whole group of Israelites is not exiled. *All* are gone, and *none* remain, but these Israelites are so poor, oppressed, and inconsequential that the defeating army ignores them, and their fellow citizens abandon them. They have no power, status, or wealth to threaten or be seen by either their fellow Israelites or their conquering enemy.

Such a group of people is embedded within every nation of every age, and *this* is the nation to which Jesus came to minister. He is dismissive of Caesar and Pilate and rebukes religious leaders—but he dines with the poor, the sick, and the sinners. “For though the LORD is high, he regards the lowly” (Psalms 138:6). As followers of Christ, we are all in this nation because we recognize our spiritual poverty, “for all have sinned” (Romans 3:23). But having been saved by grace, we have hope in a more excellent King so, like him, we at least can reach out to the lost and the hurt while we are here.

The other reason for love within the Church is perhaps even

more critical: survival as a Church for Christ's continual work on earth through us. We are "sojourners and exiles" (1 Peter 2:11), and "Our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Philippians 3:20). Like the Israelites in exile, we share a deep bond as exiles in this fallen world. Whether mildly or severely, depending on where God puts us on this earth or in what era we live, we have challenges to living a Christian life. We need each other!

We believe in his testimony, the empty tomb, and the witness of the Holy Spirit in our lives, and we find support for this journey in the fellowship of Christians. We are new people with a new Spirit, and this "new wine must be put into fresh wineskins" (Luke 5:38). These new wineskins are in a new Church with a new commandment. Jesus says in his high priestly prayer, "The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me" (John 17:22-23). We are one with him and are commanded to be *perfectly one* with each other to be a light to the world.

Two Tablets, Two Great Commandments

Love the Lord your God and love your neighbor as yourself. See how these are woven together in Leviticus:

"you shall not strip your vineyard bare...leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: *I am the LORD your God...*you shall not lie to one another. You shall not swear by my name falsely...*I am the Lord*. You shall not oppress your neighbor or rob him...*I am the Lord*. You shall do no injustice in court...*I am the Lord*. You shall not hate your brother in your heart...but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: *I am the Lord*."

(Leviticus 19:9–18)

The Ten Commandments have commandments upward to God and across to our neighbor. These and all the Law are covered in the two great commandments, to love our God and neighbor. Notice in this Leviticus passage how, after each instruction to treat our neighbor with compassion, God repeats his Lordship over all, intertwining loving God and loving our neighbor into an interdependency that cannot be separated. We cannot love our neighbor without first loving God; we do not love God if we do not love our neighbor. John writes, “We love because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19).

Jesus says, “I and the Father are one” and “before Abraham was, I am” (John 10:30, 8:58), so the Pharisees know he claims equality with God. The message of the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount are the same, just as the message of the Old Testament and the New Testament is the same: God the Father and God the Son are ever sacrificial and merciful to forgive our sins.

“And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” (Luke 24:27, 44)

Unsurprisingly, the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount are inseparable. The same God gives them both. Seeing the Son in the Old Testament and the Father in the New Testament is no accident. They are one, and they speak with the same voice.

They each choose the place for their discourse. Both occur

on a higher place, the Law far up on the cliffs of Mount Sinai that are “wrapped in smoke” (Exodus 19:18), purposely obscuring a holy God, while the Sermon is on the gentler mount, ascended to make more visible his Son. In one, from his divine and heavenly throne, “The Lord *came down* on Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain” (Exodus 19:20), while in the other, from the dust of this imperfect and fallen world, Jesus “*went up* on the mountain” (Matthew (5:1).

They each determine the proximity of the audience. In one, God says, “do not let the priests and the people break through to come up to the LORD” (Exodus 19:24). In contrast, in the other, “his disciples came with him” (Matthew 5:1). In one, “the people were afraid and trembled, and they stood far off” (Exodus 20:18), and in the other, “great crowds followed him” (Matthew 4:25) to hear, even to draw close enough for his healing touch.

Finally, the people respond to them. In one, they want Moses as a go-between and say, “Do not let God speak to us lest we die” (Exodus 20:19), while in the other, they sit enraptured, and “when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching” (Matthew 7:28). God the Father may not have been approachable in the Old Testament. Still, he sent his Son that we might approach through him. While the promise that “a bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench” (Isaiah 42:3) is fulfilled in Jesus, it originated with his ever-merciful Father.

“Not to the terrors of the Lord,
The tempest, fire, and smoke:
Not to the thunder of that word
Which God on Sinai spoke:
But we are come to Zion’s hill,

The city of our God;
Where milder words declare His will,
And spread His love abroad.”²⁸

— Isaac Watts (1674–1748)

Essay Four

Two Glories

“Then the priests brought the ark of the covenant of the LORD to its place in the inner sanctuary of the house, in the Most Holy Place, underneath the wings of the cherubim. For the cherubim spread out their wings over the place of the ark, so that the cherubim overshadowed the ark and its poles. And the poles were so long that the ends of the poles were seen from the Holy Place before the inner sanctuary; but they could not be seen from outside. And they are there to this day.” (1 Kings 8:6-8)

Of the many articles in the temple, the two poles, or “staves” (KJV) used to transport the ark probably receive the least attention. Their purpose in carrying the ark is obvious, but once the temple was finished, their purpose should have been finished, too, and it would have been logical for them to have been stored away. Yet the poles remained in place and, along with the other items in the temple, reveal something about God’s relationship with us.

The poles were not so long that they would have protruded through the curtain around the Holy of Holies, for the KJV says, “*they drew out the staves*, that the ends of the staves were seen out in the holy place” (1 Kings 8:8). They would not have had to be drawn out to be seen if they could already be seen, so

there was intentionality in this modification. Also, this passage peculiarly says they *were seen* but *could not be seen*. Commentaries resolve this contradiction by suggesting that the poles were likely drawn out enough to make bumps in the curtain but insufficient to protrude through the curtain opening. Thus, the high priest could see where they were but not see the poles themselves. But why would they be pulled out at all?

A Guide in the Darkness

Jewish sources indicate that the poles were pulled out slightly to indicate their location so that the high priest could safely find his way to the ark. While entering the Most Holy Place to minister to God was a privilege, it was also a grave responsibility and not without significant personal risk. God warned Moses at their first encounter, “Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground” (Exodus 3:5). When Uzzah “put out his hand to the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen stumbled [and] God struck him down there because of his error” (2 Samuel 6:6-7). Aaron’s sons “offered unauthorized fire before the LORD, which he had not commanded them. And fire came out from before the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD” (Leviticus 10:1-2). Isaiah says, “Who among us can dwell with the consuming fire? Who among us can dwell with everlasting burnings?” (Isaiah 33:14). Approaching God must be done in his way and in his timing.

The poles were drawn out to give the priest a starting point for his journey inward, creating a safe path where he might not violate God’s holiness. Reverend Robert Jamieson (1802–1880), Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, wrote that “these projecting staves might serve as a guide to the high priest, in conducting him to that place where,

once a year, he went to officiate before the ark; otherwise, he might miss his way in the dark, the ark being wholly overshadowed by the wings of the cherubim.”²⁹

Once inside, the poles were as a fence on either side of the high priest, keeping him from straying to either side of the safe path towards the ark. The *Koren Talmud* says, “When he reaches the Ark, he places the coal pan *between the two staves*,”³⁰ and “The High Priest takes the blood of the bull from the priest who was stirring it, enters the Holy of Holies, and sprinkles eight times *between the two staves*.”³¹

The obligatory offerings of the high priest were made between the two poles, after which he would retrace his steps, careful to stay between the poles during his exit. Because of the precariousness of this annual ritual, the drama surrounding it was high. Nothing less than the continued presence of God for the nation was at stake, for on him they relied for their welfare and blessings. So significant was the nation’s reliance on this glory-presence that when the Philistines captured the ark, Eli the high priest and judge, fell over at the news, breaking his neck and dying, and his daughter-in-law prematurely gave birth and named him Ichabod, saying, “The glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God has been captured” (1 Samuel 4:22).

In his temple dedication, Solomon prays, “The LORD our God be with us, as he was with our fathers. May he not leave us or forsake us, that he may incline our hearts to him...” (1 Kings 8:57-58). From the start, the nation depended on God’s continued presence so that it might remain under his protection and glory. God provided this and, in his mercy, gave their high priest a means to approach him.

Later, two other poles, in the form a cross, would have the same purpose for us. Like the poles that carried the ark and the glory of God in the temple, the cross carried the glory of God,

Jesus his Son. In his introduction to his gospel, John says, “we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). And later, in his high priestly prayer, Jesus says, “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you” (John 17:1). Like the two poles pulled out a little bit so the high priest would be guided to the glory of God, so the cross is lifted up to guide us safely to God’s glory through Jesus. But for us, this is not the perilous journey of the high priest in the dark, for Jesus made that journey for us. Rather than the dramatic journey of the high priest, with Jesus, “you will find rest for your souls” (Matthew 11:29).

A Reminder to Be Ready

The original purpose of the two poles was to ensure a speedy response to God’s leading in the desert. The cloud by day and fire by night led them, and “whenever the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the people of Israel would set out” (Exodus 40:36). This camping and decamping was an enormous effort. Still, the most important tent was the tabernacle, and the most important item was the ark. After the priests painstakingly packed the various holy items, the Levites would transport them, but the Kohathites were singled out to “not touch the holy things, lest they die” (Numbers 4:15). For the holiest of these items, the ark, the poles ensured they would not touch it.

The movement of their camp was unpredictable. “Whether it was two days, or a month, or a longer, that the cloud continued over the tabernacle, abiding there, the people of Israel remained in camp and did not set out, but when it lifted, they set out. At the command of the LORD they camped, and at the command of the LORD they set out” (Numbers 9:22-23). Unpredictability runs counter to our nature. During their

wanderings in the desert, the Israelites became so impatient with the unpredictability of their journey that they even wanted to return to enslavement in Egypt! When God brought the Israelites into the promised land, and Solomon built the temple, this unpredictable movement had hopefully ended. But this is not how God leads us, then or now. The poles poking into the curtain served as a visible reminder that even with the permanency of a massive temple surrounded by a walled city, the poles were still there, and the Israelites should be prepared for God to move them at any time to another place.

The cross is a similar reminder of our walk with Jesus. While our hearts and souls are firmly fixed in him, our place of service and lifestyle may not be as fixed and predictable. Jesus says, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Matthew 16:24). Like the cloud by day and fire by night, God may ask us to change our circumstances and plans. The cross is a reminder that like Jesus, who had “nowhere to lay his head” (Luke 9:58), we also are “strangers and exiles on the earth” (Hebrews 11:13). Jesus says, “where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6:21). If our treasure is our job, our neighborhood, a cause, or even our church, we will not be able to obey if Jesus asks us to “Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me” (Luke 18:22).

In one of the most pointed passages in the gospels, Jesus says, “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not *bear his own cross* and come after me cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:26-27). Reverend Billy Graham said that in bearing this cross, “Jesus doesn’t simply call us to believe that He

existed, or even to believe that He can save us. He calls on us to commit our whole lives to Him.”³²

The cross comes first. Like the Kohathites who bore the glory of God on the two poles, we must be willing to bear his glory of the cross in the same manner. We, for a while, live in a “tent that is our earthly home” (2 Corinthians 5:1); we live in it “like treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us” (2 Corinthians 4:7). Jesus said, “The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me” (John 17:22-23). His glory is revealed in us when we “present [our] bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God” so that we might be the “aroma of Christ to God” in this world (2 Corinthians 2:15). Like the high priests going into the Holy of Holies, this can be a significant burden, but it is also our greatest blessing.

Conveyances of carts and oxen for transporting the tabernacle items were given to Levites, who were charged with carrying them from one place to the next. “But to the sons of Kohath he gave none, because they were charged with the service of the holy things that had to be carried on the shoulder” (Numbers 7:9). Jesus says to James and John, “The cup that I drink you will drink” (Mark 10:39) indicating that they would carry on their shoulders martyrdom. Paul said, “We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies” (2 Corinthians 4:8-10). In manifesting his life, we also manifest his glory as a witness to a world searching for meaning.

As the Kohathites had the privilege of bearing the glory of God on their shoulders, so we have the privilege of bearing the glory of God within us. Baptized in Jesus, we are sealed with the Holy Spirit, given the power of the Holy Spirit to walk with him and given the gifts of the Holy Spirit to minister for him.

A Reassurance of His Return

While the temple was a permanent structure containing the ark with the cherubim, above which God's glory would appear, God is not restricted to a structure. "Would you build me a house to dwell in?" (2 Samuel 7:5). God didn't need to live in a building, but he allowed his glory to be seen there for the nation's sake. The Psalmist says, "Let us go to his dwelling place; let us worship at his footstool!" (Psalms 132:7). Even as a mere footstool his glory is present. However, since it was only seen by the high priest, and for him only annually, it would be easy for the people to doubt God's presence over time.

Moses was on the mountain with God for a mere forty days, yet during this short absence, the Israelites demanded of Aaron, "Make us gods who shall go before us. As for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, *we do not know what has become of him*" (Exodus 32:23), and Aaron made a golden calf for them to worship. If not seeing God's representative after just forty days led to such an event, what of 365 days? The two poles were connected to the ark, the ark was connected to the cherubim, and the glory of God was above the cherubim. If they could see that the poles were still there, they could rest assured that the ark was still there, the cherubim were still there, and God was still there.

The two poles that form the cross serve a similar purpose for us. When Jesus ascended from this earth, the disciples "were gazing into heaven as he went" as if they would be lost without

him being physically present in their lives as he had been for three years. Then two men in white robes said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven” (Acts 1:10-11). From this moment until the penultimate verse in the Bible, when Jesus reassures us, “Surely I am coming soon” (Revelation 22:20), we seek to see his glory in our lives. Peter says, “though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls” (1 Peter 1:8-9).

We don’t see *him*, but we can always see the *cross*, a historical event and visible symbol to remind us of who Jesus is. Paul says, “For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1 Corinthians 1:18). In his deepest trials he would boast only “in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world” (Galatians 6:14). As the two poles in the temple reassured the Israelites that God was with them, so during our darkest moments the cross reassures us that Jesus is with us. “I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel” (Numbers 24:17). That Sceptre is our hope.

While our faith may waiver, we need only look to the empty tomb to know that Jesus is alive, present in our lives and will return for us. Mary entered that tomb to see “two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, *one at the head and one at the feet*” (John 20:12). These angels are positioned as were the cherubim over the ark, situated “*on the two ends of the mercy seat*” above the ark (Exodus 25:18). Upon the two

poles was the ark, and upon the ark was the mercy seat, and upon this mercy seat was the glory of God, continually witnessed by two angels at either end. Jesus' resurrection, witnessed by two angels at either end of the slab on which he had lain, is the glory of God. And this glory is for our salvation and for the salvation of the world.

A Little Geometry

“Justice and judgment are the habitation of thy throne: mercy and truth shall go before thy face” (Psalms 89:14, KJV).

While there are similarities in meaning between the two poles under the ark and the two poles of the cross, there is one difference, and it is quite significant. In fact, this difference may be the entire point of this prefiguration.

Justice and mercy are contradictory concepts and mutually exclusive in their application. To exercise justice, injustice must be punished, and punishment is not merciful. To exercise mercy, injustice is not punished and is, therefore, not justice. Justice and mercy are like parallel lines, extending to infinity and, by definition, never intersecting—like the two poles supporting the ark. But nothing is impossible with God. He, who is both just and merciful, established a means we might draw unto him. He told Moses, “There I will meet with you, and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim that are on the ark of the testimony” (Exodus 25:22). If justice and mercy are mutually exclusive, how can God be both just *and* merciful?

Only on the cross, where the two poles intersect, are both justice and mercy found because that is where Jesus, God's only son, died for the world's sins. “He is the atoning sacrifice for

our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:2, NIV). Completely innocent, so not requiring justice of any kind, God, “For our sake...made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21). Judgment for all sin was put on him so that all mercy might be given to us.

This was no happenstance event, but it was planned “before the foundation of the world” (1 Peter 1:20) because of his faithfulness to us. The first shed blood of his creation was for us when “God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them” (Genesis 3:21) because even though “we are faithless, he remains faithful” (2 Timothy 2:13). Those animal skins were only temporary clothing, but soon we will be clothed in his righteousness.

We, despite having “neglected the weightier matters of the law: *justice* and *mercy* and *faithfulness*” (Matthew 23:23), have benefitted from all three through Jesus. He has fulfilled his promise in Hosea, “I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in *justice*, in steadfast love and in *mercy*. I will betroth you to me in *faithfulness*” (Hosea 2:19-20). As “The wolf shall dwell with the lamb” (Isaiah 11:6), so shall justice and mercy be fully realized in Jesus. This will be explored in more detail later in the two pillars that are outside the temple.

PART TWO

The Son and the Holy Spirit

“And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.””

Matthew 3:16-17

Essay Five

Queen Vashti

“I danced in the morning when the world was begun,
And I danced in the moon and the stars and the sun,
And I came down from heaven and I danced on the earth:
At Bethlehem I had my birth.”

— Sydney Carter, “Lord of the Dance”³³

The Book of Esther famously doesn’t contain the name *Jehovah* (YHWH/LORD). Some scholars find it hidden in acrostic form, but his name is absent in the text, and it is perhaps the only book in the Bible that does not mention God’s name. As such, the dramatic story of Esther and Mordecai is commonly viewed as a lesson for God’s people in exile, where no visible acknowledgment or celebration of God is in their secular surroundings. It tells a story of how to maintain our faith, how we can influence this world for God and in fellowship with each other, and how God places us in many places, some of obvious importance and some of hidden importance, but always in a place to be influential for the kingdom when in we are living in faith in him and guided by the Holy Spirit.

Very little time, however, is spent on Queen Vashti, who plays a small but quite significant role. The exiled Israelites are saved from destruction through Esther’s and her uncle Mordecai’s faith. Still, the precipitating providential event for this eventual salvation of the Israelites is Queen Vashti’s removal,

creating an absence near the king that he would fill with Esther. As such, the brief presence of Queen Vashti in scripture is worth a closer look.

The Book of Esther opens with a description of King Ahasuerus' great power and the expanse of his kingdom. He "reigned from India to Ethiopia over 127 provinces; gave a feast for all his officials and servants...he showed the riches of his royal glory and the splendor and pomp of his greatness for many days, 180 days" (Esther 1:1-4). A feast of that length is extraordinarily extravagant. But he could do this because he owns and rules everything and is accountable only to himself.

Satan similarly rules over this world. As C. S. Lewis fictionalized in *The Screwtape Letters*, Satan is still very active in keeping us from serving God. When Satan tempted Jesus, he offered him "all the kingdoms of the world and their glory" (Matthew 4:8), even more than Ahasuerus could offer. Satan goes "to and fro on the earth, walking up and down on it" (Job 1:7), is the "prince and power of the air" (Ephesians 2:2), the "ruler of this world" (John 12:31), and "the god of this world" (2 Corinthians 4:4). He "prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8). During King Ahasuerus' great feast,

"King Ahasuerus commanded to bring Queen Vashti before the king with her royal crown, in order to show the peoples and the princes her beauty, for she was lovely to look at. But Queen Vashti refuses to come at the king's command. At this the king became enraged, and his anger burned within him, let it be written, that Vashti is never again to come before King." (Esther 1:11-12, 19)

We don't know the reason for Queen Vashti's refusal. But

because of the emphasis on her beauty, it's fair to say that she does not want to be gawked at by *people and princes* at a party. For everyone else at the party, choices are allowed because "the king had given orders to all the staff of his palace to do as each man desired" (Esther 1:8), but for Queen Vashti, no choice is allowed. Some suggest that when the king tells Queen Vashti to appear with her royal crown, it means that she is to appear with only her crown and nothing else. The *Jewish Encyclopedia* says, "Ahasuerus ordered Queen Vashti to appear nude before him and his guests at the banquet with the queen's crown as her only ornament."³⁴ Though risky, but for a good reason, she refuses to do what the ruler of that world asks her to do.

Jesus also refuses to do what the ruler of this world wants him to do. When he is baptized, those nearby witness "the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him" (Matthew 3:16). Immediately after, Jesus is "led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil" (Matthew 4:1). And then "after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry" (Matthew 4:2), and his temptation begins.

Satan tempts Jesus in three ways: to trust himself instead of God for sustenance, to test God by unnecessarily exposing himself to harm, and finally, to reject God in exchange for the world's glory. The presence of the Holy Spirit in his life is crucial to his response. Jesus counters all three with what Paul later calls "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Ephesians 6:17). He responds with a scriptures that specifically address each temptation: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Deuteronomy 8:3), "You shall not put the Lord your God to the test" (Deuteronomy 6:16), and "You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve" (Deuteronomy 6:13).

In Ephesians, the armor of God is first item as “the belt of truth” (Ephesians 6:14). Without a belt, one risks physical exposure. Without the truth, one risks spiritual exposure to the lies of Satan. In his high priestly prayer, Jesus says, “Sanctify them in your truth; your word is truth” (John 17:17). Adam and Eve’s very first realization after acting on the serpent’s lie was that “they knew that they were naked” (Genesis 3:7). Satan would have Jesus, too, be spiritually naked and without God’s word. But like Queen Vashti, Jesus refuses to dance for Satan, to participate in the corrupt world into which he had come. He counters temptations by covering himself with God’s truth found in scripture, and “the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him” (Matthew 4:11).

Queen Vashti’s reputation has not always been viewed highly by some. Some criticize her for failing to obey her husband and king. However, in time, most have recognized the soundness of her decision, drawing on Persian laws and practices in Esther’s time that, as John Gill notes, called “women not to be seen in public” and men to “not allow their wives to be with them at feasts, only their concubines and harlots.”³⁵ For her, in this place and in this time, this was the higher truth she called on to protect herself. This, plus that her husband and the men are likely drunk, has ennobled her decision over time. Some subsequent sermon titles on Queen Vashti are “Justifiable Disobedience; A Noble Womanly Refusal; Vashti Had Good Reason to be Excused; and Vashti Obeyed the Higher Law.”³⁶ Queen Vashti uses a higher law to refuse compromise to her beliefs and dignity.

Like Queen Vashti, Jesus is in a world where the authorities see no limit to their power. Herod “killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under” (Matthew 2:16) just in case a single child, a rumored

newborn king, was among them. Jeremiah saw this when he said, “A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are no more” (Jeremiah 31:15). Herod orders “the head of John the Baptist on a platter” (Mark 6:25) simply because he didn’t want dinner guests to see him break his word to his daughter—who *did* dance for his guests. During Jesus’ incarceration under Herod, his soldiers “treated him with contempt and mocked him” because Jesus dashes Herod’s desire “to see some sign done by him” (Luke 23:10, 8). To wit, Herod wants Jesus to entertain him, as the king desires Queen Vashti to entertain him.

All Queen Vashti needs to do is dance before the king and all present. But she doesn’t. The king’s wise men advise him to banish her to protect their power and influence, “For the queen’s behavior will be made known to all women, causing them to look at their husbands with contempt” (Esther 1:17). How similar this is to the Pharisees’ concern, “If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and *take away both our place and our nation*” (John 11:47).

Those in power do not like other people making waves and disrupting the status quo. The king’s advisors in the Book of Esther and the religious leaders in the gospels are not concerned about the righteous behavior of Queen Vashti or Jesus. They only care how it will diminish their influence and position: “Pilate knew that it was out of envy that they had delivered him up” (Matthew 27:17-18), but this didn’t stop him from delivering Jesus to crucifixion.

And, just as the king later carelessly “took his signet ring from his hand and gave it to Haman” (Esther 3:10) giving him the authority to destroy the Israelites, Pilate is dismissive of his

responsibility to administer justice when he “took water and washed his hands before the crowd” (John 19:24), handing over the Jesus to be crucified. Pilate even says, “I am innocent of this man’s blood; *see to it yourselves*” (John 19:24), just as the king says to Haman, “The money is given to you, the people also, to *do with them as it seems good to you*” (Esther 3:11). Both men refuse to shoulder their responsibilities. Instead, they let others commit the crime.

Notably, Queen Vashti holds her own banquet, “a feast for the women of the palace” (Esther 1:9), separate from the king’s decadent one. Jesus will also have “a great banquet” with “many invited” (Luke 14:16), also separate from the world’s banquet. And when he does, the ruler of this world and rulers of this world will be far removed from it. However, it will be a very different kind of feast, for when he brings us to his banqueting house, his banner over us will be love (Song of Solomon 2:4), not fear, because Jesus’ “perfect love for us casts out all fear” (1 John 4:18). It isn’t the stuporous wine that will fill us then, but the illuminating Holy Spirit.

Queen Vashti’s inner beauty and integrity go unrecognized until it is too late. The king’s anger abates, and he “remembered her” (Esther 2:1), but he has already banished her. In the same way, Jesus’ spiritual beauty goes unrecognized. It isn’t until he dies that the soldiers “were filled with awe and said, ‘Truly this was the Son of God’” (Matthew 27:54), but it is too late for them to undo his banishment from the mortal world.

Queen Vashti risks her life when she refuses to obey the king because she disobeys the one with the power over life and death. Yet, she obeys a higher law to which even the king must begrudgingly submit. Paul notes, “For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show

that the work of the law is written on their hearts” (Romans 2:14-15). Just as Mordecai and Ester call on Jewish law to not worship King Ahasuerus, Queen Vashti calls on this law, one *written on their hearts* and perhaps even codified in their secular laws, which the king and his advisors should recognize but sinfully don’t.

As a result, Queen Vashti calls on a law foreign to the cultural worldview in which the Book of Esther is set, just as Jesus brings a worldview unrecognizable to those around him. Healing on the Sabbath, helping a Samaritan, clearing out the temple, raising Lazarus from the dead, and many other things Jesus does are so counter to the religiously powerful’s interpretation of Torah that they remove him, just as the king and his advisors remove Queen Vashti.

Two people in this book risk their lives for their beliefs: Queen Vashti refuses to come before the king as commanded, and Queen Esther comes before the king when not commanded to plea for her people. While Queen Vashti’s action could have cost her life, Queen Esther’s action could have cost her life and the lives of all those in the exiled Israelite nation. Jesus is incarnated to give his life for us and is “obedient to the point of death, even death on the cross” (Philippians 2:8), but his physical life isn’t all that is at stake. Jesus knows his Father intimately and prays, “glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed” (John 17:5). Had Jesus sinned in the desert temptations—or at any other time—he would forever have been excluded from his Father’s presence and bereft of the glory he had known, a sinner just as we all are.

But not just his glory is at stake. Rather than being the “last Adam” of our salvation, “a life-giving Spirit” (1 Corinthians 15:46), he could have been another Adam, remaining in the grave, dust to dust. Instead, “in every respect he [was] tempted

as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15) and so is resurrected to become “the firstborn among many brothers” (Romans 8:29). His sinless death returns him to the Father’s right hand, allowing us to enter that place of glory as well.

The Book of Esther exhibits a worldview and culture without God. Esther and Mordecai are faithful to God within that culture, with one on the outside of the power structure and one on the inside. But God uses Queen Vashti’s decision to save the Israelites through Esther and Mordecai. Through the strength of the Holy Spirit, Jesus refuses to bow to Satan, which opens the way for him to save the whole world. Scottish Theologian Sinclair Ferguson says in *The Holy Spirit: Contours of Christian Theology*, “Thus, in the power of the Spirit, in the inhospitable desert which the world had become through the first Adam’s sin, the second man...Jesus was able sovereignly to dismiss the devil.”³⁷

Essay Six

Brook Kidron

“[T]he land wept aloud as all the people passed by, and the king crossed the brook Kidron, and all the people passed on toward the wilderness.” (2 Samuel 15:23)

“When Jesus had spoken these words, he went out with his disciples across the brook Kidron, where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered.” (John 18:1)

While Matthew, Mark, and Luke provide lengthy accounts of Jesus’ time in the Garden of Gethsemane, John tells only of his entrance, followed by his immediate arrest. But John is the only gospel that mentions crossing the brook Kidron, a well-known landmark between Jerusalem and the Mount of Olives. This verse contains a great deal of history and meaning. It is significant for two reasons: first, it recalls another king who preceded Jesus across this brook, and second, his crossing symbolizes Jesus’ life on this earth.

David is the kind of king Israel hoped to see again. He is fearless, faithful, and blessed. So, when Jesus rides the donkey into Jerusalem, the crowd carpets the ground with palm leaves because they believe Jesus to be that king. And like David, he is driven out of Jerusalem by duplicitous and hateful forces. But significantly, they take a similar route out of the city—over the

brook Kidron.

Two Conspiracies

Absalom carefully plots the overthrow of his father by moving back into Jerusalem and, for four years, telling any passerby, “Oh that I were judge in the land! I would give him justice. So Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel” (2 Samuel 15:4-6). When Jesus formally introduces himself as the Christ to the Nazarene leaders of his home synagogue, they are angry enough to try to “throw him down the cliff” (Luke 4:29). Those religious leaders plot “how to destroy him” (Matthew 12:14) for the next three years.

In both cases, evil plans percolate for years before their execution. These conspiracies shouldn’t be taken lightly, for they originate within their own families. For David, this is his son. For Jesus, this family is his disciples: “And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers!’” (Matthew 12:49). And from this family, one betrays him.

Two Betrayals

David and Jesus are betrayed by those closest to them. Ahithophel is “David’s counselor” but comes to be “among the conspirators with Absalom” (2 Samuel 15:31). The royal protocol is that no one gets near the king unless they are thoroughly vetted and closely trusted. Queen Esther, for example, takes her life into her own hands when she steps into King Ahasuerus’ presence, for “if any man or woman goes to the king inside the inner court without being called, there is but one law—to be put to death, except the one to whom the king holds out the golden scepter” (Esther 4:11). In Nehemiah, the prophet “was very much afraid” simply because King Artaxerxes noticed him appearing sad (Nehemiah 2:2). King David may not have been as

severe as these kings; nevertheless, Ahithophel is trusted, and his reversal of loyalties is a profound betrayal.

Many of the Psalms are both autobiographical and messianic, and this one especially so, “Even my close friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me” (Psalms 41:9). David is writing about Ahithophel. Prophetically, Judas is in Ahithophel’s company. Judas “was a thief” long before his betrayal, “having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it” (John 12:6). When “the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to put [Jesus] to death” during Passover week, “Satan entered into Judas” (Luke 22:2-3). Before the Last Supper, the betrayal plan is set in motion.

As with Ahithophel and David, Judas is part of a small group that eats, sleeps, and travels with their Lord for three years. While Jesus knows all along Judas will betray him when the moment arrives, “Jesus was troubled in his spirit” (John 13:21). After the meal is underway, he says to Judas, “What you are going to do, do quickly” (John 13:27).

Unlike David, Jesus is in complete control of his fate, and his very presence among us is his choice to obey his Father. Jesus is not suggesting to Judas that he betray him—Judas has already made that decision. Jesus is not commanding him to betray him—Judas betrays him of his free will. Scottish theologian John Brown (1784–1858) puts it this way: “It is as if he had said, ‘I know your determination is fixed. You are ready to betray; I am ready to be betrayed; there is no need of further delay.’”³⁸

Neither Judas nor Ahithophel is a passive traitor. Judas “went to the chief priests in order to betray him” (Mark 14:10), and Ahithophel volunteers, “I will arise and pursue David tonight. I will come upon him while he is weary and discouraged;

I will strike down only the king” (2 Samuel 17:1). Both premeditate their betrayal and have a clear plan to follow through. After their plans are executed, they both have the same tragic end—hanging themselves in regret.

David runs from Ahithophel, but Jesus remains in Gethsemane, unafraid of Judas’ malice. He is quite prepared to face his fate. English clergyman Thomas Manton (1620–1677) explains that:

“[W]hen Christ saw the misery of mankind, he said, ‘Let it come on me.’ We raised the storm, Christ was cast in to allay it; Christ bore our sorrows; he would have this work in no other hands but his own. His earnestness to partake of the last Passover sheweth his willingness; he had such a desire to see his body on the cross, that Judas seemed too slow, not diligent enough. ‘That thou doest, do quickly’ is not an approbation of his sin, but a testimony of his love.”³⁹

Both kings flee Jerusalem over the brook Kidron and up the Mount of Olives. One goes humiliated, “weeping as he went, barefoot and with his head covered” (2 Samuel 15:30) and continues “beyond the summit” (2 Samuel 16:1). But the other remains at that summit, “where God was worshipped” (2 Samuel 15:32), praying and weeping in such agony for strength to do the will of his Father that “his sweat became like great drops of blood falling to the ground” (Luke 22:44) until he is arrested, abused, and crucified.

Although driven from the throne for a time, David returns and “reigned over all Israel” and “died at a good age, full of days, riches, and honor” (1 Chronicles 29:26, 28). It’s how we all hope to pass on from this life. But Jesus, unlike David, dies young: “He has broken my strength in midcourse; he has

shortened my days” (Psalms 102:23). Jesus dies with not even the clothes on his back: “they took his garments and divided them into four parts, one part for each soldier; also, his tunic” (John 19:23). Jesus dies so impoverished that he must entrust his mother’s care to another: “Then he said to the disciple, “Behold, your mother!” And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.” (John 19:27). Finally, Jesus dies in disgrace and shame: “for a hanged man is cursed by God” (Deuteronomy 21:23).

David allows violence and deceit into his house and flees. Yet, having “done nothing wrong” (Luke 23:41), Jesus stays, becoming the object of violence and deceit. But soon, Jesus will be the more excellent king, anticipated prophetically when “David himself calls him Lord” (Matthew 12:37), when Jesus “has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut” (Revelation 3:7), and when “the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered” (Revelation 5:5). All of this will be fulfilled because Jesus chose to stay on the Mount of Olives to be taken and crucified for us.

Kidron

Strong’s Concordance says this word means “cedar, wood fragrant, dark, turbid; a winter torrent, flowing into the Dead Sea,” and in Hebrew is “a place for refuse; the idea of separation, withdrawal.”⁴⁰ This description outlines the significance of this brook and valley. The word Kidron is typically preceded by “Nahal,” with the double meaning of “brook” and “valley,”⁴¹ and Jesus walked through that valley, “the valley of the shadow of death,” to drink the cup of God’s wrath.

Separation and Withdrawal

The brook Kidron is a recognizable boundary to the east of Jerusalem. Solomon once put a man under house arrest in

Jerusalem for cursing Solomon's father. Then, he used the Kidron to define the boundary of his movements (1 Kings 2:36). Jesus used the Mount of Olives, on the other side of the Kidron, as a regular place of refuge and safety from the Pharisees in Jerusalem. Luke says, "At night he went out and lodged on the mount called Olivet...as was his custom" (Luke 21:37, 22:39). Though not far, this short distance across the Kidron is separate and away from the city. Jesus goes there alone with his disciples and prays to his Father.

More than a benign geographical landmark, the Kidron has cultural and religious significance, but not in a positive way. It is a border between Jerusalem and all else that is not Jerusalem. When David and his entourage flee Jerusalem, "they halted at the last house" (2 Samuel 15:17), made some final arrangements, and then "the king crossed the brook Kidron, and all the people passed on toward the wilderness" (2 Samuel 15:23). There is Jerusalem, and then there is wilderness.

A Place for Refuse

Whenever a king or priest in the Old Testament repents of their cyclical sinfulness, characterized by idolatry, their response is to repent practically by removing the idolatrous objects.

"And he brought out the Asherah from the house of the Lord, outside Jerusalem, to the brook Kidron, and burned it at the brook Kidron." (2 Kings 23:6)

"[T]he Levites took it and carried it out to the brook Kidron, all the altars for burning incense they took away and threw into the brook Kidron." (2 Chronicles 29:16, 30:14)

Jesus crosses over this unholy pit of historical and spiritual failure, rebelliousness, and gross sin, for he comes to cleanse us

from our sins. English pastor John Gill (1697–1771), in his *Exposition of the Bible*, sees it as “an emblem of this world, and the darkness and filthiness of it, through which Christ himself went, drinking ‘of the brook in the way’ [Psalm 110:7].”⁴² Bishop Edward Reynolds (1599–1676) says the “waters signify afflictions, and it notes the universality of the wrath which Christ suffered,” and writes: “that brook was the sink, as it were, of the temple, that into which all the ‘purgamenta’ [sweepings, offscourings, filth, dirt] and uncleanness of God’s house, all the cursed things were to be cast.”⁴³ It is more than symbolic that this brook empties into a place called The Dead Sea.

This pollution flows into a valley Jesus likens to hell itself, calling it “Gehenna” (Matthew 10:28). Scottish theologian George Smith (1856–1942) says, “The bed of the Kidron was already a place for refuse and regarded as unclean. According to the Old Testament and the Talmud, the temple’s offal is cast into it, probably consumed by fire. In any case, we may see how the theological Gehinnom came to be located here.”⁴⁴ If Jerusalem is a type of heaven on earth, clean and pure, then Kidron is a type of hell on earth, unclean and impure. His trek across it to be “obedient to the point of death” (Philippians 2:8) was his whole purpose here.

“The life of the flesh is in the blood” (Leviticus 17:11)

Castoff waste from the temple and the city is dumped into the Kidron Valley, which finds its way down to the brook. Over 1200 animal sacrifices were required annually in routine compliance with Mosaic law. But sacrifices often went above and beyond this. Solomon sacrificed 142,000 for the temple’s first dedication. Jewish literature even describes a later celebration as the “crushed Passover”⁴⁵ because the crowd was so large that a man was crushed to death. Blood and the parts of sacrifices

that are neither burnt up nor consumed are discarded into this valley. Solomon's temple dedication involved "uncountable sheep and oxen" (1 Kings 8:5). It is hard to imagine the cleanup required for such work.

The blood from the sacrifices drains away from the altar and goes directly into Kidron. In addition, it is a place to deposit the excess debris of those sacrifices not consumed in the fire or consumed by the people. For example, when birds are sacrificed but then determined to be ineligible, the priest "throws them into the sewer and it rolls and goes down to the Brook of Kidron."⁴⁶ The *Koren Talmud* references one source indicating that "the drainpipes opened to a cistern one cubit wide and six hundred cubits deep."⁴⁷ This eighteen-inch width is more than many city stormwater runoff pipes, indicating the blood and refuse washed away along with the regular drainage of the city was substantial.

The *Mishnah* says that at the base of the altar, "at the southwestern corner, there were two holes like two narrow nostrils by which the blood that was poured over the western base and the southern base used to run down and mingle in the water channel and flow out into the brook Kidron."⁴⁸ One of the priest's final acts in the sacrificial ceremony is pouring "the rest of the blood...out at the base of the altar" (Exodus 29:12). The *Epstein Talmud* notes that "On the eve of the Passover they stopped up the holes through which the blood of the sacrifices passed out to the stream of Kidron" and cites a rabbi's reply to some who questioned this practice: "It is praiseworthy for the sons of Aaron to walk in *blood up to their ankles*"⁴⁹ (emphasis added). The amount of blood that flowed to the Kidron over those centuries is incalculable.

There were also cemeteries in Kidron Valley. Jeremiah describes it as a "whole valley of the dead bodies and the ashes"

(Jeremiah 31:40). Professor Paul Haupt (1858-1926) of Johns Hopkins University wrote, “The flaming pyres with the dead bodies...were in the Kidron valley between the Temple hill and Mount Olivet.”⁵⁰ He notes that even the name *Kidron* derives from “qidron,” which “may be an ancient word for cemetery.”⁵¹ This presents a problem considering the mandates, “Whoever touches the dead body of any person shall be unclean seven days” (Numbers 19:11) and, no priest will “make himself unclean for the dead among his people, except for his closest relatives” (Leviticus 21:1). The *Koren Talmud* dictates a measurable restriction, stating that “when one walks in a cemetery, within four cubits of a grave,” some priestly practices are “prohibited.”⁵² This necessitates their entire avoidance of the Kidron Valley.

The Kidron is considered so unclean that for the sacrifice of the red heifer described in Numbers 19, the *Mishnah* says that “they made a causeway from the Temple Mount to the Mount of Olives, for fear of any grave in the depths below, to burn the Heifer.”⁵³ This bridge across the Kidron Valley was built at great expense for the extremely rare red heifer sacrifice (Numbers 19:2). Rabbis counted how many red heifers had been sacrificed before the temple was destroyed in 70 AD and arrived at nine, two recorded in the Torah and seven in the *Mishnah*. While the red heifer would have become ineligible for sacrifice on the Mount of Olives if it had touched the Kidron, the true sacrifice it represented did walk through that valley on the way to the Mount of Olives.

Some Jewish traditions hold that the Messiah will perform the tenth and final red heifer's sacrifice when he comes.⁵⁴ But Jesus himself is certainly that tenth and perfect red heifer, already taken from Mount Olivet, whose sweat “like great drops of blood falling to the ground” (Luke 22:44) fell there and

whose final sacrifice sanctified the new temple of his body in the true temple in heaven. The next time we see the Messiah, “his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives that lies before Jerusalem on the east, and the Mount of Olives shall be split in two from east to west” (Zechariah 14:4). The Messiah will come not to sacrifice on the Mount of Olives but to destroy this place of sacrifice, for it need never be used again.

Because of our sin in another garden, Eden, we are responsible for this unclean world, wholly a Kidron Valley. Jesus, a holy God from a place without sin and uncleanness, willingly and obediently left heaven and walked among us in this wholly unclean world. The word “unclean” occurs 118 times in the first 15 chapters of Leviticus leading up to the sacrifice of atonement. How great is the sacrifice Jesus made when he left the clean purity of heaven and came here to make us clean by his atonement, for “though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich” (2 Corinthians 8:9).

From Unclean to Clean

The laws of cleanliness are found mainly in Leviticus but are referenced throughout scripture. Among other things, touching a corpse or anyone with a bodily discharge would make one unclean. Jesus encountered many unclean people and was often criticized for doing so. “A leper came to him and knelt before him, saying, ‘Lord, if you will, you can make me clean.’ And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, ‘I will; be clean.’ And immediately his leprosy was cleansed” (Mark 8:2-3). A woman “came up behind him in the crowd and touched his garment. For she said, ‘If I touch even his garments, I will be made well.’ And immediately the flow of blood dried up” (Mark 5:27). In the parable of the Good Samaritan the priest

and Levite would not help the assaulted man in order that they would not become unclean.

In the Law, when unclean touches clean, both become unclean. These afflictions are highlighted specifically in the law for the Israelites to “put out of the camp everyone who is leprous or has a discharge” (Numbers 5:2). Jesus should have become unclean because he touches and is touched by someone unclean. But the Law has three exceptions. One is the sin offering: “Whatever touches its flesh shall be holy” (Leviticus 6:27). Jesus is that sin offering to clean all who touch him in faith.

Another exception is of the furniture described in Exodus 30, consecrated with “a sacred anointing oil...a holy anointing oil.” After the consecration of the articles of furniture, “Whatever touches them will become holy.” Additionally, the only people who may be anointed with this oil are the priests, for it “shall not be poured on the body of an ordinary person, and you shall make no other like it in composition” (Exodus 30:29). Jesus, our sinless High Priest, is no ordinary person, descended from heaven, born of a virgin, and in whom the Holy Spirit “descended on him in bodily form” (Luke 3:22) at his baptism.

The final exception is found in Ezekiel, in which the priests “shall put off the garments in which they have been ministering and lay them in the holy chambers. And they shall put on other garments, *lest they transmit holiness to the people with their garments*” (Ezekiel 44:19). Touching Jesus’ garment in faith healed the woman with the discharge and his garment becomes salvation for us, for “he has covered me with the robe of righteousness” (Isaiah 61:10). Because our Savior was “clothed in a robe dipped in blood” (Revelation 19:13), we are now clothed “with fine linen, bright and pure” (Revelation 19:8). Of his robe, even the soldiers at his crucifixion said, “Let us not tear it” (John 19:24), as they unwittingly bore witness to his

priesthood, for the high priest's robe was intentionally constructed "so that it may not tear" (Exodus 28:32).

John Owen says that "the tabernacle, with all the parts, furniture, and services of it...were representative of Christ in the discharge of his office."⁵⁵ Early in Jesus' ministry, his feet are anointed "by a woman of the city, who was a sinner" (Luke 7:37). Just before his death, his head is anointed with a "flask of very expensive ointment" (Matthew 26:7). From head to toe and beginning to end, Jesus is the temple. Each article of furniture represents the many aspects of the infinite perfection of his sacrifice. Those he touches and those who touch him in faith are cleansed and made acceptable to God.

Presbyterian minister John Flavel (1627–1691) says, "This brook running through the valley of Jehoshaphat, that fertile soil, together with the filth of the city which it washed away, gave the waters a black tincture, and so fitly resembled those grievous sufferings of Christ, in which he tasted both the wrath of God and men."⁵⁶ All of the sacrifices on the altar speak of Jesus, the last and perfect sacrifice, whose blood is the final contribution to Kidron, ending the need for more. Because Jesus went through this valley, we do not have to.

While the idolatrous sins of those in the Old Testament may seem distant, we each have our Kidrons into which we sweep away our sins into hidden closets. English bishop Joseph Hall (1574–1656) says, "How many, like unto the brook Cedron, run from Jerusalem through the vale of Jehoshaphat and end their course in the Dead Sea!"⁵⁷ What place could be darker or more turbulent than where we hide our worst spiritual selves, "For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long" (Psalms 32:3).

But Jesus also knows that hidden place and passes through it for our redemption so that we will find true rest for our souls.

We need only let him occupy that space to receive forgiveness. He carries this sin to the cross and removes it from us eternally. When Moses pleads for his sinful flock, God responds, “My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest” (Exodus 33:14). Jesus says, “Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls” (Matthew 11:29). Charles Spurgeon says, “Rest, rest *now*; not rest after death; but it is a rest given when we come to Jesus, *given then and there*.”⁵⁸

Essay Seven

Place of the Skull

“You shall make the altar of acacia wood, five cubits long and five cubits broad. The altar shall be square, and its height shall be three cubits. And you shall make horns for it on its four corners; its horns shall be of one piece with it, and you shall overlay it with bronze.” (Exodus 27:1–2)

“they brought him to the place called Golgotha (which means Place of the Skull). And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it. And they crucified him.” (Mark 15:22–24, NIV)

The bronze altar, initially used in the wilderness tabernacle and later in the temple, is the central piece of furniture in terms God’s message to the world. Innumerable animals are sacrificed on it—1246 per year is an estimated mandatory minimum to satisfy Mosaic law. Yet, all the blood that flowed from the altar could not pay the debt owed for our sins, “For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” (Hebrews 10:4). They all point to Jesus, who “by a single offering, perfected for all time those who are being sanctified” (Hebrews 10:14).

The details of the altar point to the fullness of this sacrifice and foreshadows Golgotha. To construct this altar, along with

the other articles in the tabernacle, God told Moses, “I have called by name Bezalel...of the tribe of Judah, and I have filled him with the Spirit of God” for this work (Exodus 31:2-3). Jesus, from the same tribe and filled with the Holy Spirit, is the architect of the true temple. As both high priest and sacrifice, Jesus says of his life, “No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord” (John 10:18). Later, it is said,

“But when Christ appeared as a *high priest* of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his *own blood*, thus securing an eternal redemption.” (Hebrews 9:11-12)

Acacia Wood

The *Jewish Encyclopedia* describes acacia as a “hard and durable but light wood; at first yellowish, but gradually turning very dark, like ebony, a large, spreading, thorny tree with many branches.”⁵⁹ Acacia is one of the few trees that grew near the Israelites, and serendipitously, it is ideally suited for their purpose. Harder than oak and maple, its density makes it solid and durable, yet it is light enough to handle and easily shape into items for the tabernacle. The use of wood in the structure of the altar points us both to the humanity of Jesus’ life as a carpenter before he began his ministry and the way he chose to die for us: “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree” (Galatians 3:13).

The symbolism of acacia wood is equal to its practicality. One man, a passerby from Cyrene named Simon, could bear its weight but maintain the weight of another man, the sinless Son

of God. It begins with a beautiful color but *turns very dark, like ebony*, like the blood our Savior shed for us on that wood. On it, we see our death to sin, “crucified with Christ” (Galatians 2:20), but then under it, the home we gain is “like a grain of mustard seed, [which] becomes larger than all the garden plants and puts out branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade” (Mark 4:30-32).

Five Cubits

The number five is significance in the Bible. It indicates God’s unmerited grace toward us and his generosity in dealing with his fallen creation. The Pentateuch comprises five books that contain the patriarchs of our faith, the preservation of Israel through the famine, and the Israelites’ freedom from slavery up to the edge of the Promised Land. Hiram made “ten basins in which to wash, and set five on the south side, and five on the north side. In these they were to rinse off what was used for the burnt offering, and the sea was for the priests to wash in” (2 Chronicles 4:6). The incarnate Jesus appears in five books: the four gospels and the Book of Acts. Between the historical books and prophetic books of the Old Testament are five poetic books (Job Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon); Psalms has five sections, each tablet has five commandments.

But the *Koren Talmud* virtually surrounds the altar with the number five. Five handbreadths equal a cubit, and “The altar had five cubits of five handbreadths: The cubit of the height of the base, the cubit of the width of the foundation, the cubit of the width of the surrounding ledge, the cubit of the height of the horns, and the cubit of the width of the horns.”⁶⁰

However, the most precious indication of God’s grace is the five types of sacrifices that open the Book of Leviticus, indicating various aspects of Jesus’ work. Pastor J. Sidlow Baxter

(1903–1999) describes the offerings this way (*my summary*):⁶¹

Burnt. Christ *offered Himself without spot to God*. His *divinity* on the cross, not so much bearing sin as accomplishing the Father's will.

Meal. The *perfect humanity of Christ*. The emphasis is on the life offered and states the perfection of his character, which gives the offering its unspeakable value.

Peace. *Restored communion* from the perfect satisfaction rendered in Christ. God is appeased. Man is reconciled. There is peace.

Sin. Our *Sin nature*. "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Trespass. For *our sins*. Christ as Expiator, making restitution for the injury caused by our wrongdoing.

God's priestly representative carries out all five sacrifices, indicating we cannot approach God alone. Devotionally, Charles Spurgeon sees "five steps to the mercy-seat"⁶² in Psalm 102, and English clergyman William Greenhill (1591–1671) notes Ezekiel's "five steps of mercy"⁶³ into the presence of God. But the *Encyclopaedia Biblica* and others^{64/65} point out there were *literally* "five steps to the gate of the inner court."⁶⁶ But these are stairs we cannot climb to reach God's glory but are stairs that only Jesus could descend to save us. "He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things" (Ephesians 4:10). And, at the very to the entrance of the inner sanctuary, "the doorposts were five-sided" (1 Kings 6:31), or "five-tiered" forming "interlocking frames,"⁶⁷ as described in *Where Heaven and Earth Meet: Jerusalem's Sacred Esplanade*.

Four Sides

While the shape of the altar may not contain intentionality in pointing to God's plan of salvation for his creation, it can certainly be used as a kind of mnemonic device for a meditation on he "who desires *all* people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:3-4).

The square shape of the altar, with four sides of equal length, speaks of grace that applies equally to all the Israelites who come to it. The term *four winds* can indicate from everywhere, as when Jesus said, "he will send out the angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven (Mark 13:17). Eden had four rivers flowing out to nourish the world. Numbers 2 describes how the tribes of Israel were assigned in four groups around the tabernacle in the four cardinal points of the compass.

In Numbers 7, the twelve tribes bring sacrifices for the initial consecration of the tabernacle. Seventy-one verses describe how each tribe brings its offerings. Notably, each tribe brings the same offering, and—as if to make it abundantly clear—each tribe's offering, though the same, is written twelve times, like an early version of the copy-and-paste function in word processing. One by one, each tribe comes forward with precisely the same offerings for twelve days.

Yet, though they all sacrifice equally, God would apportion the land differently according to the tribe's size. "To a large tribe you shall give a large inheritance, and to a small tribe you shall give a small inheritance" (Numbers 26:54). Numbers 2 not only describes the camping assignments of the twelve tribes but also provides a census of their numbers. The tribes vary significantly in size, from a high of 74,600 (Judah) to a low of 32,200 (Manasseh). Yet, none can come before the Holy Place except by the precise kind and amount of sacrifice prescribed by God,

equal and identical for all the tribes regardless of size or placement. The tribe of Manasseh could ask, “Why should we be required to give the same amount as Judah when we are less than half the size of Judah?” The tribe of Judah could ask, “Why should Manasseh get equal access to God’s glory and protection when they are only half our size?”

The master of the house who hired laborers throughout the day was criticized at the end of the day for paying them all the same but said, “Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me?” (Matthew 20:1, 15). God “pays” us eternal life, no matter when we come to him. He chooses mercy for all and exacts the same price for that mercy, his Son. No more need we claim; no less can he accept. The identical sacrifices given by all twelve tribes reflect this mercy. The Psalmist says, “he has redeemed from trouble and gathered in from the lands, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south” (Psalms 107:2-3). God offers redemption to all, his redeemed come from all over the world, and all are redeemed at the same cost.

Such is the picture of our position before God: he is not a respecter of our status, power, wealth, or anything we have to offer. By Jesus alone, we “draw near to the throne of grace” (Hebrews 4:16). Even though “all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment” (Isaiah 64:6), God says, “I have taken your iniquity away from you, and I will clothe you with pure vestments” (Zechariah 3:4). His clothes, his choice. The sinless life, then death and resurrection of his Son, is the required offering and the only offering that suffices. “What shall a man give in return for his soul?” (Matthew 16:26). Nothing we have. Jesus “has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself” (Hebrews 9:26). We all have the same inheritance—eternal fellowship with him and the saints

through him.

Four Corners

As the four sides of the altar face all the Israelites aligned on those sides, the four corners point through the gaps between them, past the Israelites, to the rest of the world. Peter “saw the heavens opened and something like a great sheet descending, being let down by its four corners upon the earth” and realizes that “everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins” (Acts 10:10, 43). Just as God saved the Israelite nation, he now saves all who come to him by faith. “I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth. After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb” (Revelation 7:1, 9).

The altar invites people from the earth’s four corners to accept God’s gift. God sent his Son “in order that the *world* might be saved through him” (John 3:17). Also, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28). English chaplain Nathaniel Hardy (1618–1670) says, “Indeed, what part of the world is it that Christ’s propitiation reacheth not to? St. Basil, putting the question why the world was redeemed by a cross, maketh this answer, that a cross hath four distinct parts, which represent the four parts of the world, to all which the efficacy of the cross reacheth.”⁶⁸

The four sides and four corners are eight directions now as the gospel reaches Jews and Gentiles. All the world’s people going forward came from the eight people saved in Noah’s Ark. The Feast of the Tabernacles lasts eight days and memorializes God’s redemption of his people from slavery in Egypt. Jesus

conquers our slavery to death on the eighth day of the week, in a manner, as Augustine calls, “the day upon which He rose, the eighth namely.”⁶⁹

Jesus conquering death on the eighth day of the week changed the concept of the day of rest. Whereas before it came at the end of the week—salvation’s rest after our works to gain that rest—it now comes at the beginning of the week—salvation’s rest followed by our works of gratitude and service. God’s grace through Jesus is everywhere, all the time. “The heavens declare the glory of God,” and his “voice goes through all the earth, to the end of the world” (Psalms 19:1, 4) so that “people will come from east and west, and from north and south, and recline at the table in the kingdom of God” (Luke 13:29), a God “who desires all people to be saved” (1 Timothy 2:2).

Horns

Horns symbolize strength and victory in battles, physical and spiritual. For the Israelites, in their most commemorated historical moment, “God brings them out of Egypt and is for them like the horns of the wild ox” (Numbers 23:22). So it is for us when God “has visited and redeemed his people and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David” (Luke 1:69, 2 Samuel 22:3, Psalms 18:2) through the cross of Jesus Christ.

“Bind the festal sacrifice with cords, up to the horns of the altar!” (Psalms 118:27). These bindings and the horns used to restrain the animal are a picture of Jesus being bound to the four ends of the cross. But while a sacrificial animal must be tied up to keep it from escaping, Jesus allows himself to be restrained on our behalf: “I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord”

(John 10:17-18). He can call up “twelve legions of angels” (Matthew 26:53) but does not because he chooses to be “obedient to the point of death” (Philippians 2:8). Jesus is bound to the cross by men, but it is his choice and the Father’s will for it to happen.

After killing the animal, the priest is to take “part of the blood of the bull and put it on the horns of the altar with your finger” (Exodus 29:12). In a horrible intimacy, the priest bloodies the four horns as God’s faithful and final High Priest bloodies the four ends of the cross with his thorn-crowned head, and wounded hands and feet. As the angel tells Abraham, “God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son” (Genesis 22:8). He not only provides it himself, but he himself is the lamb.

Over this altar, the priest makes many sacrifices, some as *wave* offerings and others as *heave* offerings. Each speaks to an aspect of Jesus’ work on the cross. The *Jewish Encyclopedia* describes the wave offering as “waved backward and forward in line with the altar, a symbolical expression of the reciprocity of the giving and receiving on the part of God and the sacrifice. They were waved toward the four sides of the world.”⁷⁰ This speaks of Jesus’ sacrifice for all, his hands outstretched to the world. The wave offering is part of the third offering in Leviticus, the *peace offering*, which is symbolic of bringing peace to the world. It is the only offering of the five in which the offeror may consume what is offered, as though breaking bread in peace with the Lord himself, reminiscent of the Last Supper.

The heave offering in Numbers 18 is called a covenant of salt, preserving the promise God made to David, fulfilled in his offspring: “All the heave offerings of the holy things is a covenant of salt forever before the Lord with you and your descendants with you” (Numbers 18:19, NKJV) and “the Lord God of

Israel gave the kingship over Israel forever to David and his sons by a covenant of salt” (2 Chronicles 13:5). To fulfill this covenant, God “will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David, this is the name by which it will be called: The Lord is our righteousness” (Jeremiah 33:15-16). However, the priest takes this heave offering from what has already been tithed by the individual worshippers, so it is the priest’s offering: “When you take the tithes, offer up a heave offering, a tenth of the tithe” (Numbers 18:26, NKJV).

This heave offering is a sacrifice from the priest alone. During the ritual, *Easton’s Bible Dictionary* describes the priest’s actions as “presenting the offering by a motion up and down, a heave offering to the Lord as ruler of heaven.”⁷¹ In this respect, the heave offering is to exalt God alone, just as a tithe does: “Every tithe of the land is the Lord’s; it is holy to the Lord” (Leviticus 27:30). Offered only by the priest, it carries a particular meaning of Jesus as our high priest. The heave offering is mentioned over 800 times in the *Mishnah*,⁷² a book of 874 pages, indicating the emphasis in Jewish worship on glorifying God and God alone. Jesus says, “Father, glorify your name,” to which the Father responds, “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again” (John 12:28). The cross fully reveals that glorification.

One of the cruelties of crucifixion is that the person usually dies not from bodily injury or blood loss but from asphyxiation. Reverend Fleming Rutledge describes the impossibility of “passive exhalation” for the crucified because “each exhaled breath could only be achieved by tremendous effort as they must repeatedly push themselves up with their legs to catch each breath until their strength gives out from exhaustion and they suffocate.”⁷³ For three hours, Jesus repeatedly struggles up and collapses down “gasping and heaving,”⁷⁴ as Rutledge says until he can push himself up no longer. He is this heave offering.

Rutledge further notes it would be “difficult to say anything because speech is only possible during exhalation.”⁷⁵ So Jesus, in his final heave, inhales one last time and “calling out with a loud voice, said, ‘Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!’ And having said this he breathed his last” (Luke 23:46). He alone is the adequate heave offering and the last one this world will ever need. Jesus’ sacrifice, like the priest’s tenth, was obligatory and required by God to save us.

And as is appropriate for this offering, he exalts God to the end: “I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed” (John 17:4). As English clergyman Nicholas Byfield (1579–1622) put it, “It was needful our Saviour should be upon the cross, that so he might be the accomplishment of what was signified by the heave offering and the brazen serpent, and that so he might bear the special curse of the law for us; of all deaths, to death on the tree being, by a special law of God, made accursed.”⁷⁶

Some translations add *shoulder* to the word *heave*, calling this offering the “heave shoulder” (Leviticus 7:34, Numbers 6:20, KJV). *Easton’s Bible Dictionary* narrows it to “the right shoulder, which fell to the priest in presenting thank offerings called the heave shoulder.”⁷⁷ Isaiah adds further insight into the burden Jesus bears for us: “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6). By his sacrifice on the cross, Jesus conquers death and is King.

Bronze

The altar is overlaid with bronze, a metal harder than silver or

gold and able to withstand constant use. As such, bronze represents the hard judgment Jesus suffers because of our sins. The Israelites complained about leaving Egypt ten times, but two are significant regarding the altar.

In Korah's rebellion, 250 Israelites decide to usurp Aaron's priestly role and burn incense in censers before the Lord. It did not turn out well: "And the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, with their households and all the people who belonged to Korah and all their goods" (Numbers 16:32). Significantly, at God's direction, the authorized priests then "took the bronze censers, which those who were burned had offered, and they were hammered out as a covering for the altar, to be a reminder to the people of Israel, so that no outsider, who is not of the descendants of Aaron, should draw near to burn incense before the LORD" (Numbers 16:39-40).

Later, as the Israelites continued to complain about leaving Egypt, "the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died" (Numbers 21:6). But again, at God's direction, "Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live" (Numbers 21:8).

In the first instance, bronze is embedded into the very structure of the altar, on the very top itself, on which blood flows continually over a holy object that had been used for a sinful purpose. This hearkens to Eden and reminds us of our constant need for redemption, which can only come from a perfect priest handling the sacrifice perfectly.

In the other instance, the bronze snake is a picture of judgment for our sins on the pole and, by faith in God's command to look on it, be saved by it. As a symbol of the cross, it both judges and saves from sin. This wood altar, covered with bronze, has the same message. When we look to the altar of

burnt sacrifice, we see the cross with Jesus judged on it, and with our sins judged in him, we are forgiven through him.

Four Horns

The altar's four horns represent two animals because those horns represent the two sacrificial animals required on many occasions. For example, the Feast of Booths commemorates their exodus from Egypt just as the cross and resurrection commemorate our delivery from sin. Each of the seven days includes sacrifices, including two rams each day. There are other notable examples.

Leviticus 16 describes the unique offerings on the Day of Atonement, including two goats. While one is sacrificed “to make atonement for the holy place for the uncleanness of the people,” the other, the scapegoat, is sent into the wilderness after Aaron had puts “both his hands on the head of the live goat and confess[es] over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins” (Leviticus 16:21-22).

While it would be a great comfort for them to know that their sins are carried away to a remote area in the wilderness, it is but a temporary comfort as this ritual must be repeated each year. Imagine the worshipper who understands this and considers how compassionate God is in providing continuing relief from their burden. Soon, God will provide another, lasting sacrifice for sin.

In Jesus, our sins are finally removed “as far the east is from the west” (Psalms 103:12). Jesus represents the atonement goat and the scapegoat in that he forgives and cleanses since, as “we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). This is “once for all” because Jesus does not go into this wilderness to die only, but to die and be raised to life and “now appears[s] in the

presence of God on our behalf” forever (Hebrews 9:26, 24).

When Abraham ascends Mount Moriah to sacrifice Isaac, two sacrifices are described, one given and one promised. When Isaac asks, “Where is the lamb for the burnt offering?” Abraham responds, “God will provide for himself the *lamb* for the burnt offering” (Genesis 22:7-8). When God sees that Abraham would obey and sacrifice his son, an angel intervenes and provides a “*ram*, caught in a thicket by his horns,” which Abraham sacrifices instead of his son.

But a ram is not a lamb. Instead, this promised lamb appears fifteen centuries later when John the Baptist proclaims, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29). In these two sacrifices, we see the beginning and the end of God’s redemptive plan. Abraham had “not withheld his son, his only son,” and so “in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice” (Genesis 22:18). So, too, Jesus obeys his Father, is obedient to death on a cross, and becomes the spiritual “firstborn among many brothers” (Romans 8:29).

One Piece

The four horns are formed seamlessly into the altar. For emphasis, the phrase *one piece* is repeated three times (Exodus 27:2, 30:2, 38:2). Horns are the continuation of the bone of the skull, covered with keratin, skin, and hair. As such, the horns are one piece with the skull in that the vascular system in the skull extends into the core of this bony structure and is inseparable from it. With horns at the four corners, sacrifices are made between them in the place where the skulls of the animals would be. In effect, this place is the place of the skull between the horns. Golgotha is the eventual *Place of a Skull* in which we see the four points of the cross instead of the four horns of the altar.

On Good Friday, Golgotha lacked the horns until the cross was placed there and lacked the sacrifice until Jesus was crucified there, completing the illustration the altar provides. Isaiah 11 says,

“There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. The wolf shall dwell with the lamb. In that day the Lord will extend his hand yet a second time to recover the remnant that remains of his people.” (Isaiah 11:1)

On the cross, justice and mercy unite like the wolf and the lamb. Justice requires us to perish for our sins, while mercy relieves us of this outcome. But for God to be just, we would receive no mercy; for us to receive mercy, God would not be just. Jesus is sinless yet bore our sins on the cross, so he undeservedly took the wrath that was ours while we received mercy. The atonement goat and scapegoat symbolize justice and mercy, representing the dual accomplishments of the cross.

A Heavenly Altar

Jesus’ sacrifice is superior: “For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings” (Hosea 6:6). The blood flowing onto that cross and from Jesus’ side redeems our souls, even as we await the “redemption of our bodies” (Romans 8:23). Faith in God’s means of provision knows no temporal limit. Although the blood on the bronze altar did not take away sins, faith in its anticipated future and perfect sacrifice did. Far from being wasted, this regular shedding of blood is an ongoing opportunity for the worshipper to find true faith in God at any time in history. Thomas Goodwin wrote,

“It is highly observable, that the gate through which he

was led to be crucified was termed the sheep-gate, for the sheep that were to be sacrificed were kept in meadows without that gate, and so were led, as he was, to be sacrificed, but they in the temple; all which sheep and sacrifices and temple were types of him and his sacrifice, as in...Isaiah 53:10. Christ suffered without the gate, in mount Golgotha, unto which he was led, as the other sheep were through that gate to the slaughter. He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before the shearer, so opened he not his mouth. It is also by Peter applied to him; having termed him, the Lamb without spot, by whose blood we are redeemed.”⁷⁸

Essay Eight

Jachin and Boaz

“King Solomon sent and brought Hiram. He was the son of a widow, and his father a worker in bronze. And he was full of wisdom, understanding, and skill for making any work in bronze. He cast two pillars of bronze. Eighteen cubits was the height of one pillar, and a line of twelve cubits measured its circumference. It was hollow, and its thickness was four fingers. He also made two capitals of cast bronze to set on the tops of the pillars. The height of the capital was five cubits. There were lattices of checker work with wreaths of chain work for the capitals; he made pomegranates in two rows around the one latticework to cover the capital. He set up the pillars at the vestibule of the temple. He set up the pillar on the south and called its name Jachin, and he set up the pillar on the north and called its name Boaz. And on the tops of the pillars was lily-work.” (1 Kings 7:13–22) (edited for brevity)

God gives Moses details for building a temporary, moveable tabernacle in the desert: “Exactly as I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle, and of all its furniture, so you shall make it” (Exodus 25:9). Later, when Solomon builds a permanent temple, these two pillars are added. But they are added still

under God's design, for in David's instruction to Solomon he says, "All this he made clear to me in writing from the hand of the LORD, all the work to be done according to the plan" (1 Chronicles 28:19). And the design of these pillars are not Hiram's, for his chief artisan is "to do all sorts of engraving and execute any design that may be assigned him" (2 Chronicles 2:14).

The tabernacle and temple are similarly furnished and serve the same ultimate purpose: to house the ark and provide a place for the glory of God to dwell. However, since the desert tabernacle was temporary and subject to transport at a moment's notice, it had *moveable* pillars of fire by day and a cloud by night. These eventually lead the Israelites into the Promised Land, where these *permanent* structures are erected, indicating a permanent home.

The temple is furnished with items made from specially chosen materials and colors. Hebrews says these have lessons for us as "copies of the true things" (Hebrews 9:23-24) in heaven, anticipating Jesus' work on the cross. The pillars are named Jachin and Boaz and stand out among the other temple furniture. Scholars suggest various reasons for the pillars' presence in front of the temple. These include the two named trees in Eden (of life, of the knowledge of good and evil), representations of the mountains of God (Zion, Sinai), copies of foreign temples, and even prophetically, of Peter and Paul establishing the early church for Jews and Gentiles.

Solomon's Temple pillars are unique in several ways, all of which inform their purpose. They are built first, seen first, uniquely proportioned, and freestanding, supporting no part of the building. The delicate detail is at the top, high above the worshipper. Most significantly, they are each given a proper name—as though representing a person. No other parts or

furnishings of the temple are given proper names. But these pillars reveal the depth of God's justice and mercy through Jesus Christ on the cross, foreshadowing his Passion.

Built First and Built High

These two pillars are built first and are the first items a worshipper sees when drawing near God's glory in the temple. They are placed *at the vestibule of the temple* on the east side, the side on which the tribe of Judah used to encamp in the desert, the tribe from which Jesus descended as noted in two gospels. Thirty-five feet high, they are seen from a great distance. In the fifteen Psalms of Ascents, we read: "I lift up my eyes to the hills...my help comes from the Lord...Jerusalem to which the tribes go up...To you I lift up my eyes...my eyes are not raised too high...O Israel, hope in the Lord" (Psalms 121:1, 2, 122:4, 123:4, 131:1, 3). These are but a few meditations of those who approach the temple.

Like those worshippers, we also draw near to Jesus, who was raised upon the cross and then raised from the dead, trusting in him for our deliverance. These pillars rise so that we can say, "I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near: a star shall come out of Jacob" (Numbers 24:17). If the pillars are still standing in the dawn's light, then the whole of God's dwelling is still there, along with the hope of God's mercy.

Bronze

Made with *bronze*, the same material as the altar, it conveys a similar message: the judgment of and salvation from our sins are seen in these pillars. Engineers have considered making hollow metal pillars of this height and suggest that accomplishing this may have required an inner lining of wood to support them.⁷⁹ We see Jesus' humanity and judgment on a cross in this wood and bronze.

Four Fingers

The pillars are hollow inside, with walls *four fingers* thick. This is unusual, as pillars are typically made from solid stones for structural integrity and durability. The Greek Parthenon still stands on such pillars. In ancient times, “pillars were sometimes made from one block, but generally from several stones placed one on top of the other.”⁸⁰ These pillars are hollow but would not remain empty. When the disciples’ mother asks for her sons to sit next to him in his kingdom, Jesus answers, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink?” (Matthew 20:22). And then in Gethsemane, he prays, “My soul is very sorrowful, even to death, My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will” (Matthew 26:38-42). Jesus “emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of man” (Philippians 2:7); he then takes on all our sin, his cup filled wholly with the wrath of God’s judgment meant for us.

The Psalmist prophetically writes the words Jesus may have said in Gethsemane, “Your wrath lies heavy upon me, and you overwhelm me with all your waves” (Psalms 88:39). This is not the “good wine” (John 2:10) of his first miracle at Cana but the dark wine of God’s wrath that Jesus drinks to the bitter dregs as the gall offered him on the cross (Psalms 69:21, Matthew 27:34). He drinks it so that we need not, but that we may drink the new wine with him in his Father’s kingdom (Matthew 26:29).

The *Encyclopaedia Judaica* says, “The measurement of the handbreadth was the width of four fingers.”⁸¹ This handbreadth may represent our short life on this earth, as described in the Psalms, “Behold, you have made my days a few handbreadths, and my lifetime is as nothing before you” (Psalms 39:5). But

when the immortal Son chooses this mortal life among tax collectors and sinners, this Psalm may be his prayer as he sees the day of his crucifixion approaching. The four-fingered walls of these pillars represent the mortality he chose and the shortened life Jesus lived.

The sound of a horn is used for ritual calls to worship. Leviticus speaks of “a memorial proclaimed with blast of trumpets, a holy convocation” (Leviticus 23:24). The *Koren Talmud* explains that “only an animal horn that is naturally hollow, for example, that of a ram or goat, may be used for these purposes.”⁸² But an additional requirement is put upon the horn: it must be of a specific size. “The minimum length is enough that when one holds it in his hand with four fingers, it can be seen protruding from both sides of his fingers.”⁸³ The hollow pillars, wrapped in four fingers of bronze, are the trumpets that call the world to come to Jesus: “And when the burnt offering began, the song to the LORD began also, and the trumpets” (2 Chronicles 29:27).

Earlier, a horn had sounded when the walls of Jericho fell, and now sounds at the wall's fall between God and us. When our Savior returns, we will see that the “seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever” (Revelation 11:15). Jesus, as prefigured in the hollow pillars with walls four fingers thick, took on our “human form” (Philippians 2:8) to bear God’s wrath and proclaim victory over death.

Dimensions

Research suggests the cross might have looked like a “T” or a “t” or a “+” or an “X” or even just a single pole. Historians have dug deep into ancient records to unearth details. Although

definitive proof of the exact dimensions does not exist, scriptural evidence supports the general shape we know today. For example, when Thomas says, “unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails [plural]” (John 20:25), he indicates that two nails were used on either side of a horizontal bar. “And over his head they put the charge against him, which read, ‘This is Jesus, the King of the Jews’” (Matthew 27:37), which indicates that the vertical post extended above the horizontal bar. The vertical bar would naturally be longer than the horizontal bar to accommodate body dimensions and allow the pole to fit securely into the ground, giving it the common “t” shape we are familiar with today.

Jachin and Boaz have unique proportions that point to the cross. “Eighteen cubits was the height of one pillar, and a line of twelve cubits measured its circumference” (1 Kings 7:15). If this tubular pillar were to be unrolled like a rug, the vertical and horizontal ratio would be the same as a traditional Christian cross: “A horizontal crosspiece divides the vertical bar with one-third of the bar above the crosspiece and two-thirds below. In addition, the crosspiece’s left and right sides and the vertical bar’s top section are all the same size.”⁸⁴ The twelve-by-eighteen measurement of the pillar fits these proportions, with six cubits to the left and right of the post, six cubits above the crosspiece, and twelve cubits below the crosspiece. The shape and proportions of these pillars and the cross are the same.

Our estrangement from God is often depicted as a deep canyon between two cliffs, with God on one side and sinful humanity on the other. Our salvation is seen in the cross of Jesus, spanning that gap and allowing access to God’s presence. Like the two pillars in front of the temple, the cross is the first thing we encounter when we seek God and is the only way into his presence. The spreading out of the circumference of the pillar is akin

to Jesus spreading out his arms across this divide to die for us, to beckon us, and to welcome us into a heavenly home.

Freestanding

The *Jewish Virtual Library* says, “Most scholars tend to the opinion that these were two freestanding pillars, one on each side of the entrance; few scholars maintain that the pillars fulfilled any function in supporting the roof of the portico.”⁸⁵ German theologians Keil and Delitzsch say that the scripture, “unquestionably implies that the two brazen pillars stood unconnected in front of the hall.”⁸⁶ Further, they elaborate with the observation that “the monumental character of the pillars is evident from the names given to them. No architectural portion of the building received a special name.”⁸⁷

Similarly, Jesus is crucified disconnected from the temple and his Father’s house. On the Day of Atonement, “the goat for the sin offering, whose blood is brought in to make atonement in the Holy Place, shall be carried outside the camp” (Leviticus 16:27). In the same way, “Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood” (Hebrews 13:12-13). The altar on which the animal’s blood is shed, prefiguring Christ’s death, and the pillars, prefiguring the manner of his death, are outside the entrance.

The beginning of our salvation is to join him and to not “be ashamed about the testimony of our Lord” (2 Timothy 1:8). “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34) is the anguished end for the one who, twenty-one years earlier as a child, said, “Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?” (Luke 2:49). Ultimately, he is excluded from his Father’s house for a time to redeem all creation by bearing the ocean of sin we have filled.

The Capital

The decorative top of the pillar is called the *capital*. Each capital is five cubits high, and, as with the dimensions of the altar, the number five speaks of God's grace, here now high and visible to all. Two hundred carved *pomegranates* encircled the capital. The pomegranate fruit is topped with an unusually shaped stem, or *calyx*, which, once the fruit is pulled from the tree, looks remarkably like a crown and is called just that in the *Koren Talmud Bavli*.⁸⁸ This speaks to Jesus' crown of thorns and that he is not just *a* king, but *the* king, "The King of the Jews," as Pilate insists on labeling above his head (John 19:21). After he was abused and mocked, "Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns" (John 19:5).



The inside of the pomegranate is blood red and can have over a thousand seeds. This speaks to Jesus' bloodshed and the countless people saved by that blood. The appearance of these pomegranates embedded in the capital is like the bumps of the many scars that he had on his body from the beatings he endured. Just as the healed wounds of his hands and side could be seen and touched when Jesus offered them to Thomas, his other wounds would also be visible.

Carved into these capitals are *lattices of checker* depicting Jesus' body marred by whips. "I gave my back to those who strike, and my cheeks to those who pull out the beard; I hid not my face from disgrace and spitting" (Isaiah 50:6), which led to

his shocking appearance, even “as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not” (Isaiah 53:3). As the whip lays down lines across his back, this way and that, it would form what appears as a latticework pattern in his flesh.

During the American Civil War, an escaped enslaved man known by only his first name, Gordon, joined the Union Army. While being fitted for his uniform, the soldiers saw a similar *shocking appearance* on his back from the whippings he had endured. They took a photo, and this infamous photo became known simply as “The Scourged Back.”⁸⁹ It is a frightening reminder of what man can do to man and what men did to the Son of Man. The bumps of the pomegranates and the stripes of the latticework are *decorative*, to be sure, but in the darkest way. “And with his stripes, we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5, KJV), which is not a prophecy of metaphorical suffering but the literal reality of it.

The NIV translates 1 Kings 7:17 as, “interwoven chains adorned the capitals on top of the pillars, *seven for each capital*.” As can be seen in any police procedural television show, when a person is arrested, a careful chain of custody begins so that at no time is the prisoner not under the responsibility of lawful authority, from the police to the jailer to the judge in the courtroom, and so on. These seven chains represent how Jesus is bound under seven different authorities who maintain a chain of custody from his initial arrest in Gethsemane through his interrogations and beatings until he is secured to the cross.

These seven are as follows: the soldiers in the Garden led by Judas, then Annas, Caiaphas, the chief priests and scribes, Pilate, Herod, and ending with a captain and his battalion, who took him to the cross (John 18:12, 18:13, 18:24, Luke 22:66, Matthew 27:2, Luke 23:7, Matthew 27:27, 31). Once he is

arrested in Gethsemane, he is not free from human bondage until he rises to life on the third day; then, he is free not just from the chains of human bondage but from the bondage of death itself, freeing all of us from those chains as well. While for a time “he has made my chains heavy” (Lamentations 3:7), ultimately, he can proclaim, “O Lord...you have loosed my bonds” (Psalms 116:16).

Finally, *on the tops of the pillars was lily-work*, from which comes the fragrance of Jesus’ work on the cross, for “he shall blossom like the lily” (Hosea 14:5). The aroma rises to heaven, “a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” (Ephesians 5:2). The large and empty flower atop the pillar would later, in manner of speaking, be filled by Nicodemus with “a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds in weight” (John 19:39). Theologian Richard Kidder (1633-1793) observes that “the bodies of great men were buried with great quantity of spices” and citing Jewish sources, says that this amount of spices “was enough for two hundred dead bodies.”⁹⁰

How fitting the Father, when looking down on his Son on the cross, sees this sweet offering as from an incense bowl, rising to heaven. “Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice” (1 Samuel 15:22), and “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased” (Mark 1:11). Jesus is unique in his sacrifice, which in turn is uniquely pleasing to God.

The decorated capitals atop undecorated bare pillars speak to two historical events of that Passover week—Jesus on the cross and Jesus no longer on the cross. This may seem like mixed messaging, but it is precisely the point. Our salvation is based on both, and neither can be absent. Jesus dies on the cross to forgive sins but then conquers death through his resurrection.

The *Encyclopaedia Judaica* notes that it is “difficult to discover the nature of the capitals; as the description of their construction is filled with unclear technical terms which do not appear elsewhere.”⁹¹ These *technical terms* are not found elsewhere, maybe because of the singularity of a Holy God who would sacrifice his Son for us.

Justice and Mercy

Significantly, the pillars have proper names and personifications, which no other items in the temple have. As the arriving worshipper faces the temple, Boaz, which translates to “in him is strength,” is on the north (right). Jachin, meaning “he will establish,” is on the south (left). In scripture, *strength* is often used to describe God's administration of justice and *establish* is used to describe God's mercy on his people when they fail.

Boaz. Justice requires strength that derives from the *position* of authority and the *will to exercise* that authority. A king is the only one with absolute power to execute justice without anyone questioning the decision. However, strength derives not only from the king's position but also from that king's will to act. Solomon says, “Divide the living child in two and give half to the one and a half to the other” (1 Kings 3:25). The power of his position, coupled with the complete confidence of his conviction, discerns the child's true mother, and justice is served. The successful outcome of this dispute is based on Solomon's authority to do this—and on the natural mother's absolute certainty that he *would* do it.

By contrast, the lack of strength in Eli, a priest, and Judah, a king, shows how difficult it is to execute justice, even with legitimate authority. Eli is a faithful priest, but “his sons were worthless men, for the men treated the offering of the Lord with contempt” (1 Samuel 2:12-17) by stealing the meat from the

sacrifices. Eli's weakness in failing to correct this injustice results in his two sons dying on the same day, thus ending his legacy. Judah promises his daughter-in-law a husband but fails to keep that promise. He lacks the strength to give Tamar justice and ends up inadvertently (and sinfully) fathering her twins.

Finally, when Israel's first high priest was anointed, "Moses took some of its blood and put it on the lobe of Aaron's right ear and on the thumb of his right hand and on the big toe of his right foot" (Leviticus 8:23). This signified the strength to listen to God, the strength to act for God, and the strength to walk in God's way. Justice and strength are bound together in one pillar. Boaz represents justice against us and our sins on the cross. In him is strength; the meaning of Boaz underlies this requirement to administer justice for our sins. God would give up his own Son for our sins, who had the strength of will to hear and obey. Jesus *could* do this, and Jesus *did* do this.

Jachin. Mercy comes because God promised to *establish* the Israelites in Canaan and us in his salvation. He does this despite our endless failures. Only the priest is given the permission and tools to offer mercy offered by God. But the "life of the flesh is in the blood" (Leviticus 17:11), and "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins" (Hebrews 9:22), so mercy comes at a cost. That cost is the blood as represented in the priest's sacrifices, yet "it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (Hebrews 10:4), so "Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come; he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption" (Hebrews 9:11-12). And this is because he has mercy on us—and *establishes* us in him by grace.

After Abraham suggests Ishmael stand in as his promised

heir, God says, “But I will *establish* my covenant with Isaac” (Genesis 17:21). During Paul’s ministry to the Thessalonians, he says, “For not all have faith. But the Lord is faithful. He will *establish* you and guard you against the evil one” (2 Thessalonians 3:2-3). Of Jesus, Isaiah says, “Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to *establish* it” (Isaiah 9:7). Look no further than Hebrews 11, the hall of fame of faith, to see that none of these saints are perfect. Still, they trust in God and not themselves to fulfill his promise to send a Savior. Similarly, the people in the genealogy of that Savior in Matthew and Luke are all imperfect sinners, but the Branch that saves us came through every one of them. God *establishes* us in him, for he made “an everlasting covenant” (Jeremiah 32:40) to redeem us.

Only God can judge justly *and* be merciful to save. Presbyterian pastor Stephen Charnock (1628–1680) says, “Believers have two immutable pillars for their support, stronger than those erected by Solomon, called Jachin and Boaz: these are election, or the standing counsel of God, and the covenant of grace. He will not revoke the covenant and blot the names of his elect out of the book of life.”⁹² The Psalmist says, “The earth feared and was still, when God arose to establish judgment, to save all the humble of the earth” (Psalms 76:9). The two pillars point to “*his* righteousness...so that he might be *just* [justice] and the *justifier* [mercy] of the one who has faith in Jesus” (Romans 3:26).

The Bases

While no description survives of the footings at the base of Jachin and Boaz, all the other pillars in the temple fit into crafted bases called sockets. The *Barclay Talmud* describes how all these “sockets were made with holes.”⁹³ Because these

pillars are of a single piece inserted into the ground, they must be raised from their prone position into these sockets. Anglican cleric Frederic Farrar (1831–1903) says of the installation of the cross, “The accursed tree was slowly heaved up by strong arms, and the end of it fixed firmly in a hole dug deep in the ground.”⁹⁴ Solomon “raised up the pillars before the temple” (2 Chronicles 3:17, KJ21), and God promises, “I will raise up your offspring after you, one of your own sons, and I will establish his kingdom” (1 Chronicles 17:11).

Jesus says, “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself” (John 12:32). He is lifted twice, once in the crucifixion and again in the resurrection. Oswald Chambers says, “When we preach our own experiences, people may be interested, but it awakens no real sense of need. But once Jesus Christ is *lifted up*, the Spirit of God creates an awareness of the need for Him.”⁹⁵ Perhaps for this reason, a glass-encased hole within the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, thought to be where that cross was fixed, remains one of the most revered and visited places for Christian pilgrims to Jerusalem.

The Builder

The crafter of these pillars previews the earthly life of Jesus. King Solomon hired *Hiram* to make the temple furnishings, who bears striking parallels to Jesus. “He was the son of a widow, his father was a worker in bronze, he was full of wisdom, understanding, and skill, He came to King Solomon and did all his work, He cast two pillars of bronze” (1 Kings 7:14-15). Like Hiram’s mother, Mary is likely a widow at the end because, on the cross, Jesus tells John, “Behold, your mother! And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home” (John 19:27). This instruction would not be needed if Joseph were still

alive. Hiram and Jesus follow in their father's footsteps as skilled laborers, one in bronze, the other in carpentry. Jesus' good reputation is widely known, and, like Hiram, he "increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man" (Luke 2:52).

As Hiram does *all the work* that King Solomon asks for, Jesus comes "to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work" (John 4:34). He "accomplished the work" (John 17:4) and then on the cross cries out, "It is finished" (John 19:30). Hiram ensured the pillars were finished before any other temple furnishings were started, just as Jesus' work on the cross had to be completed before the temple curtain could be torn in two to bring down the dividing wall between God and us. He was raised up in three days with the temple of his own body and is now ministering and interceding for us in heaven.

In His Hand

Something can also be understood from the pillars' placement in the vestibule in front of the temple, Jachin to the south and Boaz to the north, to the left, and the right as the worshipper approached the temple. These also point to the two triumphs of mercy and justice on the cross.

Authority and power are often described as coming from the right hand, administering justice, and superseding human will. "Your right hand, O Lord, shatters the enemy" (Exodus 15:6), and Jacob crosses his hands so his right hand will bless the younger son against tradition and Joseph's request (Genesis 48:17).

The left hand is often associated with God's mercy. The Psalmist says, "I am continually with you; you hold my right hand" (Psalms 73:21-24, Psalms 109:31). Also, "For I, the LORD your God, hold your right hand; it is I who say to you,

‘Fear not, I am the one who helps you’” (Isaiah 41:13). If Jesus is holding our right hand, he is holding it with his left hand, mercifully guiding us as we navigate the difficulties in this life. “For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him” (John 3:17). He does this despite our rejection of him. In Jesus are justice *and* mercy. He is “seated at the right hand of Power” (Mark 14:62) but uses that power to “intercede for us” (Romans 8:34).

Two Points of View

Just as Jesus is raised naked and in shame on Calvary, these pillars are exposed on every side. However, not having any structure above, they are unobstructed from heaven’s view, so what is seen in them is a matter of perspective. When we look up, we see a crown of thorns; when his Father looks down, he sees a crown of glory. When we look up, we see a weak and dying man who “cannot save himself” (Matthew 27:42); when his Father looks down, he sees the strength of the only man who ever lived a sinless life yet endured the weight of our sin and the fury of his wrath. When we come near the cross, we smell the stench of death; when his Father comes near the cross, he smells the fragrance of an obedient and suffering Savior. When we look up, we see a mere man; when his Father looks down, he sees his own Son. But when we see what the Father sees, we see a suffering servant and a path between two pillars into his presence in the true temple.

When the sun rises, the highest object is the first thing that gets illuminated. On top of the capital, the lily bowl catches those first rays of light. This is the first image we see when the darkness of our sinful heart begins to fade, and we are attracted to that sweet-smelling offering to heaven. But as the sunlight

works its way down the capital, we see the cost of that sweet smell, a suffering servant, and the decorations of his abused body. Finally, we see the rest of the pillar void of decoration as Jesus' suffering has ended, and he gained victory over death.

Like these two pillars in front of the temple, Jesus on the cross, crucified for us, stands astride history where justice and mercy meet, as the Son of God receiving justice for our sins, and the Son of Man providing us the gift "To enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus" (Hebrews 10:19). It is the first temple furnishing we see, and the first furnishing we must see and then pass between to fellowship with Jesus and each other. When Joseph interpreted Pharaoh's dream, he said, "And the doubling of Pharaoh's dream means that the thing is fixed by God, and God will shortly bring it about" (Genesis 41:32). That Jesus would come to save us was decided since our fall from grace, and the two identical pillars indicate that God indeed *fixed our salvation* from the beginning.

Finally, we see the undecorated pillars bare like the cross because Jesus is resurrected. God's justice and mercy are bound up in his only Son. He died on top of a cross but has risen from that cross and ascended to the Father's right hand, mediating for us day and night. "I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star" (Revelation 22:16).

Many yearn for a deeper connection to these events in an Easter week ritual called *The Passion of the Christ*, visualizing his torture, crucifixion, and death. It can be in the form of a live performance, movie, or even conducted in public places during the Lenten season, with people acting out the biblical narrative in front of mourning onlookers. This has not always been so. The *Encyclopaedia Biblica* remarks that "Modern realism takes interest in these painful details which was unknown to primitive Christianity and to the [first] evangelists," who took an interest

in it only to see Jesus' "wonderful character" and use it as proof of "prophecies fulfilled," showing he was indeed the promised Messiah.⁹⁶

These pillars might be seen as the original Passion Play—a representation of what the Messiah would go through for those people in ancient days who might look forward and believe in him by faith, and for those of this age to look back and not forget the price paid for our faith. "For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2). When Babylon conquered Jerusalem, it is noted, "As for the two pillars, the one sea, and the stands that Solomon had made for the house of the LORD, the bronze of all these vessels was *beyond weight*" (2 Kings 25:16). Indeed, the value of Jesus' victory over death is similarly beyond measure, as was his Passion.

Two Equals One

The original moving tabernacle pillars of God's glory in the desert, they are actually one pillar—a cloud by day, "and fire was *in it* by night" (Exodus 40:38)—so, too, these two pillars have one purpose and meaning. God loves us and leads us through this earthly desert into his rest. As the cloud led them by day, and the fire gave them light "that they might travel by day and by night" (Exodus 13:21), these two pillars always lead us into Jesus' Tabernacle presence. As the Psalmist says, "The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night. The LORD will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forevermore" (Psalms 121:6, 8). Jesus is here for us, in our brightest and day and in our darkest night.

Professor Frederic Thieberger, teacher, translator and Jewish philosopher, speculates a translation of the pillars' names into a single thought could be considered: "Or are both phrases to be

taken as one sentence, Jachin-Boaz meaning: ‘He will set up with strength’? But then we come up against this difficulty: the subject of the sentence must be God, yet there is no object. What will he set up?” Thieberger’s puzzlement has precisely identified the uniqueness of Jesus in history. For the answer is that the subject and the object are one and the same: Jesus, both God and Lord.

David knew this—and Jesus quotes him in telling the Pharisees who is, “The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet””? If then David calls him Lord, how is he his son?” (Matthew 22:44-45). Their response indicates their understanding of the conundrum, for “no one was able to answer him a word, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions” (Matthew 22:46). The pillars, separate but identical, anticipate Jesus, fully divine and fully human, fully God in Heaven and fully Lord of this earth.

The King Between

When King Joash is crowned, the *Amplified Bible* says, “There stood the [young] king [*on the platform*] by the pillar, as was customary” (2 Kings 11:14). The *Cambridge Bible* notes that “the word ‘pillar’ is the same used for the two, Jachin and Boaz.”⁹⁷ *John Gill’s Exposition of the Entire Bible* notes that some think this platform was the brazen scaffolding erected by Solomon, spoken of in 2 Chronicles 6:13.⁹⁸ *Gill* goes on to note, “This throne was like an high tower, *standing upon two pillars*...in the place where kings used to sit or stand.”⁹⁹

It is appropriate that Israel’s kings secure their rule elevated in glory lifted between the pillars of Jachin and Boaz. The true King, risen in glory above all others, sits at the right hand of God based on the saving work he did on the cross, as seen in the pillars of Jachin and Boaz. He is “King of kings and Lord of

lords” (Revelation 19:16) and “Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore” (Isaiah 9:6-7). In him, we have an assurance to join him there, for he promises,

“I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown. The one who conquers, *I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God*. Never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name.” (Revelation 3:11-12)

In His Hands

As a final note, shortly after Jesus begins his ministry, he chooses his hometown synagogue in Nazareth to give his inaugural public sermon. He reads aloud from Isaiah for his text, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Luke 4:18).

In the liturgical formality of this moment, “the scroll of the prophet Isaiah is given to him,” and after Jesus reads the text, “he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant” (Luke 4:17, 20). Consider that on either side of this text is the rest of the scroll wrapped around two posts Jesus holds. How appropriate that Jesus, the pillars through whom we must pass for entry into the heavenly temple, read these words about himself, set between two literal posts, like pillars, announcing his eagerly anticipated arrival.

The name of the wooden dowel of the scroll's post has a beautiful significance. Rabbi Menachem Posner notes in his essay, "Etz Chayim: The Tree of Life in the Bible and Beyond,"¹⁰⁰ that the Hebrew word for the post used to wrap the scroll is "atzei chaymin" and explains, "In Hebrew, the word 'etz' can refer to either a 'tree' or 'wood.' Thus, the wooden dowels around which a Torah scroll is wrapped are often called atzei chayim, 'woods of life.'" As John writes, "In him was life, and the life was the light of men" (John 1:4).

Between these two Trees of Life exists a picture of God's grace spanning all scripture. From the Fall in Eden through to the New Jerusalem are the words describing the intentionality and persistence of his mercy and grace for our deliverance through the Word incarnate. God is faithful in working through people and history, and his only Son is to restore us to himself. Theologian Thomas Goodwin (1600–1680) says, "he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad. All the Gentiles that were scattered, Christ's death to gather them together in one, all them that belong to God's election, both in that age, and in all ages to the end of the world."¹⁰¹ As Isaiah says, "He will raise a signal for the nations and will assemble the banished of Israel, and gather the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth" (Isaiah 11:12).

PART THREE

The Holy Spirit and the Church

“And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven.”

Acts 2:4

Essay Nine

Dove, Dove, Dove

The dove makes infrequent but significant appearances in the scripture. We should “be wise as serpents and innocent as doves” (Matthew 10:16), which indicates the purity and wisdom that comes through the Holy Spirit. The Beloved calls his Bride “my dove” (Song of Solomon 6:9) in the Song of Songs, indicating the intimacy in their relationship. Peace is associated with an image of a dove, as, “Oh, that I had wings like a dove! I would fly away and be at rest” (Psalms 55:6). Noah sends one dove from the ark three times; in this, we see parallels to the Holy Spirit’s work in God’s plan of redemption.

The Holy Spirit is at Creation “hovering over the face of the waters” (Genesis 1:2). He is there when God says, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness” (Genesis 1:26). And as one of *us* creation, he is later “walking in the garden in the cool of the day” (Genesis 3:8). But when God expels Adam and Eve from the Garden, he becomes an intermittent presence in our world. God’s prophets are given the Holy Spirit for a time, but not permanently. The “Spirit of the LORD clothed Gideon” (Judges 6:34), Moses has the Spirit “on” him (Numbers 11:17), and the “Spirit entered into” Ezekiel (Ezekiel 2:2). But God’s great compassion would change the Holy Spirit’s occasional and transient presence into a permanent and indwelling one in us because of Jesus’ work on the cross.

First Trip

“And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.” (Genesis 1:1–2)

“Then he sent forth a dove from him, to see if the waters had subsided from the face of the ground. But the dove found no place to set her foot, and she returned to him to the ark, for the waters were still on the face of the whole earth.” (Genesis 8:8–9)

When Noah sends the dove out for the first time, it encounters a place similar to the one where the Holy Spirit hovered over at the start of Creation, but for a very different reason. The dove finds that all the living things God created are again absent. What happened? Because of sin, “the earth was filled with violence...for all flesh had corrupted their way,” so God would “destroy them with the earth” (Genesis 6:11-13).

The dove returns to Noah because there is nowhere to set down its feet and nest, just as the Holy Spirit does not have a home in our world after we were separated from it in Eden. God “drove out the man” and “placed the cherubim and a flaming sword” (Genesis 3:24) to isolate us from the Tree of Life and, consequently, the Holy Spirit.

In his *Exposition of the Bible*, John Gill reminds us that in Exodus, “between the two cherubim” (Exodus 25:22) is where God meets Moses. Hence, these Eden cherubim may have in them the presence of God, who “fixed his abode in a very awful manner at the entrance of the garden, to keep man out of it.”¹⁰² Since then, we have been “dead in our trespasses” (Ephesians 2:5) and unable to experience the joy of the Holy Spirit until Jesus sent us the Comforter.

Second Trip

“[H]e sent forth the dove out of the ark. And the dove came back to him in the evening, and behold, in her mouth was a freshly plucked olive leaf” (Genesis 8:10–11)

“The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God” (Luke 1:35)

“I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him.” (John 1:32)

Noah sends the dove out a second time, but something has changed, for it brings back a leaf plucked from the branch of an olive tree. Life springs from the ground, indicating that the waters of wrath are subsiding, giving hope to the travelers on the ark. Just as this olive tree is on a mountain revealed by receding waters, so on another mount, the Mount of Olives, rising water floods the Son of Man with sorrows before he is betrayed. Prophets speak of the “Branch” of David (Jeremiah 23:5, Isaiah 11:1), who would be the king and Savior of Israel. Deuteronomy says, “he who is hanged on a tree is cursed by God” (Deuteronomy 21:23). Although Jesus commits no crime, “he was killed by hanging him on a tree” (Acts 5:30). The dove clings to the olive leaf from such a tree just as the Holy Spirit remains with Jesus through these sorrows in Gethsemane.

Jesus is incarnated to redeem us, and although he is fully divine, he is also fully human and is comforted and strengthened by the Holy Spirit, just as we are. Hebrews says that “because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.” So, he can “sympathize with our

weaknesses” but always “without sin” (Hebrews 2:18, 4:15). Although he is fully divine, he doesn’t use his divinity to minister to his humanity. He could call down “twelve legions of angels” (Matthew 26:53) to save him but does not. Instead, Jesus relies on no more than what we are given to rely on: the Word (as during his desert temptation), frequent prayer alone with the Father—and the Holy Spirit’s comfort and strength.

After this second time out, just as the dove returns to Noah with evidence that God’s wrath is subsiding, Jesus returns to the Father with evidence that his wrath could also subside: a bloodied cross and an empty tomb. Jesus gives a final blessing to his disciples before his ascension: “And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high... While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven” (Luke 24:49-51). *Strong’s Concordance* translates the word *carried* as “to carry up, to lead up.”¹⁰³ Just as six times the “Spirit carried” Ezekiel from one place to another (Ezekiel 3:14, 8:3, 11:24, 37:1, 40:1, 43:5), and just as an olive leaf is carried to the ark by the dove, Jesus is *carried up into heaven* by and with the Holy Spirit, having assured the disciples this same Holy Spirit would soon return to them to stay, just as the dove does the third time it is sent out.

Third Trip

“[H]e waited another seven days and sent forth the dove, and she did not return to him anymore.” (Genesis 8:12)

“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever.” (John 14:15)

“When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all

together in one place...And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 2:1–4)

Noah sends the dove out a third time, and it remains in the world, just as the Father sends out the promised Holy Spirit on Pentecost, who is now here with us. We can scarcely turn a page in the epistles without seeing the blessings of the Holy Spirit in the Church and our lives. The gifts of the Holy Spirit build up the Church. The fruits of the Holy Spirit empower us to overcome the desires of the flesh. But, most significant of all, our relationship with Jesus is sealed with the Holy Spirit for the day of redemption (Ephesians 1:13, 4:30). And what greater comfort could we have knowing that he will “never leave nor forsake us” (Hebrews 13:5).

“The Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away” (Acts 8:39) after he baptizes the Ethiopian official. John speaks of how an angel “carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God” (Revelation 21:10). Similarly, the Holy Spirit leads us through this life until we, too, will be carried away, “caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

The Raven

“At the end of forty days Noah opened the window of the ark that he had made and sent forth a raven. It went to and fro until the waters were dried up from the earth.” (Genesis 8:7)

Noah sends a raven out before the dove. The raven is a scavenger, eating the carrion floating on the water. This may be why the Israelites are to detest and not eat “any kind of raven”

(Leviticus 11:15, NIV). Noah releases it as the first animal he wants to be rid of. The raven “went to and fro until the waters were dried up from the earth” (Genesis 8:7). The raven represents Satan’s presence in the world. In Job, God asks Satan what he’s been up to, and he replies, “going to and fro on the earth” (Job 1:7), like this raven. Unfortunately, as Peter says, he is still at it, “seeking someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8).

The history of Satan’s rise and fall is described in Ezekiel: “You were the signet of perfection; You were in Eden, the Garden of God; your heart was proud because of your beauty; I cast you to the ground; you have come to a dreadful end and shall be no more forever” (Ezekiel 28). God gave us dominion over this earth, but we transferred it to Satan. “The prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience” (Ephesians 2:2), is sent off the ark and is still at work today. But we know that “the ruler of this world will be cast out” (John 12:31), when “The kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord and his Christ [who] shall reign forever” (Revelation 11:15).

Seek Him

Some commentators say the raven going *to and fro* refers to it going to and from the ark. Others say the raven never returned to the ark but was going to and fro among the carcasses. Neither is necessary to understand how the raven’s flight differs from the dove’s because it’s not about a place but a person. The raven may or may not go back and forth to the ark, but with certainty, it never returns to Noah, the ship’s master. Proud in its glory and self-sufficiency, it is accountable only to itself. However, the dove, unlike the raven, “returned to *him*” after the first trip and “came back to *him* in the evening” (Genesis 8:9, 10) after the second trip. The dove is connected to Noah in a way the raven

is not. As the birds of the air in the Sermon on the Mount rely on their heavenly Father, the dove is in relation with Noah just as the Holy Spirit is with the Father.

Also, the dove could have feasted on the animals as the raven did but did not. Later, God says to Moses, “You shall not eat the blood of any creature, for the life of every creature is its blood” (Leviticus 17:14). The dove observes this law of righteousness before God later formalizes it for Moses. The Holy Spirit is with God and from God and is God in the Trinity. As such, it has an intrinsic knowledge of God’s purity and holiness because these things are “written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God” (2 Corinthians 3:3).

The dove remains out in the world, bringing hope to the remnant on the ark that God’s wrath is subsiding. The Holy Spirit’s presence here means that the flood of God’s wrath is receding for people everywhere as the gospel is shared of another flood, that of a “fountain filled with blood, drawn from Immanuel’s veins,”¹⁰⁴ as the hymnist William Cowper said, washing away our sins. When Jesus promises the disciples the Holy Spirit, he says, “You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you” (John 14:17). The Holy Spirit dwelt with them, for they had dwelt with Jesus for three years, but he lives forever in them and now in us.

Soon, we will again be with God in a new Garden in the cool of the day. This time, we will eat from a tree of life “for the healing of the nations” (Revelation 22:2). The raven and the dove are in this world now, but as John says, “he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world” (1 John 4:4). The Holy Spirit in us is greater.

Essay Ten

Daughters of Job

Much talking takes place in the Book of Job. After Job loses everything, including his health, his wife talks to him, three friends speak to him immediately, and another younger friend joins later. Lots of talking. Lots of words. They discuss why this has happened to him and what he should do about it. While their presence is undoubtedly beneficial, their arguments often miss the mark as they go back and forth on the whys and wherefores of “when bad things happen to good people,”¹⁰⁵ a phrase Rabbi Harold Kushner coined in his 1981 bestselling book of the same name. God waits until the end to speak his piece, but then he goes on for four stern chapters. Oddly, though, God does not counter any of their theological arguments. He doesn’t argue with them. After all, he is God!

God’s first words to Job and his friends are, “Who is this that darkens my counsel by words without knowledge?” (Job 38:2). He then proceeds to ask them many questions (some count 77), all rhetorical. “Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?” (Job 38:4). Nowhere. “Is it by your understanding that the hawk soars?” (Job 39:26). No. “Can you draw out Leviathan with a fishhook?” (Job 41:1). No. God states his power over the earth and its workings, animals and their behavior, and the Leviathan and its dominance, but no counterarguments to Job and his friends are mentioned. In other words, I am the

potter, and you are the clay (Jeremiah 18:6). “Is it to inquire of me that you come? As I live, declares the Lord GOD, you will not inquire of me” (Ezekiel 20:3). God need not be questioned.

A chronological Bible puts the Book of Job between chapters 11 and 12 of Genesis. Genesis 11 is about the tower of Babel, which says, “Now the whole earth had one language and the same words, this is only the beginning of what they will do” (Genesis 11:1, 6). Lacking any communication barrier, they could maximize their combined knowledge to engineer a tower to the heavens. But things can go wrong when people talk about the ways of heaven and spiritual matters without God in the conversation.

Elihu, one of Job’s friends, unwittingly points out this error when he suggests, “Let *us* choose what is right; let us know *among ourselves* what is good” (Job 34:4). But Isaiah says, “Come now, let us reason together, *says the Lord*” (Isaiah 1:18). The Pharisees erred in a similar way when they struggled to answer Jesus’ question, “was the baptism of John from heaven or from man?” (Luke 20:4). Rather than seeking wisdom from God, they “they discussed it *with one another*” (Luke 20:5) and were unable to answer. God must be included in our conversations about him.

As in Babel, Job and his friends are doing a lot with words, building theological towers instead of physical ones, but self-made towers, nonetheless. When God booms “out of the whirlwind and says: Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?” (Job 38:2), he arrives to give his input, perspective, and opinion. If God is not in the conversation, we’re guessing, drifting, or worse, intentionally ignoring him. Jeremiah relays God’s opinion of false prophets, “they have spoken in my name lying words that I did not command them” (Jeremiah 29:23).

It isn't that their arguments are unsound or possibly blasphemous, but that they are speaking so confidently about what they think God thinks rather than asking *him* what he thinks. Job recognizes this problem early on, even in deep despair, when he rebukes his friends: "Will you speak falsely *for* God and speak deceitfully *for* him?" (Job 13:7). On the other hand, Job pleads, "I desire to argue my case *with* God" (Job 13:3). In this realization, Job is distinguished from his friends in their many back-and-forths.

Solomon says, "To draw near to listen is better than to offer the sacrifice of fools, let your words be few" (Ecclesiastes 5:1-2). But, of course, the original one who name-dropped God's name is Satan in his first appearance. His simple "Did God actually say?" (Genesis 3:1) sets the standard for manipulating God's name for selfish purposes, and these four words have always been the template used to cast doubt on the truth. It doesn't deny the truth; it just makes us wonder if the truth is really the truth by casting doubt on the originator of that truth.

When Job gets his chance to speak, he says, "I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you" (Job 42:5). They spent all this time talking about God, hearing about God, but not seeing God himself working in their lives. Jesus tells his disciples, "Blessed are the eyes that see what you see!" (Luke 10:21). Job comes to see the personal God.

Job ends his journey as a humbler man, not because he is crushed by tragedy but because he is enlightened about God's sovereignty through that tragedy. God restores his wealth and blesses him with sons and daughters. Notably, none of his children are named at the beginning of the book, and the sons are not named at the end. However, in an unusual occurrence, his daughters are named at the end of the book. This is contrary to the practice of that time and lends insight into Job's

transformation.

To provide his daughters' names—especially *only* their names—breaks sharply with the recording of patriarchal lineages up to this point. For example, sons are identified by name sixty-eight times in the generational records of Adam and Noah just a few chapters earlier, in Genesis 5 and 10, but not once is a daughter named in those lineages. Now, Job not only names his three daughters but “gave them an inheritance among their brothers” (Job 42:15). Considering Job’s unusual decision, let’s consider the significance of their names.

Jemimah means *day* or *calm*, for Job has come out of his suffering and now understands the beauty in each new day of God’s sovereignty and the peace found in him, as in “his mercies never come to an end, they are new every morning, great is your faithfulness” (Lamentations 3:22-23). The anxiety and hand wringing, to the point of his wife advising him to curse God, is done. Now, “the lines have fallen to me in pleasant places; indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance” (Psalms 16:6).

Keziah or **Cassia** is from *fragrance* and spice from the bark of the same tree as cinnamon. It is possibly among the spice gifts the wise men offered the newborn King or the perfume the woman poured on Jesus to prepare him for burial (Matthew 26:12), as “a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” (Ephesians 5:2). So, when Jesus fills our lives with his love, we know his mercy and want to worship him, and we become the “pleasing aroma of Christ” (2 Corinthians 2:15) in the world. Job saw the joy of being in a new relationship with God.

Keren-happuch is the *horn of antimony*, from which a dark dye in cosmetics makes the eyes appear more prominent. Jeremiah uses this word in describing those who would “enlarge your eyes with paint” (Jeremiah 4:30). Although in that reference, it is about Israel’s seductive enticement of evil, here it is

about Job's eyes being opened in a good way, to the benevolent sovereignty of God. Now he sees God, not just talks about God. God responded by describing his creation and his control over it, providing Job and us a way to see him, as "the heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork" (Psalms 19:1, Luke 2:30). Through his suffering and God's response, Job's eyes are opened like Simeon's, who says, upon seeing the infant Jesus, "My eyes have seen your salvation" (Luke 2:30).

What a change in Job's perspective. He starts as a fretful man, distant from his children, making just-in-case sacrifices to ward off a distant and maybe/maybe not angry God. But now that uncertainty and legalism are over, Job's heart is changed, and he is thankful and sincere in his worship without fear. He even breaks tradition and gives his daughters an inheritance. Job learns of a God whose name is not just bandied about in philosophical terms but one who speaks and is personal.

God is no longer an intellectual concept for conversation but a presence around him, filling the space with light, fragrance, and wonder. His perspective of God changes so radically that the deeply held cultural distinctions between sons and daughters, and even between those who will get his inheritance, are erased. Job realizes God is so great and his mercy so deep that it equalizes us all as humble recipients of his grace, including his daughters.

God always has a merciful plan for his fallen creation. As Genesis 11 draws to a close "the LORD dispersed them over the face of all the earth" (Genesis 11:9), but after Job, in Genesis 12, Abraham's father takes his family "to go into the land of Canaan" (Genesis 11:31). Job's experience sets the stage for a significant step forward in God's plan. He is moving people toward a place he chooses that is not only spiritual but physical

as well. It is a plan not based on our own efforts to reach him, as it was with the Tower Babel, but on faith in him alone.

Genesis 12 opens with, “Now the Lord said to Abram, ‘Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you’” (Genesis 12:1). Later, when he promised Abraham a people, Abraham “believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness” (Genesis 15:6). And the rest is history. Job’s emergence from despair into faithfulness and hope set the stage for this event.

In some measure, Job’s journey reflects our journey. It often starts with a crisis in which we feel completely abandoned and alone. We seek answers from family and friends who provide needed and appreciated comfort but arrive at no solutions. But the Psalmist points to another way: “Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud; be gracious to me and answer me! You have said, Seek my face. My heart says to you, Your face, Lord, do I seek” (Psalms 27:7). And we have what the Psalmist did not have, the Holy Spirit in us. Jesus promised, “the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name” (John 14:26). In the end, Job’s friends “showed him sympathy and comfort” (Job 42:11), but our Comforter is so much greater.

Like Jemimah’s calm, the Holy Spirit gives us fruits of joy and peace (Galatians 5:22); like Keziah’s fragrance, the Holy Spirit shines through us for the world to see as it did through Stephen when, “full of the Holy Spirit...his face was like the face of Angel” (Acts 7:55, 6:1); and, like Keren-Happuch’s bright eyes, the “Spirit of truth” will guide us into all truth (John 16:13).

Jesus wants a relationship, not a transaction. His mercy is great when we see his face for the first time, then “his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning” (Lamentations 3:22-23). Each day arrives with worries of its own, as

Jesus says, and we tend to get wrapped up in them, as Martha did, but Jesus lived this life and knows our concerns. He says, “Your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you” (Matthew 6:32-33). Job learns this lesson, and his burden is transformed into joy.

Essay Eleven

The Rock

“For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ.” (1 Corinthians 10:1–4)

As in so many New Testament passages, this one draws on an event in the Old Testament to show the Father’s redemptive plan through his Son. Unfortunately, a turn of affairs poses a problem. Moses, who in infancy is providentially saved from Pharaoh’s edict to kill the Hebrew babies, who talks to God in the burning bush, who humbles a Pharaoh to let the Israelites go from Egypt, who receives the Ten Commandments, and who pleads with God for his people and speaks with God face to face, is barred from entry into the Promised Land because he strikes a rock rather than speaks to a rock. In the heat of a moment’s frustration with the people’s relentless stubbornness, it seems like a comparatively simple sin to commit, followed by an outsized punishment. But from our feeble perspective, it always does.

God tells Moses to bring water from the rock on two separate occasions. The first time, God indeed says, “You shall *strike* the

rock, and water shall come out of it, and the people will drink” (Exodus 17:6). The second time, God only says, “*Tell* the rock before their eyes to yield its water,” yet “Moses lifted up his hand and *struck* the rock with his staff” (Numbers 20:8, 11). God then tells Moses and Aaron they would not enter the Promised Land because “you did not believe me” (Numbers 20:12) and “broke faith in the midst of the people” (Deuteronomy 32:51). Obedience by faith in God is crucial to our relationship with him. Without it, we are lost, for “without faith it is impossible to please him” (Hebrews 11:6). Faith that leads to obedience is the underlying premise of our whole spiritual walk, and if that goes wrong, it all goes wrong.

Jesus is that Rock in the desert, providing them with water, both literal and spiritual. Moses describes this Rock as separate but of identical purpose of the Father: “The *Rock*, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. A *God* of faithfulness and without iniquity” (Deuteronomy 32:4) and “You were unmindful of the *Rock* that bore you, and you forgot the *God* who gave you birth” (Deuteronomy 32:18). They scoffed at the Rock of his salvation” (Deuteronomy 32:15), salvation that only comes through his Son. Later, Jesus tells the woman at the well that “Whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again” (John 4:13). This describes the certainty of the singularity of Jesus’ work of the cross in our lives which, once given to him, never changes. Romans says, “The death he died he died to sin, *once for all*, but the life he lives he lives to God” (Romans 6:10). But two promises are at work with these two encounters with the Rock.

In the first instance, God says, “I will stand before you there *on* the rock at Horeb” (Exodus 17:6). In the divinity of Jesus, God is there, *on* the rock that is struck. Later, as a man fully human and fully divine, he is struck many times and on the

cross, “one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water” (John 19:31). But notice in the second instance that God isn’t *on* the rock in the second instance, for he is resurrected and off that cross on which he was struck. After we accept Jesus’ gift of mercy, we never need to strike him again to gain it again. In fact, we *must* never strike him again, for to do so would be a lack of faith that the first time wasn’t enough. From the moment of salvation on, just one requirement now exists for spiritual water: “Ask, and it will be given to you” (Luke 11:9).

Moses only needs to *ask* for water the second time. This hearkens again to God’s justice and mercy. In striking the rock, justice is satisfied—forever. Henceforth, in mercy, water flows from the rock simply by asking—also forever. Hebrews speaks of this once-only sacrifice in several places when the writer says Jesus was offered up “once for all” (Hebrews 7:27, 9:12, 26, 10:10), but this passage is the clearest:

“For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.” (Hebrews 6:4-6)

The rock that is Christ may not be struck again; it cannot be struck again, for it is *impossible* to crucify Christ again, and to want to do so would be to show *contempt* for his sacrifice. In justice, the first rock is struck, which begins the flow of the waters of salvation into the world. “We esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted” (Isaiah 53:4). We do not want to

do this twice. In mercy, the second rock flows freely with the living water whenever we ask, quenching our spiritual thirst.

His mercy is always present after we stumble in sin or drift away from faith. He never leaves us. “Give me a drink, you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water” (John 4:10). Let us not lose sight of that gift! The *Mekhilta*, a first-century Jewish commentary, says of these passages about the Rock: “As it says in Scripture, ‘He brought forth streams from a rock’ (Ps. 78:16). ‘Streams’ means only ‘living water’.”¹⁰⁶ (emphasis added). The rock that produced that living water is Jesus, and all we need do is speak to him to quench our spiritual thirst.

Moses knew this Christ, for he had “considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt” (Hebrews 11:26) and ultimately did appear in Canaan when he joined Jesus and Elijah, together transfigured on the mount. Jesus says, “For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me” (John 5:46). The path to trusting God has never changed. Jesus was struck once for our justification then pours forth living water for our sanctification. As members of the church, we build our “house on the rock” (Matthew 7:24) with “Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone” (Ephesians 2:20).

Essay Twelve

Paul, and Beyond

Paul is one of the most remarkable figures of grace in history. His transformation is unique because he knows more about Moses, the Law, and the Prophets than the disciples, and perhaps most of the Pharisees. And yet, despite having a deep knowledge of the Messiah in these scriptures, he hates Jesus and his followers, ironically, based on those very same scriptures.

Paul is a man of the Old Testament Law and becomes a man of the New Testament gospel. His head is full of knowledge of the Messiah before the Messiah ruled his heart. Paul is a legal expert, trained from his youth in Jerusalem under a mentor-Pharisee of the highest reputation. He drags Christians out of their homes and sees them imprisoned and killed. He is the on-scene commander at Stephen's stoning. Then Jesus reveals himself to Paul.

Once he knows Jesus, he never looks back. He seems to have no earthly regrets. He later says, "For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death" (2 Corinthians 7:10). No doubt that, unlike Judas, whose grief leads to death, Paul knows this godly grief but, in his redemption, moves forward in world-changing service to the Lord.

As a Pharisee, he studies the Law and is more than familiar with what it says about the Messiah. The *Encyclopaedia*

Judaica states,

“Pharisaic doctrines have more in common with those of Christianity than is supposed, having prepared the ground for Christianity with such concepts as Messianism, the popularization of monotheism and apocalypticism, and with such beliefs as life after death, the resurrection of the dead, immortality, and angels.”¹⁰⁷

Just as he reminds Timothy, “how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings” (2 Timothy 3:15), Paul had studied the Torah since his youth, “educated at the feet of Gamaliel” (Acts 22:3).

Yet, as we know from scripture, knowledge isn’t the end goal in our lives. Instead, the goal is the knowledge that leads us to understand the God who is love, enabling us to love him and our neighbor. This is the message of the whole scripture. Paul the Pharisee believes in one God, that this God will send a Savior, that our choices in this life have consequences, and that there is life after death. But in his pride, he focuses all his efforts on obeying and serving God in his own power, only later to “count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ” (Philippians 3:8).

Some suggestions have been advanced on why Paul, from a respected family and in an honorable profession, is unusually aggressive against Jesus, becoming “a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent” of him (1 Timothy 1:13). No doubt, he is protecting the religious practices of the Pharisees. There was “Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus” (John 19:38), who asked for the body of Jesus, and likely Nicodemus, who provided the burial spices. Still, his zeal for a Messiah makes him defensive when dealing with his followers and who he thinks is a false Messiah. He is looking at a Messiah which

the scriptures describe but is blind to the Messiah in front of his own eyes. Like many others, he wants an earthly king, not a humble servant.

When Jesus opened his disciples' eyes to understand the scriptures, they realized the whole meaning of the prophecies about him. At the two extremes, the disciples know Jesus personally but don't understand all that scripture says about him; Paul thoroughly understands all that the scriptures say about the Jesus but doesn't know him personally. When Jesus makes himself known, the change in Paul is rapid and profound. In effect, Paul experiences the equivalent of three years with Jesus compressed into this one event. After just a few days with the disciples, "immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, 'He is the Son of God'" (Acts 9:20). As Job says, "I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you" (Job 42:5).

Paul has much knowledge—and we are encouraged to have knowledge. We read, "Fools, how long will you hate knowledge?" and "Zeal without knowledge is not good" (Proverbs 1:22, 19:2, HCSB). Yet we also read, "If I have all knowledge, but have not love, I am nothing" (1 Corinthians 13:2). Worse still, if we are "always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth" (2 Timothy 3:7), we will struggle to have a close relationship with Jesus. Paul has all the knowledge but needs to have a relationship. Now he has both, making him a powerful witness for Jesus.

Imagine a pastor beginning a sermon by asking us if we *longed* to see Jesus, if we would be *glad* if we did see him, if we would want him to give us a *sign*, and if we would like to ask him questions. We would enthusiastically say "Yes." But what if the pastor then reads this scripture for the sermon: "When Herod saw Jesus, he was *very glad*, for he had *long*

desired to see him, because he had heard about him, and he was hoping to *see some sign* done by him. So, he *questioned him* at some length” (Luke 23:8-9)? After hearing that, we are left to wonder: what is the difference between Herod and us?

A difference with eternal consequences exists between looking *at* Jesus, as Herod does, and looking *to* Jesus, as God desires. In one instance, we look *at* him out of curiosity, to be part of a kindred group, or to be entertained. Or even to persecute his followers, as Paul does. After we see what his lordship requires of us, we may even, as the pig herdsmen did, “beg Jesus to depart from their region” (Mark 5:17). But in the other instance, we look *to* him for hope, forgiveness, and salvation, “our eyes look to the Lord our God, till he has mercy upon us” (Psalms 123:2). Using our knowledge of Jesus to serve ourselves differs from using it to abandon ourselves to serve Jesus.

The woman who touches Jesus’ robe in the middle of a crowd is a familiar story. After she touches his robe and is healed, Jesus says, “‘Who touched my garments?’ And his disciples say to him, ‘You see the crowd pressing around you, and yet you say, ‘Who touched me?’” (Mark 5:29-31). It is easy to imagine someone from the crowd going home that evening and telling his family of the commotion Jesus created in town, the press of the crowd, the fact that he had actually brushed up against Jesus (!), and the unusual exchange between Jesus and a ritually unclean woman. Then he casually asks, “So, how was your day?” He is excited about seeing Jesus and eager to tell his family all about him, but he has not been changed in any way by him. Life goes on. So many touch his robe, yet only one feels Jesus’ touch in return. She is the one forever changed because she looked *to* Jesus for mercy.

Paul is excited about a Messiah he sees in scripture, so much so that he persecutes those he thinks are blaspheming this

Messiah, confessing, “in raging fury against them I persecuted them” (Acts 26:11). But when he hears, *I am Jesus* while on the road to Damascus, Paul goes from looking *at* Jesus as his enemy to looking *to* Jesus as his Lord. In obedience, he goes to Damascus and waits until Ananias arrives, wherein he says the Lord” has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 9:17)

Paul doesn’t need the explanation of the Torah as the disciples do, for he already has all that knowledge. Instead, he needed to know Jesus personally. Once his strength returned after his conversion, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, he “confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ” (Acts 9:22). This confounding and proving comes from the same scriptures he had previously used against Jesus.

Regret is debilitating, especially for the Christian. Those who are all-in with the ways of this world may seem to have fewer regrets since “they have no pangs, they are not in trouble, they are always at ease” (Psalms 73:4-12). They may not suffer under a burden of guilt because they don’t recognize the burden of sin. Or worse, they suffer guilt with no path to relief. Those who love Jesus and aspire to love their neighbor as he did sometimes regret not doing better or being “perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:48) because we don’t fully comprehend the grace given to us through Jesus Christ.

Paul could have been crippled by regret for what he had done to Jesus’ followers and Jesus himself, but he isn’t. Instead, the Lordship of Jesus makes him “a new creation” (2 Corinthians 5:17), and he lives his life “forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:13). Over the course of three years, right up until his ascension, Jesus tells

the disciples what the Old Testament says about himself. But Paul's revelation of this connection happens in an instant when he realizes that Jesus is the Messiah he had been peering at all his life.

So, too, finding Jesus in the Old Testament is encouraged and encouraging. If we investigate the *heavenly things* of which Hebrews speaks, to seek the face of Jesus there because we want, as St. Richard of Chichester (1197–1253) describes, to “see thee more clearly, love thee more dearly, follow thee more nearly,”¹⁰⁸ we will not be disappointed. “If you seek him, he will be found by you,” and “he rewards those who seek him” (2 Chronicles 15:2 *and* Hebrews 11:6). One of the most significant rewards is the gift of the Holy Spirit in us and in the church. Paul's Holy Spirit-inspired writings pointed the way forward for the church and continues to this day.

Conclusion

New Testament writers cite passages from the Old Testament nearly 300 times and make an additional 500 allusions to them. All but four of the thirty-nine Old Testament books are referenced in the New Testament, with these references widely distributed across twenty-two of the twenty-seven New Testament books. Jesus alone fulfills about 300 Old Testament prophecies.¹⁰⁹ While these statistics tell a story and are worthy of study, they cannot approach the saturation of God's love for us on every page of both testaments. God reveals himself as "merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin" (Exodus 34:6-7).

His persistent and perpetual love for us is seen from Genesis to Malachi, a gospel in the Old Testament. When Adam and Eve fall, he makes garments to cover their nakedness; when he destroys the earth by water, he says, *never again*; when his people reject his authority in exchange for an earthly king, he gives them David, *a man after his own heart*, from which the Branch of salvation comes; when their kings fail the people, and they are scattered, he gives them protection in exile. As Israel drifts deeper and deeper into sin, God's words through the prophets correspondingly drift higher and higher in anticipation of the Savior's arrival to save us from these sins.

At the same time King Uzziah "grew proud, to his destruction," and is struck with leprosy until his death (2 Chronicles

26:16, 21), the prophet Zachariah is saying they will look “on him whom they have pierced” and “there shall be a fountain opened” to cleanse us from unrighteousness (Zechariah 12:10, 13:1). At the same time King Ahaz follows the “despicable practices of the nations” around him, including sacrificing his own son (2 Kings 16:13), the prophet Isaiah writes, “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel” and “his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 7:14, 9:6). At the same time King Manasseh “shed very much innocent blood, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another” (2 Kings 21:16), the prophet Micah is prophesying, “But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, and he shall stand and shepherd his flock, and he shall be their peace” (Micah 5:2, 4, 5). And at the same time Joel is prophesying, “blackness is spread upon the mountain...like has never been before, nor will be again after them through the years of all generations,” he follows with, “rend your hearts and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful” (Joel 2:2, 12).

At their worst moment, when the Israelites reject him entirely and adopt the idols and practices of the nations around them, God at that very moment promises them a Savior who will take up their infirmities, freely give them the richest of fare, and settle them in a place of peace like a river (2 Kings 21:6, Isaiah 53:4, 55:2, 66:12). Yet, after all these mercies, in the final book of the Old Testament, the religious leaders ask with an amazingly dismissive banality, “How have you loved us?” (Malachi 1:2). Do we ever ask this in our hearts? Yet, even then, he answers with a promise, “The Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple” and “all nations will call you blessed,

for you will be a land of delight” (Malachi 3:1, 3:12).

This improbable promise arrives when the angel Gabriel tells Mary, *The Lord is with you*, and is fulfilled when Jesus says, *It is finished*. Many recognize Jesus right away as the Messiah. John the Baptist says, *Behold, the Lamb of God*; Simeon says, *A light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel*; Anna the prophetess says, *The redemption of Jerusalem*; Peter says, *You are the Christ, the Son of the living God*. Others recognize Jesus as God’s chosen after his death. A centurion says, *Truly this man was the Son of God*; Thomas says, *My Lord and my God!* Paul says, *What shall I do, Lord?*

People throughout history die in faith, looking forward to God’s Messiah, but we have the great advantage of looking back to his completed work on the cross. Yet for all his people, BC or AD, “faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” and “this is the gift of God” (Hebrews 11:1, Ephesians 2:8), too. As the Son gave us the Lord’s Prayer, the Father gave Moses his prayer of blessing, “The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace” (Numbers 6:24-26).

The Old Testament is more than history, poetry, and prophecy. It is the story of God’s redemption, to be sure. Still, far more, it precedes the New Testament with equal standing in revealing the love of God, the mercy of God, the grace of God, and the perfection of the coming sacrifice of Jesus to save, comfort, and preserve. Augustine says, “The two Testaments are both in tune, and the two Testaments have one voice: let the voice of the Testaments in tune be heard.”¹¹⁰

Afterward

Reverend and Doctor Iain Duguid, a professor of the Old Testament at Westminster Theological Seminary, says of the Old Testament that Jesus Christ “is there on every page as the central theme and storyline of the entire book” but for interpretations to “fasten on superficial details of the text...to find references to Christ where none was originally intended” amounts to “wild excesses of allegory.”¹¹¹

Point taken. Over-allegorizing the Old Testament can be problematic. Likely, the altar was a table because standing at a table is more accessible than stooping over the ground, making it more practical and comfortable for the priest to accomplish his duties. Tables typically have four sides and four corners. Perhaps God’s mercy and grace are not deduced from the shape of the table but its mere existence. God had compassion on the priest’s back!

But many allegories are unmistakable. Jesus said that his body was the temple, and “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (John 2:19), equating the temple to his body. Expressing this became the proximate excuse for the religious leaders to seek his death. Hebrews says Christ “entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself” (Hebrews 9:24). Yearning for heaven and seeing Jesus, generally, leads to yearning to see where he resides at the Father’s right hand and what blessings are waiting for us there, specifically, through that earthly copy

of it. It extends to the rest of the Old Testament, which speaks of Jesus on every page.

Perhaps just the process of peering into the often-neglected Old Testament, “into the perfect law, the law of liberty,” as James calls it, can be its own reward. As an older and long-ago departed mentor of mine frequently and joyfully said to the younger me, “Keep your nose in the book!” As Jeremiah says, “You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart” (Jeremiah 29:13). The promise that a heart guided by his word will, in time, lean towards him gives us great hope.

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