

THE LAW OF CHRIST:

God's Will
for
New Testament Believers

by

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RSP

Day 7

JESUS CHRIST, THE PROMISED MESSIAH

*“Men of Israel, hear these words:
Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you
by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the
midst of you, as you yourselves also know. . . .
Therefore, let all the house of Israel know assuredly,
that God has made that same Jesus, whom you have crucified,
both Lord and Christ”*

(Acts 2:22, 36).

The promise of the Messiah is the most important promise of the Old Testament. The significance of the Messiah’s work as the Savior of the world is easily understood. Scriptures also indicate that a second significant aspect of the Messiah’s work is as the King and Heir of the world: “God has made that same Jesus, whom you have crucified, both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36).

These two aspects, that Jesus Christ is both “crucified Savior” and “promised King,” are repeatedly emphasized throughout the New Testament. On the first Pentecost after Christ’s resurrection, Peter delivered his great sermon concerning God’s fulfillment of His messianic promises. Peter focuses on

these two main aspects of Jesus Christ's work: His ministry as Savior (Acts 2:21-28) and His ministry as King (Acts 2:29-36). As Savior, Christ's substitutionary death provides for man's reconciliation with God. As King, Christ's Commandments provide the opportunity for believers to earn eternal rewards and enjoy an abundant everlasting life.

The distinction between Christ's ministry as Savior and His ministry as King is important to understand. God's promise of the messianic Savior was for man's reconciliation, so that his fellowship with God could be restored. God's promise of a messianic King was for the restoration of all creation, a promise made to Adam, to Abraham, and to King David. Sometimes it is difficult to see a sharp distinction between the Messiah's roles as savior and as king.

God made four promises which are foundational to all other Old Testament promises concerning the coming Messiah:

- 1) To Adam and Eve, God promised a Savior. God's initial promise was to provide a Savior through the seed of the woman. God promised that the Messiah would bruise the serpent's head and be bruised on His heel (Gen 3:15).
- 2) To Abraham, God promised a Savior. God explicitly promised that from Abraham's Seed would come God's blessing on all the families of the earth (Gen 12:3).
- 3) To Abraham, God promised a King. God promised that kings would come from Abraham (Gen 17:6-7).
- 4) To King David, God promised a King. God promised that his Seed would establish an everlasting kingdom (2 Sam 7:12).

God's Promise of a Savior

The first aspect of these foundational promises is that the Messiah will be the Savior of the world. In the first promise, God's word to Adam and Eve is that "the seed of the woman" will reverse the curse of Adam's sin (Rom 5:14-19) when the serpent "bruises the heel" of the Savior (Gen 3:15). Here, the "bruising" refers to the suffering of the Savior (Isa 53) as He conquers the adversaries of sin, death, and Satan (1 Cor 15:54-57).

Almost two thousand years later, God made a related promise to Abraham to bless all mankind. Paul explains that this promise to Abraham was fulfilled when Christ, the “Seed” of Abraham, died in man’s place and reversed the effects of sin and its curse, not only for the Israelites but also for the Gentiles:

Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, “Cursed is every one that hangs on a tree”: That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith (Gal 3:13-14).

Christ substituted His death for man’s death; His sacrifice legally released man from the condemnation of sin and made man free.

God’s Promise of a King

The second aspect of these four foundational promises is that the Messiah will also be a king: God promised Abraham that from him would come kings (Gen 17:6-7), and God promised King David that his Seed would have an everlasting kingdom (2 Sam 7:12).

Actually, these two promises further develop the initial promise God had made to Adam and Eve that the Seed of the woman would crush the serpent’s head with His heel (Gen 3:15; Rom 16:20). The image of a triumphant king with his foot on his conquered adversary was common in the ancient world.

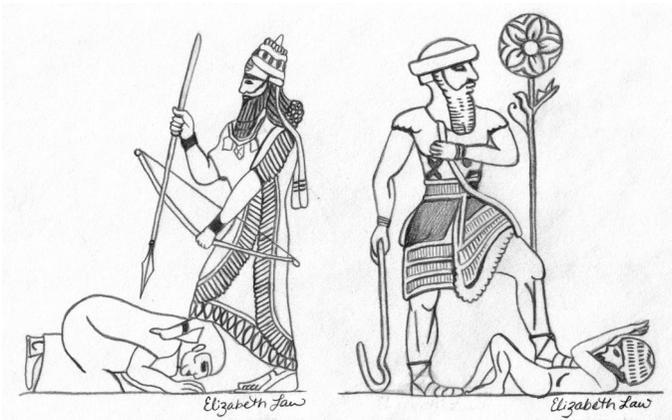


Fig. 7.1 Ancient Kings with Foot on the Conquered Foe

As the promised Messiah, Jesus Christ became the “Last Adam,” the King and Heir of the world. The first Adam, because of his disobedience to God’s command, had forfeited to Satan his authority over the earth. When Christ overcame the forty days of temptation by Satan, He proved that Satan and sin had no authority over Him and proved that He had the moral right to be King. The promise that Messiah would be a King included related promises of a new lawgiver, a new covenant, and a new life.

Jesus Christ, the King of the Jews, became the new Lawgiver when He exercised His authority as the rightful King and handed down the Law of the New Covenant.

Christ, the promised Lawgiver, offered the New Covenant to the Jewish nation. Some in Israel believed Christ and willingly followed His New Covenant Law as His disciples, but many Jews were unwilling to receive Jesus as the Christ or His New Covenant. And so, Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh and King of the world, made His offer available to all who will receive Him:

He came unto his own [people, Israel], but his own did not receive him. But as many as received him, to them gave he the authority to become the children of God, specifically, to those who believed on his name (Jn 1:11-12; cf. 3:16).

Fortunately for those of us who are not descendants of Israel, many of the benefits and blessings of Christ’s New Covenant offer are now available to everyone, from any nation, who receives Him and is willing to be His disciple (Mt 28:19-20).

Christ offers a new life to those who follow Him. The one who accepts Christ receives two major benefits from the New Covenant. First, his old life and legal debt, owed because of the judgment of sin, have been terminated by Christ’s substitutionary death (Rom 10:4). Second, he has been given a new life and now lives under the New Covenant and is obligated to Christ’s Law.

A New Lawgiver

As King, Christ had the right to hand down new law. By giving Israel the New Covenant Law, He fulfilled God’s promise to send a new Lawgiver Who would be like Moses.

Moses has long been recognized as one of the greatest lawgivers of history. Though he never sat on a throne, Moses was the most powerful man of ancient Israel. His stature is prominent because he was the lawgiver whom God met face to face. God wrote the Ten Commandments on tables of stone and gave them to Moses. These Commandments, along with the rest of Israel's law-code, are commonly referred to as the "Law of Moses." Even the United States government, in the Chamber of the House of Representatives, has honored Moses as the greatest of all ancient lawgivers. They have recognized His greatness as a lawgiver by placing his portrait as the focal point of all the other portraits of the great lawgivers of history.

But truly, the greatest lawgiver ever was to come after Moses. Both God and Moses prophesy concerning the future day when the "Prophet like Moses" will come:

[Moses said,] "The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear"

.....

And the LORD said to me: "What they have spoken is good. I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. And it shall be that whoever will not hear My words, which he speaks in My name, I will require it of him" (Dt 18:15-19 NKJV).

"That prophet" will be "like Moses" because he will also be a lawgiver and speak God's commandments to His people, Israel.

The Israelites understood that "the prophet like Moses" would be the promised Messiah, the "Just One," who would act as King and dispense God's justice:

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, your King comes unto you: he is a just one, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon a mule, that is, upon a colt the foal of a donkey (Zec 9:9; cf. Mt 21:1-11).

The premise of the Gospel of Matthew is that Jesus is the promised Messiah, both King of the Jews (Mt 1:1-17) and Savior

of the world (Mt 1:18-21). Therefore, Matthew presents Jesus Christ as the new Lawgiver, exercising His rights as the King of the Jews. Matthew records the Law of Christ (Mt 5-7), presenting the New Covenant in a recognizable literary form with elements similar to the Old Covenant recorded in Deuteronomy.

The book of Hebrews directly compares Jesus Christ and His New Covenant Law with Moses and the Old Covenant Law. The writer of Hebrews presents Jesus Christ as the Lawgiver Who “established law” (Heb 7:11, 8:6). Christ’s Law is “better than” Moses’ Law: 1) because it does what the Old Covenant Law could not: “draw [us] near to God” (Heb 7:11-19); 2) because His “better Law was established on better promises” (Heb 8:6).

And so, on a Galilean mountainside, Jesus Christ, the Lawgiver “like Moses” and “better” than Moses, delivers God’s new instructions for His New Covenant people. When Christ was finished “the people were astonished at his doctrine: For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes” (Mt 7:28-29). Later Jesus explains why He has such authority:

My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me. If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself (Jn 7:16-17).

The doctrine which Jesus spoke is God’s new Torah, instructions which Christ’s disciples are required to obey and teach (Mt 5:19).

A New Covenant

As King, Christ offers Israel the New Covenant which God had promised them. Even before Israel had entered the Promised Land or accepted the Covenant in Deuteronomy, God knew that they would fail. Since God foreknew their eventual failure, He promised to provide certain remedies for their failure (Dt 30). God made these promises more explicit when Jeremiah prophesied that a New Covenant would provide them with a new heart (Jer 31:33).

Biblical history records both the failure of the Israelites to keep God’s Old Covenant and how its curses did eventually come upon them. Even in the Old Covenant, God prophesies that in a future day the Israelites will repent, will return to Him, and will

obey Him with whole hearts (Dt 30:2). Thus, the Old Covenant includes certain promises to the Israelites who will return to God with their whole hearts and obey His commands: a promise to gather them back to the Promised Land (Dt 30:3-5), a promise to put the Old Covenant curses on their enemies (Dt 30:7), a promise to “circumcise” their hearts (Dt 30:6), and a promise to make all their works successful (Dt 30:9-10). Although the Old Covenant was unable to give the Israelites a circumcised heart, it did contain God’s promise that one day they could have such hearts.

The most significant New Covenant promise is of a new heart with a new nature which is able to receive God’s law:

“Behold, the days come,” says the LORD, “that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was a husband unto them,” says the LORD.

“But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, says the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, “Know the LORD”: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, says the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more” (Jer 31:31-34).

In this New Covenant prophecy, God makes specific promises:

- 1) to place His law in their hearts and write it in their minds
- 2) to be their God and be known by all of them
- 3) to remember their sin no more (cf. Heb 10:15-18).

A unique promise of the New Covenant is the new heart which will have a new nature which can receive the Law of God. The other promises, knowing God and being forgiven of one’s sins, are not totally new. Many Old Testament saints, such as Enoch, knew God intimately; all of them, just like David, had their sins forgiven.

Ezekiel gives further details about the new heart, explaining how the stony heart will be replaced by a living heart:

A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and you shall keep my judgments, and do them (Eze 36:26-27).

Ezekiel's prophecy clarifies the New Covenant promise of a new heart with a new nature for believers and describes its purpose: to prepare believers to walk in obedience to God's commands. God will circumcise ("cut away") the old heart which is "dead like a stone" and will replace it with a "fleshy" living heart. This new living heart is the regenerated heart and its new nature comes from its spiritual rebirth (Jn 3:5-7). Once regenerated, the new heart is enabled to walk in God's way and obey His commands.

A New Life

As King, Christ offers a new life to those who will serve Him under the New Covenant. When Jesus interviews Nicodemus, He scolds him for being a teacher in Israel and not knowing what God has promised concerning spiritual "new birth" (Jn 3:10). God's promises in the New Covenant are critical to the believer's understanding of his new birth and new life in Christ. We need to know what God has promised in order (1) to tell others of the salvation God offers to all men through faith in Christ, and (2) to live his life in obedience to God's instructions.

The concept of a "new birth" was a common motif in many ancient cultures. The Egyptians and other ancients believed that, when their rulers became king, they were reborn as a "son" of their gods. Similarly, in some of these cultures, when someone came into the service of the Great King, that person was also reborn, leaving his old life behind and starting a brand-new life.

This ancient idea of new birth and new life helps to explain what happens to Joseph after he interprets Pharaoh's dream (Gen 41). When Joseph comes into the service of Pharaoh, his life is renewed and his old life fades away. The king gives him a new

name: Zaphnathpaaneah (Gen 41:45). The king also gives Joseph a wife, authority in the kingdom, a royal ring, royal clothes, and a royal necklace (Gen 41:42ff.). All of these gifts signify Joseph's rebirth and new life in the royal household.

Similarly, when Daniel and his three companions come into the service of King Nebuchadnezzar, they also are "reborn" into Nebuchadnezzar's royal household. For this new life, each is given a new name, housing, daily provision of royal food and drink, and a royal education, just like the Chaldeans (Dan 1:5ff.).

This ancient idea of rebirth into the royal household also helps to explain what is expected to happen to New Testament believers. Those who believe in Jesus Christ are spiritually reborn into God's household (Jn 1:12). Christ gives these promises to those sons of God who faithfully serve Him and overcome the world:

- 1) eternal life from the tree of life (Rev 2:7)
- 2) protection from the second death (Rev 2:11)
- 3) provision of heavenly food and a new name (Rev 2:17)
- 4) authority to rule over other nations (Rev 2:26)
- 5) clothing of white raiment (Rev 3:5)
- 6) a dwelling place in God's temple (Rev 3:12)
- 7) a place to sit with Jesus Christ on His throne (Rev 3:21)
- 8) an inheritance of all things as God's son (Rev 21:7).

Believers under the New Covenant have been given a new heart and a new life. If we know and obey Christ's new commands, we will be able to "overcome the world" and benefit from all of the New Covenant's promises (1 Jn 5:4-5).

Memory verses:

And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine: For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes (Mt 7:28-29).

Jesus answered them, and said,
 "My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me.
 If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine,
 whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself" (Jn 7:16-17).