

# Comfort and God's Power

Isaiah 40 begins with an exhortation to comfort:

“Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.  
Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,  
and cry to her  
that her warfare is ended,  
that her iniquity is pardoned,  
that she has received from the Lord's hand  
double for all her sins.”

Isaiah speaks forward to the generation of God's people who would be in Babylonian captivity because of their sins and refusal to repent. Even though they were punished for their evils, God still provides comfort and encouragement for them. He promised to bring them back out of the captivity and give them a new beginning.

Then a voice cries in the wilderness, a section that is readily recognized as being fulfilled in John the Immerser as he prepared the way for the coming of Jesus Christ (Matt 3:3). The voice that cries then speaks to the contrast between the enduring nature of God's word against the temporal nature of all flesh. Peter quotes this passage as well (1 Pet 1:22-25). The New Testament shows that the greater fulfillment of comfort is to be found in Jesus Christ. Recall how Simeon at the temple, at the time of Christ's birth, was “waiting for the consolation of Israel,” and He knew Jesus fulfilled this promise (Luke 2:25-32).

The greatness of God is a continual theme in this Isaiah 40—a theme that we do well to be continually reminded of as we try to wind our way through a world that can be so difficult and discouraging.

I also find it interesting that in the midst of a passage intended to provide comfort for God's people, and in declaring God's greatness, we find this (Isa 40:15, 17, 23):

“Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket, and are accounted as the dust on the scales”

...“All the nations are as nothing before him; they are accounted by him as less than nothing and emptiness.” God “brings princes to nothing, and makes the rulers of the earth as emptiness.”

No nation will stand forever. If Assyria and Babylon were but a drop from a bucket, accounted by God as less than nothing and emptiness, with princes and rulers brought to nothing, so also is the USA, Russia, China, and every other nation.

Christians, then, while seeking the welfare of the place wherein they live (wherever that may be), are not to idolize any nation or ruler, for all nations and rulers will come and go. To God, they are as nothing. They will be taken up like fine dust. Do not put your trust in earthly princes or powers.

Regardless of our earthly citizenship, which sometimes can be utilized for the benefit of the spread of the gospel, our heavenly citizenship overrides all other factors (Phil 3:19-20). We are part of a “kingdom that shall never be destroyed” and will never be “left to another people” (Dan 2:44). Even so, all the nations are yet invited to partake of the tree of life for their healing (Rev 22:2). There is, indeed, great comfort in all of this for we are reminded that God is in control and He will always do what is right. Have you not known? Have you not heard?

The comfort continues in Isaiah 40 and speaks to those who feel like they are not being heard:

Why do you say, O Jacob,  
and speak, O Israel,  
“My way is hidden from the Lord,  
and my right is disregarded by my God”? (Isa 40:27)

This is the cry of those who feel forgotten and forsaken. Does God care? Is He there? Is He listening? Or has He just abandoned people in their plight? The answer, in context, is this (Isa 40:28ff):

Have you not known? Have you not heard?  
The Lord is the everlasting God,  
the Creator of the ends of the earth.  
He does not faint or grow weary;  
his understanding is unsearchable.  
He gives power to the faint,  
and to him who has no might he increases strength.

When we feel forlorn and forsaken, wondering if God is listening or if He cares, here is His answer. He is everlasting, the Creator who does not get tired and whose understanding is past finding out. He gives strength to the weary and will cause His people to mount up with wings like eagles. In other words, God provides comfort and strength through tribulation and distress.

God has not forgotten His people, and He does hear. He ultimately answers in Jesus Christ and shows that nothing can tell us that God does not love us (Rom 8:31-39). The night may feel that it is taking much too long, but the morning will come. Trust God, and know that in Christ we will find our strength.

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## Bad Company Corrupts Good Morals

Paul makes an important argument in 1 Corinthians 15 about the resurrection of Jesus Christ. He begins the chapter by showing that there were many witnesses to the resurrected Christ. The Gospel is not just that Jesus died, but that He died, was buried, rose again on the third day, and appeared to many. We are saved by this message (i.e., what actually happened and its effects), and we must stand in it (remain firm, as v. 58 indicates).

Paul then shows the opposite impact if there was no resurrection. If Jesus was not raised, then there will be no resurrection for anyone. If that is the case, then our faith is vain, preaching is vain, and we are to be pitied for believing it all. There is nothing noble about believing so great a lie, and in this case it would be a lie with real consequence. On the other hand, those who deny its truth also will deal with serious consequences. Unbelievers have no hope in anything beyond this world, so any life choices will not *ultimately* matter. Choices would matter only temporarily, but nothing would have eternal ramifications, for there would be no resurrection. Death would mean the cessation of existence altogether.

Paul, then, shows the vital nature of resurrection. It has implications, not only for eternity, but also for how we live our lives now. Read the whole chapter, but note here an argument Paul makes in verses 31-33: "I affirm, brethren, by the boasting in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily. If from human motives I fought with wild beasts at Ephesus, what does it profit me? If the

dead are not raised, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die. Do not be deceived: 'Bad company corrupts good morals.'"

We should step back and see how Paul makes his point. There really are only two ways to live: 1) with a view toward eternal life, or 2) with a view toward this earthly life alone. If we believe in resurrection, then we accept eternal life, and in turn we will believe that we must strive to live by God's view of morality because it has eternal consequences. Holiness will be vital to us. Notice Paul's next statement: "Become sober-minded as you ought, and stop sinning; for some have no knowledge of God" (v. 34). If, on the other hand, we do not believe in the resurrection, then we might as well do whatever we wish, "for tomorrow we die," and that will be that. We won't be any better or worse for whatever we choose. We'll just die.

In this context we see the well known adage: "Bad company corrupts good morals."

What is the point of that statement? Behavior is affected by what we believe about resurrection and afterlife. If we don't believe in resurrection, if there is nothing else beyond this, then how we view morality and behavior will be very different from those who believe in resurrection. We will think we just die and that there are no eternal consequences and no final judgment or justice.

The problem is that those who did not believe in resurrection were influencing the behavior of other Christians, for the consequences of there being no resurrection leads to this nihilistic view of life and reality (meaninglessness). This seems to be the "bad company" against which Paul warns. That is, even within the church were those whose influence directed others away from the resurrection and, consequently, good moral behavior. We expect this from the world, but to get it from other Christians is shameful.

We live in an age that pushes skepticism and disbelief in God or anything beyond the world we can see. Resurrection is written off, and the consequences are serious. What we believe about post-death reality will affect our morality and any views we have of meaning and purpose. If we do not have the resurrection firmly in mind, our behavior will change.

The "bad company" of this passage are those who would influence us not to believe in resurrection, which will include all that is entailed in what the resurrection means. We will cease believing in the saving message of the Gospel, and this will change everything. Do we not live in the midst of bad company today? Whether it be in schools, politics, movies and shows, the media, online activity or otherwise, we live in an age of skepticism that influences behavior. People lose their faith due to unbelieving influences, and resurrection no longer factors into how they make decisions. This will always be the danger Christians face.

Now, more than ever, we need to reaffirm our faith in Christ and the resurrection. Only in this way can we keep our real purpose before us. Only in this way can we do what Paul encourages at the end of the resurrection discussion: “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Cor 15:58, NASB).

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## The Redemption of Judah: Judah’s Role in Genesis

We often think of the latter part of Genesis as being all about Joseph. There is no doubt that the role of Joseph here is major. Yet we might also wonder, why Joseph? After all, he is not in the line of Jesus.

Joseph is the reason why Jacob and his sons will end up in Egypt, and this is a significant part of God’s plan to bring about the promises given to Abraham (Gen 12:1-7). By coming down to Egypt and being isolated, the children of Israel are able to grown into the nation that God wanted so that the greater plans of bringing about the Messiah, Jesus, could happen. There are many components to this story and many layers that, coming together, provide the framework for how God accomplished His purposes.

It is easy to get caught up in the individual stories here, and if we are not careful in our reading, we might lose sight of the greater purposes. When we think of Joseph, we think of the fact that is the favored son of Jacob because he is the firstborn of Jacob’s beloved Rachel. We think of the special coat given to Joseph by Jacob. We think of the dreams that Joseph claimed indicating that his family would one day bow down to him (Gen 37). We even may point out that Joseph telling his brothers about these dreams was probably not very wise, given how much the brothers already disliked him. We also think about how mistreated Joseph was by his brothers, how they planned to kill them, then wound up selling him into slavery and winding up in Egypt. Then we think about Joseph rising to top positions as a servant. We recall how Joseph, as a servant of Potiphar, was in charge of the household and how Potiphar’s wife tried to seduce him. We see Joseph, in Genesis

39 saying that he could commit such a sin against God, and he ran from Potiphar's wife while she held his coat (notice how important clothing is in these accounts of Joseph, how his brothers use Joseph's coat to convince their father he was dead, and how Potiphar's wife used his garment to claim that Joseph tried to force himself upon her, then later how Joseph's clothing as an Egyptian helped fool his brothers.).

The point is that we see Joseph as the main character and we stress the stories of Joseph trying to do what is right and God using him to rise to top levels in Egypt. We see at the end of the story how God brought about His plans, that though the brothers meant harm against Joseph, God meant the events to turn out for the good. We see a pattern here for trying to better understand what we often term as God's providence, God's hand in bringing about the results He desires. God is indeed always in control. Of course, Joseph was far from perfect, yet these are the issues we usually stress. There are some powerful lessons in these events.

Let's bring something else to the table. The main character that is so often overlooked in these chapters is, in fact, Judah. We see Judah doing some bad stuff here, so we may think of him more as a side character. We come to Genesis 38, where Judah actually commits a terrible sin by going in to his daughter-in-law thinking she was a harlot. We wonder, why in the world is this chapter here? Why are we reading this about Judah when the main story is supposed to be about Joseph?

I believe the answer is that the main story is supposed to be about Judah. This is not to diminish the major role played by Joseph. We must not overlook what happened to him and how he took care of him. Yet Judah has a larger role than we may at first think, and I believe it sets up perhaps one of the most important features of these chapters. Let's survey what's happening with Judah here and see why this is critical to the overarching narrative of God's people.

### **Who is Judah?**

Judah was the fourth son of Leah, the older sister of Rachel (Gen 29:35). In this position, one might not expect much at first. After all, he is not the firstborn son so we would not expect the greater blessings to go to him or his family. Through Genesis 36, all we are told about him is that he is the fourth son. We might even expect that he would fade into obscurity as so many have done. Yet God had other plans, and Judah's role in the story will become much greater.

Judah was among the brothers of Joseph when Joseph told them about having dreams of rulership over them (Gen 37). The text says, "And his brothers were jealous of him" (v. 11), and there is no reason to think that Judah was as jealous as the others. The brothers conspired to kill Joseph. Initially Reuben, the oldest brother, saved Joseph's life. Instead of killing Joseph outright, they

would put Joseph into a pit. Reuben thought to come back later and rescue him.

As the brothers were eating, apparently without Reuben, a caravan of Ishmaelites passed through on their way to Egypt. “Judah said to his brothers, ‘What profit is it if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him, for he is our brother, our own flesh.’ And his brothers listened to him.” (Gen 37:26-27).

What Judah said to the brothers made sense to them. While Judah is not particularly noble here, he does at least persuade the brothers not to kill Joseph, “for he is our brother, our own flesh.” Never mind that he sold his own brother into slavery, but perhaps he at least thought that was better than death and the brothers would be appeased. This event helps shape the rest of what happens. Note also that while Joseph is the reason for the family coming down to Egypt, Judah is the reason for Joseph going to Egypt first.

### **Judah’s Sin**

This brings us to Genesis 38, a passage that some see as troubling not only for content, but for placement in the book of Genesis. Why is it here? What is the point?

The text first tells us that Judah married a Canaanite woman who conceived and had a son named Er. Then she had other sons. Next, we are told that Judah took a wife, named Tamar, for his son, Er. However, because Er was so wicked in the sight of the Lord, the Lord put him to death. Judah then had his second son, Onan, marry Tamar so they could have children. Onan, however, prevented this from happening, and because of his wickedness, God put him to death, also. One is reminded of Eli and his wicked sons who were put to death by God. God was not being honored. Yet the problems are not over.

Notice some connections here. Judah “went *down* from his brothers” (Gen 38:1), which is the same terminology as in Genesis 39:1 regarding Joseph who was brought *down* to Egypt. One went willingly, the other did not, but both indicate separation from the family and a turning point for both of them. Judah married a Canaanite, just like Esau had done. Recall that when Esau married Canaanite women (Hittite women), this made life bitter for Isaac and Rebekah (Gen 26:34-35), and Rebekah, who loathed the situation, feared that if Jacob did the same she couldn’t live with it (Gen 27:46). Jacob was specifically told, ““You must not take a wife from the Canaanite women” (Gen 28:1). The Canaanites were wicked, and this had an impact on those who were supposed to be God’s people. These stories were meant to teach the children of Israel later, who were not to marry with Canaanites. Esau did it, and Genesis 36, which gives the genealogy of Esau, starts with, “Esau took his wives from the Canaanites” (v. 2). Now we are in Genesis 38, and see this:

“There Judah saw the daughter of a certain Canaanite whose name was Shua. He took her and went in to her” (Gen 38:2). Things will not turn out well.

Notice, also, the connections of the terms “saw” and “took” together. These are the same terms used of Eve when she saw and took of the forbidden tree (Gen 3:6), and when the “sons of God” “saw” and “took” the daughters of men in Genesis 6:2. The princes of Pharaoh “saw” and “took” Sarai, Abram’s wife, to Pharaoh in Genesis 12:15. Shechem “saw” and “took” Dinah, Jacob’s daughter, in Genesis 34:2. Achan “saw” and “took” of the forbidden spoils of Jericho in Joshua 7:21, and David when he “saw” and “took” Bathsheba (2 Sam 11:2-4). Such is the nature of what leads to sin. We “see” what we think is good, and we “take” it. Judah saw and took a wife from the Canaanites. These terms in Genesis 38 help us see that the what is about to happen will not be good. In fact, we see how wicked the sons of Judah are here, and they were put to death for it. One great counter-example is in Genesis 22:13 where Abraham, in his display of faith, saw and took the ram that God provided and offered it as a burnt offering instead of Isaac. Abraham’s faith stands in sharp contrast to others. What we “see” and “take” from this is critical.

After his sons died, Judah told Tamar to live as a widow until another son, Shelah, could grow up enough to marry her. However, though Shelah had grown up, she had not been given to him. In the meantime, Judah’s wife died. One day as Judah was going to shear his sheep at Timnah, Tamar was told about this. She took off her widow’s garments and veiled herself so that when Judah saw her, he thought she was a prostitute. The story shows that he went to her, promising to give her a young goat for payment. She asked for a pledge until then, and he gave her a signet ring, a cord, and a staff to hold. When it all over, she conceived, and put her widow garments back on.

Again, what happens next is a stark reminder of what would later happen with David and Bathsheba, when Nathan accused him (2 Sam 12). Judah was told about Tamar’s immorality, given that she was now expecting. Judah’s response was, “Bring her out, and let her be burned.” When they were doing this, Tamar presented the ring, the cord, and the staff, and Judah then realized what had happened. “She is more righteous than I, since I did not give her to my son Shelah” (v. 27).

Notice all the deception that is part of these accounts, once again. People lie, deceive, act immorally. Judah was responsible to provide a husband for Tamar, which is highlighted by the fact that she is still called his “daughter-in-law” (v. 16). Judah had broken his promise to Tamar, and Tamar, to secure her position and inheritance through Judah deceived him as a result. Broken promises and lies drive the events. Yet in all of this, God is faithful and still had a plan even though the people involved here are so wicked. God can indeed use terribly flawed people to bring about greater purposes. Salvation is not about God saving perfect people because they were so



great. What wondrous grace we see!

Tamar, by Judah, had twins, named Perez and Zerah. At this point, the story about Judah seems to disappear for a time, so what is the point of this in the overall story?

Remember that God is bringing about the purposes and plans based on His promise to Abraham. What is happening here is that we are being shown, well in advance, the role of Judah in the line of Jesus Christ. When we open up the Gospel of Matthew, we are met with these words in Matthew 1:2-3: "Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron..."

Perez, son of Judah and Tamar, are in the lineage of Christ. Matthew traces Joseph's line to show legal lineage, but we also see Perez's name in Luke's account of Jesus' genealogy (Luke 3:33), which may establish Mary's side of the family. Jesus was from the tribe of Judah, and even though there are immoral people in his lineage, God is able to overcome all of this to carry out His plan of salvation. God's plan was never dependent upon people being righteous in themselves.

### **Judah's Turn to Savior**

Next, we encounter Judah after Joseph interpreted the various dreams and came to power in Egypt. When a famine hit the land, the sons of Jacob were sent to Egypt to get food, and Joseph was already in place with a plan in place to deal with the famine (Gen 42). When the brothers came to Joseph, they did indeed bow down to him, and Joseph recognized them. Joseph appears to be testing the resolve and character of the brothers as he made it appear that they had stolen grain and demanded that they bring back their youngest brother. The brothers feared greatly, and now they were faced with the idea of taking Benjamin, Joseph's younger full brother, down to Egypt with them. This is the one thing Jacob did not want. It is here that Judah steps up with an attitude that is a pivotal point in the account. In order to convince Jacob to let them take Benjamin, "Judah said to Israel his father, 'Send the boy with me, and we will arise and go, that we may live and not die, both we and you and also our little ones. I will be a pledge of his safety. From my hand you shall require him. If I do not bring him back to you and set him before you, then let me bear the blame forever'" (Gen 43:8-9).

They went back to Egypt, with Benjamin, and Joseph used the situation to further test the brothers, making it appear that Benjamin had stolen Joseph's cup. This would mean that Benjamin would be unable to return home and could face death. Notice here how the narrative proceeds in Genesis 44:14: "When Judah and his brothers came to Joseph's house, he was still there. They fell

before him to the ground.” Judah is put forward as the leading brother. It’s not just the brothers, but “Judah and his brothers.” When Joseph set up the situation to make an accusation against Benjamin, Judah is the one who stepped in, and his speech in **Genesis 44:18-34** changes everything.

Judah turns into a savior here. He transformed from an immoral man who failed to keep his word to a man of integrity who is willing to give his life for another. He tells the story of what happened to have them bring Benjamin down to Egypt, which included how grieved their father was over the whole scenario. Here is Judah’s pivotal statement (Gen 44:30-34):

“Now therefore, as soon as I come to your servant my father, and the boy is not with us, then, as his life is bound up in the boy’s life, as soon as he sees that the boy is not with us, he will die, and your servants will bring down the gray hairs of your servant our father with sorrow to Sheol. **For your servant became a pledge of safety for the boy** to my father, saying, ‘If I do not bring him back to you, then **I shall bear the blame** before my father all my life.’ Now therefore, please **let your servant remain instead of the boy** as a servant to my lord, and let the boy go back with his brothers. For how can I go back to my father if the boy is not with me? I fear to see the evil that would find my father.”

This event was the breaking point for Joseph, who could no longer keep up the charade. He revealed himself to his brothers, though they were terrified of what Joseph might do to them. Joseph reassured them that God meant these events for good. Now the family was to come to Egypt along with their father. Judah not only changed himself, but he effected change in others. He was the leader now. According to Genesis 46:28, Judah was the one led the way to reunite Joseph with Jacob. Judah had become a leader in the family, the one through whom they could find their path to reconciliation.

One of the concepts we see here is the interaction between Judah and Joseph, both representatives of what will later become the north and south division of Israel with Judah in the south and Ephraim, a son of Joseph, as the main family of the north. They had been divided, but for a moment they come together. Later, the families of Joseph and Judah will be divided due to the sins of the leaders, and only through Christ will the divisions be made right.

There are important, practical lessons we learn through the narrative of Judah. Here are a few to consider:

### **Judah points to Jesus.**

**In Salvation:** Think back to Genesis 44:18-34. Note particularly how Judah became a pledge for

Benjamin so that his life was tied up in Benjamin's life. He was willing to bear the blame and to take the place of Benjamin. Does any of this remind us of someone else? Someone who would bear the sins of others, who would become a pledge for others, who would give His life for the lives of others? Does this not point us ultimately to Jesus?

While not every facet of this transfer to Jesus, and no type does that, there are significant pointers here to the idea of one who will step in to give his life for another. In this sense, then, Judah is a type for the Messiah, Jesus Christ. What did Christ do for us?

“Surely he has borne our griefs  
and carried our sorrows;  
yet we esteemed him stricken,  
smitten by God, and afflicted.  
But he was pierced for our transgressions;  
he was crushed for our iniquities;  
upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,  
and with his wounds we are healed.  
All we like sheep have gone astray;  
we have turned—every one—to his own way;  
and the Lord has laid on him  
the iniquity of us all.” (Isa 53:4-6)

“He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.” (1 Pet 2:24-25).

“For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor 5:21).

“And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Heb 10:10).

What Judah did is, in small measure, what Christ does for us in great measure. If Judah, by his actions, could essentially save the life of his brother Benjamin, Jesus, by His actions saves the lives of all who put their trust in Him.

**In Kingship:** Not only does Judah point to the salvific work of Jesus, but also to His kingship.

Genesis 49 gives us our last glimpse of Judah in the book of Genesis, and it has to do with the blessings given by Jacob. Notice this section:

“Judah, your brothers shall praise you;  
your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies;  
your father’s sons shall bow down before you.  
Judah is a lion’s cub;  
from the prey, my son, you have gone up.  
He stooped down; he crouched as a lion  
and as a lioness; who dares rouse him?  
**The scepter shall not depart from Judah,  
nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet,  
until tribute comes to him;  
and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.**” (Gen 49:8-10)

Kingship is promised to the line of Judah here. This promise will be carried forward in David, who comes from Judah (2 Sam 7:12-13). Ultimately, the kingship will be Christ’s. He is the One to whom belongs the obedience of the peoples. This is why the spread of the gospel goes to all nations (Matt 28:18-20). Christ is our King! He is the King of kings and Lord of Lords. To Him belongs the scepter and the rule. As **Revelation 19:15-16** puts it:

“From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.”

### **Judah shows what transformation looks like.**

Our sins need not define us forever. The gospel is about transformation and reconciliation. Here we see Judah transforming from one type of man to a very different type of man. He moves from selfish to selfless, faithless to faithful, dishonest to honest. By the end, he is a man of integrity who steps up and does what he knows is right.

Judah is, in a sense, the story of the gospel bound up in a person. We see him at his worst, then we see him at his best as a new man. He encapsulates what the message of the gospel proclaims. Think about this when reading a passage like 1 Corinthians 6:9-11:

“Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived:

neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”

This is the gospel. If God could use Judah, to take him from his selfish, proud, sinful ways and transform him into a selfless, sacrificial man of integrity, what can He do with us? When I read this, I am encouraged because I can see that my sins do not need to define me. God can use Judah to accomplish something great, and God can use you and me to do His will in this world. When I read about Judah, I see hope. I see change. I know that God can forgive and use me.

### **Judah shows how to become a leader through humble service and selfless sacrifice.**

Modern concepts of leadership often include ambition that goes beyond how God would have us act, thrusting ourselves out in front of everyone else and taking charge because it's what we want. Biblical leadership, however, starts with humility and godly submission, traits that our world fights against. In reality, Scripture does call us to be “leaders” as much as servants, and it is through serving that we show love for one another and, in the end, pave a path for others to follow. Judah was the peacemaker who brought reconciliation.

Jesus did give His life for us, His brethren. And we are called to follow this example:

“By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers” (1 John 3:16).

Judah's actions impacted the actions of others. As seen in the text, Judah's attitude is what brought about Joseph's breaking point where he finally revealed himself to his brothers. This led to bringing the family to Egypt and seeing the reconciliation of Joseph with his father Jacob.

### **Conclusion**

Judah is no minor character in these accounts. Indeed he becomes the one through whom the Messiah would eventually come. God used imperfect people to carry out a perfect plan for salvation. In many ways Judah mirrors the same problems we have today with sin, deceit, and consequences. Yet there was redemption in the end. Judah became a man who was willing to give his life for another, which provides us a snapshot of what our Savior, Jesus Christ, would do for us. He also shows what it means to lead through service and sacrifice. May we learn to avoid the sins

that led Judah down the wrong path, and may we follow his example in selfless sacrificial service.

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[Note: I do not claim originality for all of these thoughts. Over the years I have read what several others have said and I have gleaned bits and pieces from them, and they, no doubt, have influenced my thinking. For example, Robert Alter's *The Art of Biblical Narrative* has some helpful sections for reading stories like these, and he has a section focused on Judah. What I wanted to do here was just try to see what the text says while comparing what happened with Judah to others. I am sure there is much more to learn from the material, but this is the beauty of Bible study. With every layer we peel back, more layers will be found. Dig in!]

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## God's Right to Judge

Justice is a common desire. When someone has committed a terrible act against another, we want to see justice done. We know there is something wrong about someone getting away with a criminal offense. Consequently, societies have systems in place in order to try to bring about justice for the offended. Since they involve humans and human governments, these systems are imperfect. We don't always get the resolution that we desire, and sometimes we err. Yet we continue trying because it is the right thing to do.

If we, as human beings, desire justice, then how much more shall we think that God desires justice? God was certainly concerned about justice under the Law (cf. Exod 23:2, 6; Deut 10:18; 16:19; 24:17; Isa 1:17, and... so much in the prophets!). His desire is, always, that His people "do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8).

Unlike mere human beings, however, God knows the way of perfect justice. He knows the beginning from the end and knows the hearts of all. He sees what we cannot see, knows what we cannot know, and has the perfect wisdom and understanding to carry out judgment and justice without the finite flaws of imperfect societies. Consequently, when God brings judgment, it will be

right. We may not always be able to understand or see why God judged a nation at a particular time, but those calls are His right to make. Our lack of knowledge and understanding hardly constitutes reason to call God into question over His judgments. God owns life and death (Deut 32:39). He is the Creator, the Potter, the King, and the Judge.

Abraham understood that God had the right to judge the wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah. He pled with God, to be sure, hoping that God might spare the cities if only ten righteous people could be found. "Far be it from you to do such a thing, to put the righteous to death with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?" (Gen 18:25) He was calling upon God's just nature, hoping to spare his own family from what was about to happen. The ten could not be found. Yes, the Judge of all the earth will do what is just. He will make no mistakes in carrying out justice so it should not surprise us when God finally brings down the gavel.

Why would God bring such judgment? When human beings are violated, we rightly want justice. Again, how much more ought God to desire justice, especially when He has been violated? This is the nature of sin, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23). Sin violates the nature and glory of God. Just as crime against other humans violates human rights, God has "divine rights," and these are violated when we sin. In detailing the sins of God's people, Isaiah said that they were being judged "because their speech and their actions are against the Lord, to rebel against His glorious presence" (Isa 3:8, NASB).

Shall we, then, think it right that we would "get away" with crimes against the Almighty Creator? Shall we think to remove His divine right to judge? Should we think that He is out of place for bringing justice and doing so perfectly with complete wisdom, knowledge, and understanding? He could do it with the nations and He can do it with us. One day, there is, indeed, a final day of judgment coming. As Paul told the people of Athens, God "commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead." (Acts 17:30-31; cf. 2 Cor 5:10)

This can be rather frightening, especially when we realize that our crimes against the Divine Glory, when met with justice, means suffering "the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might" (2 Thess 1:9).

Yet here is where the Gospel becomes so powerful. God Himself stepped in, took on human flesh (John 1:14), and suffered as a sacrifice on our behalf so that He would be both "just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (Rom 3:26). By doing this, He does not give up being

just while forgiving the sins of those who turn to Him. His justice stands. His holiness stands. His glory stands. His grace is magnified. To God be the glory!

God's right to judge is established by the fact that is the Creator. Just as human beings expect justice when human rights are violated, so God brings about justice due to His divine rights being violated. He does this with perfect knowledge, wisdom, and power. Will the Judge of all the earth do what is just?

He already has, and He always will.

Doy Moyer

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## The Living God

God the Creator is sometimes viewed, in Scripture, in contrast to the idolatry that was so prevalent. The question is asked in Isaiah 40:25, "To whom then will you compare me, that I should be like him? says the Holy One." Then, in chapter 41, God challenges idolaters to make their case (Isa 41:21-24):

Set forth your case, says the Lord;  
bring your proofs, says the King of Jacob.  
Let them bring them, and tell us  
what is to happen.  
Tell us the former things, what they are,  
that we may consider them,  
that we may know their outcome;  
or declare to us the things to come.  
Tell us what is to come hereafter,  
that we may know that you are gods;  
do good, or do harm,  
that we may be dismayed and terrified.  
Behold, you are nothing,



and your work is less than nothing;  
an abomination is he who chooses you.

The need to see God in contrast to what is unable to see and save is still vital. The God we serve is the “true and living God” (1 Thess 1:9). Christians have turned from the worthless things of the world “to the living God who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them” (Acts 14:15). We have come to the city of the living God (Heb 12:22). The reason godliness is profitable is because “we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all men” (1 Tim 4:10). We are the church of the living God (1 Tim 3:15), children of the living God (Rom 9:26), the temple of the living God (2 Cor 6:16), letters of Christ written with the Spirit of the living God (2 Cor 3:3), who put our trust not in uncertain riches, but in the living God (1 Tim 6:17). We are to see to it that we do not depart from the living God (Heb 3:12), for our consciences have been cleansed from dead works to serve the living God (Heb 9:14), and we know that for those who have turned away it is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Heb 10:31). The Scriptures stress this aspect of who God is. He is not just a god. He is the living God, the only living God.

In contrast to the idolatry of his day, Jeremiah said, “But the LORD is the true God; He is the living God and the everlasting King. At His wrath the earth quakes, and the nations cannot endure His indignation” (Jer 10:10). As it was then, so it is now.

We are tempted to think that the world has something meaningful to offer apart from God. People look for meaning in power, in education, in money, or in other worldly pursuits. None of these can save or fulfill the true human need of being reconciled to God. All the world can offer apart from God are worthless objects, no more alive than the idols served by pagans. But the true, living God offers us what is far greater than the world can begin to give. This is why our treasures need to be laid up in heaven rather than in what can rot, rust, and be destroyed (Matt 6:19-21). Peter also reminds us:

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you...” (1 Pet 1:3-4).

Did you notice the phrase, “a living hope”? Hope is one of the great blessings of the gospel, and it is grounded in the character of God. This hope is a “steadfast anchor of the soul” (Heb 6:19), and we have strong encouragement to “hold fast to the hope set before us” (v. 18).

The reason God can give us a living hope is that He is the living God. Jesus is the Savior who “always lives to make intercession” for His people (Heb 7:25). As the living God, God is not the God of the dead, but of the living (Matt 22:32). He has made us alive together with Christ (Eph 2:5), and if we continue to believe in the Son of the living God, no matter what else happens, we will live even if we die (John 11:25-26). Do we believe it?

So now we say with the psalmist: “My soul thirsts for God, for the living God” (42:2). “My heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God” (84:2).

Doy Moyer

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## Abraham Believed God

Among the names of great men and women of the Bible who displayed such marvelous faith, Abraham is one of the most remarkable. Hebrews 11:8-12 speaks of his faith and how he was pleasing to God in his obedience. James 2:14-26 uses Abraham as an example of one who demonstrated his faith through his actions. In Romans 4, Paul discusses Abraham in the context of one who was credited with righteousness because of his faith. In many New Testament passages, Abraham is upheld as a man of faith and righteousness. He is a great example of one who put his trust in God. His faith represents what our faith today should be. In fact, when our faith follows that of Abraham's, we are called “sons of Abraham” (Gal 3:7).

God promised Abraham that it would be through his seed that “all the nations of the earth will be blessed” (Gen 12:1-3). This promise was fulfilled through Jesus (the blessing refers to forgiveness of sins, Acts 3:25-26). Abraham did not know exactly how the promises of God would be fulfilled, but he “believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.” “Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham” (Gal 3:9). The faith demonstrated by Abraham is the model after which we are called. If we want to share in the blessing promise, then faith is key. Yet this faith was not a mere mental assent. It was an active, living trust that Abraham had in God. He trusted that God would do exactly what He promised even though Abraham could not see it all first hand.

Abraham's trust was demonstrated in a dramatic way when he attempted to offer up his son,

Isaac, as a sacrifice, in obedience to God's instructions (Gen 22). God had a plan in all of us, but it is hard to see the bigger picture unless we trust Him. It is difficult for us to imagine how Abraham would have felt when God told him to offer up his "only son" as a burnt offering (v. 2). Yet, we find no hint of Abraham questioning God or trying to argue with Him. He could have said, "But Lord, this is the son of promise; how can you ask me to do this? Don't you care?" This didn't happen. The text simply says, "So Abraham rose early..." and he did what God told him to do. Abraham trusted that God had a plan in place, so he submitted to the will of God.

Hebrews 11 tells us what Abraham was thinking: "He considered that God is able to raise people even from the dead, from which he also received him back as a type" (v. 19). In other words, Abraham knew that Isaac was the son of promise. He knew that God would fulfill His promises through Isaac because he believed God. Therefore, even if Isaac died on this occasion, God, who is faithful to His word, would raise him up and do what He said He would do through him. How could it be any other way? God made the promise! Of course, Abraham passed this test of his faith and God provided an animal for a sacrifice. The point was not that God wanted a human sacrifice. The point was that Abraham's faith passed a very serious test, and this is seen in what God had asked of him. Abraham's faith was justified, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness (Jas 2:21-23).

Because of Abraham's faith, he was called God's friend. Friendship with God begins with faith. It is a living trust that God fulfills His promises, and this, in turn, provides hope (Heb 6:13-20). This means we now have a basic choice to make. Shall we be friends with God or friends of the world? Notice how James put it: "You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God" (Jas 4:4). God has made Himself available to be our friend, but if we choose the world, then we have chosen to be God's enemies.

Abraham trusted God completely. He took God at His word. This is the idea of faith — taking God at His word. This means that we trust His promises, we abide by His word, and we obey His will. If we will be sons of Abraham and participate in the blessings through his seed, then we must accept what He says without arguing or questioning His authority. God will always do what is right (cf. Gen 18:25).

If we, like Abraham, will trust God, then righteousness will be credited to us as it was to him. Can it be said of us, that we "believe God"? Can it be said that we are friends of God? Will we be marked by the same kind of righteousness and faith?

Doy Moyer

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# Miraculous Lessons

First, consider Mark 4:35-5:41. In these verses, several miracles are recorded for our reflection and understanding. The following take place:

1. Stilling the stormy winds on the sea of Galilee (4:35-41).
2. Casting out the unclean spirits (5:1-20).
3. Healing the daughter of Jairus and the woman who touched Him (5:21-34).

Keep in mind Mark's purposes. Mark began his Gospel by referring to Jesus Christ as the Son of God. This truth has been supported in several ways in Mark, from the Father's testimony (1:9-11) to the various healings and demonstrations of His ability to forgive sin and His Lordship over the Sabbath (e.g., Mark 2). The parables were given to illustrate the nature of the kingdom (rule) of God, and the various miracles help to confirm the same point. What I would like to highlight here are some of the statements Jesus made through the miracles recorded in this section.

1. "Why are you afraid? How is it that you have no faith?" (4:40)
2. "Go home and report to them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He had mercy on you" (5:19).
3. "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace and be healed of your affliction" (5:34).
4. "Do not be afraid, only believe" (5:36).
5. "Why make a commotion and weep? The child has not died, but is asleep" (5:39).

Let us note what is emphasized by Jesus: faith, mercy, peace, and comfort. What can we learn from this?

First, notice the connection between faith (or lack thereof) and fear. Jesus shows that their fear

was blinding the disciples to the fact that they needed to be trusting God, so He rebuked them for it. There is a direct correlation here: the more we trust God, the less we will fear that which we cannot change. The less we trust God, the more we fear. We lose our bearings. When we worry and fret about the problems of this life, what are we demonstrating about our faith in God? We might also note that this first statement was a rebuke to His own disciples, and that ought to put matters in perspective more. Sometimes it is the believers who need to be rebuked for their lack of faith and trust. Sometimes I need it.

In Mark 5:36, Jesus again draws a direct connection between faith and fear. This is not so much a rebuke, however. Jairus had lost his daughter to death, or so he thought. The inward fear and sorrow is understandable. Yet, what would change that fear is faith, so Jesus told him to believe. One can indeed move from fear to faith when learning to trust that God is in control of both life and death.

Second, see how mercy is tied to the actions of the Lord in these miracles. Jesus cast multiple unclean spirits out of one man, which shows His control over the world of those spirits. Notice, too, how the demons even recognized who Jesus is: the "Son of the Most High God." Some of those who should have known did not even confess this. Jesus cast out the unclean spirits, and He can cast out all uncleanness. We cannot help but see the importance of the implications of this for us, for we are beset by the uncleanness of sin. When we recognize what Jesus has done for us in forgiving our sins and giving us new life, we are overwhelmed by His mercy for us. When we emphasize mercy, we emphasize the work of God.

Third, peace is the result of trusting the Lord (5:34). Peace is the one of the overarching ideas through these miracles. The waters were calmed, the unclean spirits were silenced, the man was at peace finally, the woman could go in peace, and Jairus could also have peace when his daughter was saved. So instead of the fear that tended to characterize them, they could now have peace because they trusted in Him. When we know we are healed of the affliction of sin, we, too, will have peace. Paul says that the peace we can have will surpass all understanding, but it will "guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Phil 4:7).

Fourth, Jesus shows His power over death, thus providing the greatest comfort of all. He came to deliver us from the fear of death (Heb 2:14). Death is not truly death, but "sleep." From our perspective, we go to sleep, but wake up in a new life and situation. Jesus shows, though, that His power is not only over nature, but over life itself. We fear the unknown, but if we trust the one in whose hand is life, then we can put aside that fear and find the peace that passes understanding. When we pass from this life to the next, the Lord Himself will be there, saying, "Get up!"

“Now may the Lord of peace Himself continually grant you peace in every circumstance. The Lord be with you all!” (2 Thess 3:16)

Doy Moyer

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## Idolatry and Sin

One of the most “called-out” sins in Scripture is idolatry. It was one of the primary reasons why God’s people were sent into captivity. Isaiah said,

“Their land is filled with idols;  
they bow down to the work of their hands,  
to what their own fingers have made.” (Isa 2:8)

Jeremiah, likewise, was clear:

“Every man is stupid and without knowledge;  
every goldsmith is put to shame by his idols,  
for his images are false,  
and there is no breath in them.” (Jer 10:14)

Habakkuk pulled no punches:

“What profit is an idol  
when its maker has shaped it,  
a metal image, a teacher of lies?  
For its maker trusts in his own creation  
when he makes speechless idols!” (Hab 2:18)

Over and over, the prophets chastise various forms of idolatry. The people should have known

better, for they were warned from the beginning not to make graven images to worship, not even of Yahweh Himself (Exod 20:1-6). Nothing else is permitted to come before God. Nothing.

If idolatry is worshipping something other than God or putting something else before Him, then all are guilty of it and it is still just as much a problem as it has ever been. One may well make the case that all sin is idolatry, for in every sin people are putting self over God. It is the clay trying to take authority over the potter, the image trying to control the one in whose image they are made. It is exchanging the "glory of the immortal God" for the lesser images, even of self (Rom 1:23). Even covetousness is specifically referenced as idolatry (Col 3:5).

Sin, therefore, is not simply doing something wrong, but at the deeper level it is seeking to change places with God, to dethrone the Almighty in order to create its own rules and seek its own undeserved glory. Sin forms idols of the clay and acts as if the Potter is meaningless or can be ignored. The mess humanity makes with the image in which all are made is the reason for the corruption and despair of the world. It is also the reason that Jesus descended to this world and died. This fact needs to sink in deeply.

Some think that Jesus could have died just about any kind of death, and that would have been sufficient for God's purposes. Yet if that is true, then the ugliness, reproach, and humiliation of the cross would, at best, be gratuitous and excessive. There would have been no point to it. Why go through such a brutal death if any death would do? Why would the death of the cross come at just the right time in history?

Remember that crucifixion was horrific. It was the most extreme punishment, which is why Cicero thought it to be so inhumane and unworthy of Roman conversation. Herein one's human image is essentially humiliated and destroyed. For Jesus, in Isaiah 52:14, "his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the children of mankind." Why must it have been this way? Why did His image have to be so marred? Here's one way to think about it:

Crucifixion would indeed demonstrate the horrific nature of what sin does. The physical destruction of Christ's body symbolized what sin does to the image of God in mankind. No animal sacrifice could have accomplished such (Heb 10:1-10), for no animal was made in God's image. The death of Christ is God manifested in the flesh, the one who is the exact representation of God (Heb 1:3), coming in that image as a man and having his visage decimated. In doing so, he paved the path of forgiveness so that the image can be remade, reborn, and repurposed. This is why the resurrection was also necessary. Death would not, could not, have the last word. Note the progression:

1. God made man (male and female) in his image.
2. Man sinned, thus marring that image through self-idolatry. Everything was corrupted.
3. Christ, who is God, came as a man and suffered the extreme destruction of his own image. This demonstrated the horrors of sin. He was then raised again to defeat the death that was so destructive to his image, and by extension, to all mankind. Defeating such death and destruction paved the path not only for forgiveness of the sins that caused the destruction, but also for the renewal of that image in him (2 Cor 3:18; Rom 8:29; Col 3:10). The culmination of all of this will find its completion in the final resurrection, wherein all will be restored.

Trying to make an image of God, whether materially or in the mind (idolatry), is an affront to God who has already made human beings in His image. God has taken this insult head on in Jesus and turned it into an opportunity for blessing. Now God offers forgiveness, purpose, hope, renewal, and eternal life. Idolatry is finally defeated.

Doy Moyer

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## To Be With Christ

The apostle Paul gave us a glimpse into a worldview that transcends this world. It is a view that is built solidly upon the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Paul's desire was to glorify and honor Christ in all that he did, whether through life or death:

"I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. But if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose. But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better; yet to remain



on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake.” (Phil 1:19-24 — really, read the chapter... and the book...)

What a statement! Paul contrasts departing to be with Christ with remaining in the flesh. There is much we do not understand about how the body and mind function together. Terms like “spirit” and “soul” are used in a variety of ways (though not here), and we who are now in the flesh will have only a limited view about how it all works. Yet here is Paul, in faith and with confidence, saying that if he departs the flesh he will be with Christ. In 2 Corinthians 5, he said it this way:

“Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord—for we walk by faith, not by sight—we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord” (vv. 6-8).

The tricky part is how all of this works with the resurrection. We know that there will be a resurrection day (John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15), and this is not just a way of speaking to our physical death now. There will be “a day” in which God judges the world (Acts 17:30-31). In the same epistle of Philippians, Paul says resurrection is his ultimate goal:

“...that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.” (3:10-11)

On the one hand, Paul was ready to depart the flesh to be with Christ. On the other, he was longing for the resurrection. Are these desires at odds with each other? Hardly.

Unless the Lord returns first (and thus the resurrection), we will all face our “departure” (cf. 2 Tim 4:6). If that departure occurs before the resurrection, Paul’s writings indicate that Christians will depart to be with Christ as they await the resurrection. I accept the words of Paul: to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. Do I understand it all? Nope. But I accept it, and I believe Paul knew what he was talking about.

Also, recall what Paul wrote to the Thessalonians. When the Lord returns, He will “bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus,” and these will rise first (1 Thess 4:13-18). This makes sense if saints who have passed from this life have, in the meantime, gone to be with Christ. They will be with Him in His return for the resurrection.

This should not really surprise us. Jesus told the penitent thief, “Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43). While the body of Jesus lay in the tomb, and before His own resurrection, Jesus was in paradise. So was the former thief. It was not a period of inactivity and lifelessness. Paradise is access to the tree of life, which is in the very presence of God (cf. Rev 2:7; 22:1-5).

What I see in all of this is that there is a continuity of the person from this life in the flesh, to life departed from the flesh, and to the final resurrection in which the flesh is changed in the twinkling of an eye from what is corruptible to that which is incorruptible (1 Cor 15:50-57).

One might question, what is the purpose of the resurrection if we are already going to be with Christ after we die? I believe the answer lies in the greater purposes of God. His intention was not to have us be bodiless spirits forever, but to maintain continuity between then and now. If all He wanted were bodiless spirits, He could have started with that and it would all be done. He had something more in mind in making us in His image. While it is not fully explained, and I am not claiming to know fully, there is a sense in which our incorruptible resurrected bodies, coupled with the new heavens and new earth in which righteousness dwells (2 Pet 3:13; Rev 21:1-4), will be the complete and final culmination of what God initiated in Christ from the foundation of the world. The final resurrection state will be God’s monument, as it were, to his setting all things free, including creation, “from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God” (Rom 8:21). All things, “whether on earth or in heaven,” will be fully and finally reconciled to Him (Col 1:20). I do not know exactly what this will look or feel like. I do trust God that we will be like our Lord and that all things will be made right. We will finally be all that God intended. Therefore, while we desire to be with Christ until then, we still eagerly await the final resurrection as He has promised. Heaven, being in God’s presence and dwelling space, and being in the completed state that fills God’s final purposes, will be fully realized and enjoyed. God will be glorified!

In summary, may God help us have Paul’s attitude in this. As we face our departure from the flesh, may we desire to be with Christ. And as we eagerly await the new heavens and new earth in which righteousness dwells (2 Pet 3:13), may we also seek to attain to the resurrection, thus sharing in the complete redemption for which Christ came to die and rise again. The imperishable inheritance is kept in heaven for us (1 Pet 1:3-5).

Doy Moyer

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# Themes of the Law

The Decalogue (Ten Commandments) is probably the the most well-known part of the Law of Moses (Exod 20; Deut 5). The framework for the rest of the Law is found therein. While it is tempting to view the commandments as a list to check-off, those commandments were to be seen as foundational to the Israelites' way of life. The Decalogue is a charter of ethical behavior and respect. Consider the basic commands:

1. You shall have no other gods before Me.
2. You shall not make for yourself an idol (no graven images, not to worship or serve them).
3. You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain.
4. Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.
5. Honor your father and mother.
6. You shall not murder.
7. You shall not commit adultery.
8. You shall not steal.
9. You shall not bear false witness.
10. You shall not covet your neighbor's house or wife.

Applications of these commands are many and varied. For example, Jesus demonstrated how these commands are to be understood in a broader context than just a check-list. He showed that not only is the act of murder wrong, but the attitude that leads to it is also a violation of the principle (Matthew 5:21-22). Not only is the act of adultery sinful, but the lust that leads to the act is also sinful (Matthew 5:27-28; see also James 1:13-15). In other words, understanding the nature of these commandments means understanding the principles that can be applied to various circumstances. Never should we see God's word as a rote check-list with no further implications.

With that in mind, think about some of the interwoven themes that are involved in these commandments:\*

**1. Authority.** The authority of God is stressed in the first four commands. No other god has the authority to command and expect obedience, for Yahweh alone is God. He is the Creator and has the right to be honored by His creation. Further, the authority of parents is stressed in the fifth

command. Children were to honor their parents and obey them. The significance should be apparent in that the home is the first place children are going to learn about the concept of authority. Most importantly, they will learn something about God's authority. The command to honor father and mother comes in the middle of the ten purposefully, as it serves as a hinge that points to both God and others.

**2. Respect.** Respect for God demands close attention to how we view and treat God. Making a graven image of God or taking His name in vain shows a lack of respect for God with His glory and dignity. Idolatry is an attempt to bring God down to humanity's level or lower. Likewise, a lack of respect for human life, marriage, and personal property is what would lead to someone violating the commands that relate other people. Inherent in the commandments are the rights and privileges of individuals to own property and expect others to respect that personal property. Murder, adultery, and stealing represents a complete disrespect for what God considers precious and valuable.

**3. Commitment.** One who is committed to God will also be committed to holiness. The commandment to keep the sabbath holy presents a principle that requires His people to keep all holy things holy. Keep what is holy in its proper place, and by this God is honored. If God has pronounced something holy, then we must be committed to keeping it that way in our lives. Further, the commandment not to bear false witness represents a commitment to truth. The ethic of the child of God will not permit lies and slander. Commitment is also foundational both to authority and respect. Without a fundamental commitment to do what is right as defined by God, then nothing else will work properly.

The commandments were not intended to be read in some wooden fashion that failed to appreciate the underlying principles. Again, Jesus also showed this point when He was asked about the greatest commandment (Matthew 22:36-40). Isn't it interesting that His response does not include one of the Ten Commandments, but rather commandments that are all encompassing. Loving God and loving neighbors stretch across the ten commandments to all of the Law and the prophets. While we need to follow the commandments of God (whether old or new stipulations), we also need to learn to understand the principles implied by the commandments. This will take some discernment, but that process comes through our maturity in Christ (see Heb. 5:14).

All of this reflects upon how we read Scripture. Are we seeing the principles, the connections, and the applications that grow from the passages? Are we just looking for a minimal list of what we have to do, or are we seeking to better understand our God and Savior through His Scriptures so we can better love and appreciate who He is and what He has done for us?

Doy Moyer

\*Andrew E. Hill and John H. Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000.