

ONE GOD
ONE MESSAGE

Part 4



Understanding
The Problem

by P. D. Bramsen



- ☞ Evil's Entrance
- ☞ The Law of Sin and Death
- ☞ Mercy and Justice
- ☞ The Curse
- ☞ Double Trouble

ONE GOD ONE MESSAGE - PART 4
UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM

by P. D. Bramsen

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P.O. Box 50770
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info@lifechallenge.de

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Paul D. Bramsen pb@rockintl.org
www.one-god-one-message.com

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Understanding The Problem

Dear friend,

Why is it that our greatest politicians, philosophers, religious leaders, economic experts, and other wise men struggle in vain to find lasting solutions to the world's problems?

Could it be because they too are a part of the problem?

A familiar African proverb declares: "Even if a log soaks a long time in water, it will never become a crocodile." Can dead logs change themselves into living creatures? Can sinful humans change themselves into righteous people who are qualified to live forever with a perfectly holy God?

It is time to press on with the critical fourth stage of our journey to discover:

- what sin is and where it came from.
- the unalterable penalty of sin.
- what man can do that the Almighty cannot do.
- why bad things happen to "good" people.
- what God requires for people to live with Him.

We pray that the fourth part of this eight-part adventure will give you a crystal clear picture of sin and its consequences. Take time to answer the questions at the end of each chapter and send them to us. We appreciate hearing from you.

Life Challenge Assistance
P.O. Box 50770
Nairobi – 00200 – Kenya
info@lifechallenge.de







11

EVIL'S ENTRANCE

*“Praise the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all **his** benefits.
Praise the LORD, you **his** angels ...who obey **his** word.
Praise the LORD, all **his** heavenly hosts ...who do **his** will.
Praise the LORD, all **his** works everywhere in **his** dominion...!”*

— King David (Psalm 103:2,20-22 NIV)



Before God made humans, He created an innumerable host of spirit beings called *angels*. God made them for His pleasure and praise. They were “**HIS** heavenly hosts,” designed to know, serve, enjoy, and exalt their Creator-Owner forever. God did not create angels to be like animals, which operate mainly on instinct. As with mankind, God gave angels the moral obligation to choose for themselves whether or not they would obey His word, do His will, and praise His name.

THE SHINING ONE

The most powerful and privileged spirit-being was named *Lucifer*, meaning, *the shining one*.¹²² This brilliant angel was described as “*the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty.*” (Ezekiel 28:12)

While God has not revealed all the details, we know that it was through this magnificent angelic being that evil and imperfection first entered the universe.

God says of Lucifer,

“You were perfect from the day you were created, till iniquity was found in you! ...Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty. ... For you have said in your heart:

‘I will ascend into heaven,

I will exalt my throne above the stars of God;

I will also sit on... the farthest sides of the north;

I will ascend above the heights of the clouds,

I will be like the Most High.’”

(Ezekiel 28:15,17; Isaiah 14:13-14)

Instead of praising and obeying God, five times Lucifer said, *“I will!”* He wanted to *“be like the Most High.”*

Blinded by his own beauty and intelligence, and forgetting WHO had given him everything he had, this angelic being deceived himself into thinking he was wiser than God. He wanted the host of angels to praise *him* instead of the Creator, who alone is worthy of worship and praise.

Lucifer also persuaded a third of the angels of heaven to join forces with him in his revolt.¹²³ Thus, *the shining one* schemed to topple God’s dominion and sit on the throne of heaven.

Sin had entered God’s universe.

WHAT IS SIN?

The Scriptures define sin for us.

- *“Sin is lawlessness.”* (1 John 3:4)
- *“All unrighteousness is sin.”* (1 John 5:17)
- *Sin is to “know...to do good and...not do it.”* (James 4:17)
- *Sin produces “all manner of evil desire.”* (Romans 7:8)
- *Sin is to “fall short of the glory of God.”* (Romans 3:23)

“The glory of God” refers to God’s absolute purity and flawless perfection. To *“fall short”* means to miss “the bull’s eye” on the target of perfect righteousness.

Sin is failure to live in complete conformity to the holy nature and will of God.

In its distilled form, **sin** is whenever an eternal being, whether angelic or human, chooses to exalt self and *turn* “to his own way” (Isaiah 53:6), instead of exalting and following God’s way.

To think or act independently of God is **sin**. That was the path chosen by Lucifer and the angels who sympathized with him. Instead of depending on their Creator, they became proud in heart and turned to their own way.

*“Everyone **proud in heart** is an **abomination** to the LORD; though they join forces, none will go unpunished.”*
(Proverbs 16:5)

Abomination is a strong word, meaning “an object of disgust, a detestable act, a pollution, or idolatry.” God hates self-centered pride. It is sin.

Allowing sin to reside in His presence is more nauseating to God than a rotting pig carcass in your house would be to you. A single sin is as unacceptable to God as a single drop of poison in my tea would be to me. Why are we unable to tolerate a putrid carcass in our house or a drop of poison in our tea?

Such things go against our nature.

Sin goes against God’s nature.

“Are You not from everlasting, O LORD my God, my Holy One? ...You are of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on wickedness.” (Habakkuk 1:12-13)

SATAN, DEMONS, AND HELL

Because Lucifer wanted to steal God’s glory and usurp His authority, God expelled him from his place in the highest heaven, along with the angels who chose to side with him. Lucifer’s name was changed to *Satan*, meaning **adversary**. He is also called *the devil*, meaning **accuser**. The fallen angels became known as evil spirits or *demons*, meaning **knowing ones**.

The devil and his demons know who God is and tremble before Him, nevertheless they are doing all they can to defeat Him.

But they will not win.

The Scripture foretells that, on a pre-appointed day, Satan and his demons will be cast into *“the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.”* (Matthew 25:41) This *“eternal fire”* is a real place where God will forever quarantine all that is not conformed to His holy nature.

One of the words in the Greek New Testament used to describe the place of punishment for those who join forces with Satan is *gehenna*, often translated *“hell.”*¹²⁴ This word literally denotes a *burning garbage dump*.

Not far from where my wife and I raised our children in Senegal was a dumping ground where people would throw their trash and refuse. The dump was often smoldering as those living nearby would attempt to burn the foul-smelling garbage. Anything considered worthless was tossed into the fire.

Hell is God’s “garbage dump” where the departed dead who die in their sins are presently being held. One day, Satan, his demons, and all the inhabitants of hell will be tossed into a final place of judgment called *the lake of fire and brimstone*.¹²⁵

Sin will not pollute God’s universe forever.

SATAN’S OBJECTIVE

As for the devil and his demons, they are not yet in the lake of fire. Rather, they are at work in our world. The Scriptures identify Satan as *“the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that **now** works in the sons of disobedience.”* (Ephesians 2:2)

It is important to understand that though Satan is powerful, he is not *all*-powerful. He is a created being and a fallen one at that. The devil is no match for the LORD. Satan is called *“the god of this age.”* His goal is to prevent people from knowing the one true God and from embracing the purpose for which they were created.

*“If our gospel [God’s good news of salvation] is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, **whose minds the god of this age has blinded**, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel...should shine on them.”* (2 Corinthians 4:3-4)

What is Satan's objective? He seeks to blind minds and keep people from hearing and believing God's message. He is at war with God. It is a war which Satan cannot win, but he is doing all he can to take down with him as many as possible. And he hopes that will include you.

Knowing Adam and Eve had been created for God's glory and pleasure, Satan plotted to spoil the friendship that existed between God and man. Of course, the LORD God, who "*knows the secrets of the heart*" (Psalm 44:21), knew everything the devil planned to do and all that was about to happen.

God had a plan of His own.

ONE RULE

God gave man freedom to choose whether or not to love, praise, and obey his Creator. True love cannot be forced or preprogrammed. Love involves a person's mind, heart, and will. While it is true that God is the Sovereign King over His universe, it is also true that He holds man responsible for making choices of eternal impact.

Even before God created the woman, God gave the man a command. Since Adam would be the head of the human race, God put the test before him.

"The LORD God commanded the man, saying, 'Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.'" (Genesis 2:16-17)

Notice God's simple instructions. Adam could freely partake of all the delicious fruits from the abundant trees in the garden, except one. God told Adam what would happen if he disobeyed. *"In the day that you eat of it **you shall surely die.**"*

To cross over that line would be to *trespass*, another term for *sin*. As in Lucifer's case, rebellion against the Lord of the universe would result in solemn consequences.

Although the first man was perfect, he was not perfectly mature. With this one rule, man was given the chance to grow in

his relationship with his Creator. God wanted Adam to choose to obey Him from a heart of gratitude and love. That should have been easy enough, considering all God had done for him.

Think of it! God had given Adam a body, soul, and spirit. He blessed him with the privilege of reflecting his Creator's holy and loving nature. He placed him in a glorious garden and provided every benefit imaginable to make his life one of pure joy and satisfaction. God also gave him the freedom and capacity to make responsible choices. He gave Adam a lovely wife and committed to them the oversight and care of the created world. Best of all, the LORD Himself would come into the garden to walk and talk with Adam and Eve. God gave them the opportunity to get to know their Creator-Owner. It was a perfect world.

Then one day the serpent showed up.

“HAS GOD INDEED SAID?”

It is in Genesis chapter three that the most tragic and far-reaching event in human history is recorded.

One day as Eve and Adam were near the forbidden tree, Satan appeared to them in the subtle form of a serpent. We know it was Satan because later the Scripture identifies him as *“that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world.”*

(Revelation 12:9)

Just as God had a plan for mankind, so did Satan.

*“Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, ‘**Has God indeed said**, ‘You shall not eat of every tree of the garden’?’”* (Genesis 3:1)

Satan chose to speak with the woman rather than the man. Did you hear the first thing he said to Eve?

*“Has God indeed **said**...?”*

Satan did not want Eve to believe **God's word**. He wanted her to question God's wisdom and authority. He dared Eve to challenge

her Creator, just as he, Lucifer, had done. To this day, the devil fights against the truth, because it discredits and disarms him. As light dispels darkness, so God's Word dispels Satan's deceit.

Satan also attacked God's character by encouraging Eve to doubt **God's goodness**.

*"Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of **every** tree of the garden'?"*

Satan distorted God's word, as if their generous Maker, who had given them life and the right to freely eat from all trees but one, wanted to keep them from ultimate good.

"YOU WILL NOT SURELY DIE!"

"The woman said to the serpent, 'We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.'"

*Then the serpent said to the woman, '**You will not surely die**. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.'*" (Genesis 3:2-5)

Not only did the devil want Eve to doubt God's word and goodness, he also wanted her to doubt **God's righteousness**, as though God would not actually impose the death penalty if she tasted the forbidden fruit.

God had made it clear:

*"In the day you eat of it you will surely **die**!"* (Genesis 2:17)

Satan denied it, saying, "You will **not** surely die!"

Satan's basic method has not changed. He continues to *distort* and *deny* God's message. He wants us to *doubt God's Word, goodness, and righteousness*.

Satan wants us to think that our Creator cannot be trusted, that He is not really who He claims to be.

THE VERY RELIGIOUS DEVIL

The devil is extremely fond of religion. It is for that reason there are more than 10,000 religious systems in the world today. Notice how Satan pretended to speak for God by telling Eve, “**God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened.**”

Satan likes to impersonate the Almighty. He is an expert at taking God’s truth and mixing it with his own lies. He is the great syncretist, imitator, plagiarist, and counterfeiter. Even the most bizarre belief systems in the world contain hints of truth. That is what makes them believable. Again, the Arab proverb states it well: “*Beware: some liars tell the truth!*”

In his first effort to start a counterfeit religion, Satan told Eve, “*You will be like God, knowing good and evil.*” When Satan told Eve, “*You will be like God,*” he spoke a *lie*, because the one who sins is not like God but like Satan who wants to usurp God’s authority. However, when Satan said, “*You will know good and evil,*” he spoke *truth*, but he did not tell them about the bitterness, suffering, and death that would accompany such knowledge.

Notice that Satan, in speaking of the LORD, only used the generic term *God*. Satan is quite happy if you believe in one God, as long as you perceive that God to be distant and unknowable.

“You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble!” (James 2:19)

The devil and his demons are all monotheists who tremble before Almighty God. This will be revealed with shocking clarity several chapters from now. Satan and his fallen angels know that there is only one true God, but oh, how they hate Him!

They do not want *you* to know, love, worship, and obey your Creator-Owner.

THE CHOICE

The moment had arrived for Adam and Eve to choose between the word of their loving Lord and the word of their archenemy.

The formula for victory was obvious: *Trust the wisdom of the Creator*. How simple! All Adam and Eve had to do was

quote God's inspired, inerrant Word, saying, "The LORD God commanded us: '*Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat.*' We will not eat from it! Period."

Had Adam and Eve stood firm on God's unchanging word, the tempter would have fled. But that is not what they did.

"So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate." (Genesis 3:6)

She ate it. He ate it.

Instead of submitting to the word and will of their holy and loving Creator, they submitted to God's enemy. They trespassed into the forbidden realm.

Once Adam tasted the unlawful fruit, the consequences were immediate.

"Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings. And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden." (Genesis 3:7-8)

Notice the change. Instead of rejoicing when the Lord came to visit them, they were now filled with fear and shame.

What caused these intimately relational beings to want to run from their loving Lord? What made them imagine they could hide from their all-seeing Creator? Why did our first parents feel the need to cover their bodies with leaves?

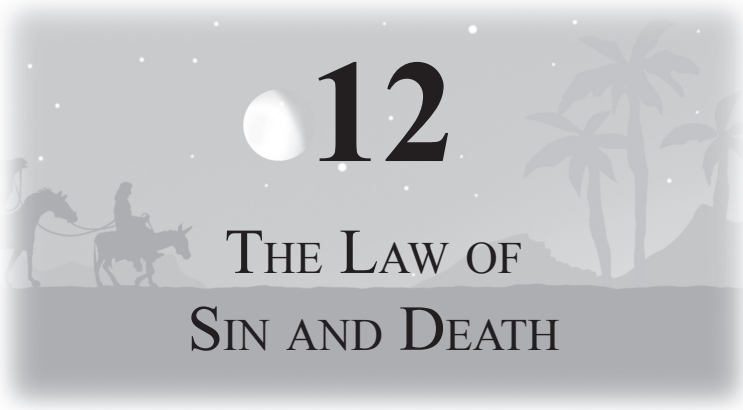
They had sinned.



CHAPTER 11 REVIEW

EVIL'S ENTRANCE

1. Everything God created was perfectly good. So where did Satan and sin come from?
2. God's prophets provide many clear definitions of sin. Cite one of these definitions and then illustrate it with a personal story.
3. What word-picture is used in the Bible to depict hell?
4. What is one of Satan's goals?
5. What did the LORD say would happen to man if he ate of the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil? What did Satan say would happen?
6. In your own words, explain James 2:19. *"You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble!"*



12

THE LAW OF SIN AND DEATH

*“Whoever commits sin is **a slave of sin.**”*

— Jesus of Nazareth (John 8:34)

Adam and Eve had disobeyed their Creator-Owner. Like Satan, they lost their connection with God and became slaves of sin. Like children who have disobeyed their father’s clear command, Adam and Eve no longer wanted to be with the One who loved and cared for them. Feelings of delight and confidence had been displaced by feelings of fear, defilement, and shame.

“They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.” (Genesis 3:8)

Adam and Eve were now contaminated by sin, causing them to want to hide from their Maker and Master. Their newly-acquired conscience gave them a sense of good and evil, instinctively teaching them that only holy people can live in the presence of a holy God. Adam and Eve were no longer pure before God and they knew it. The close bond between God and man was broken.

The relationship was dead.



A BROKEN BRANCH

One day, as I was chatting with some men under a tree near a mosque, the conversation turned to the subject of sin and death.

I broke a branch off the tree and asked them, “Is this branch dead or alive?”

One of the men answered, “It’s dying.”

Another said, “It is dead.”

I chided him, “How can you say it’s dead? Look how green it is!”

“It looks alive, but it’s dead because it is separated from its source of life,” he answered.



“Exactly,” I replied. “You have just given an accurate definition of DEATH according to the Scriptures. DEATH is not annihilation, but *SEPARATION* from the Source of Life. That is why, when a loved one dies, even before the body is buried, we say, ‘He’s gone.’ We say that because we know the person’s spirit has left his body. *Death* means *separation*.”

Next, I reviewed for the men the command God had given to Adam. Then I asked them, “What did God say would happen to Adam if he sinned against God? Did He tell Adam that if he ate of the forbidden fruit, he must start doing religious rituals, praying, fasting, giving alms, and attending a mosque or church?”

“No,” they replied, “God said Adam would die.”

“Right. God made it clear: the punishment for sin would be DEATH. But, tell me, after Adam and Eve disobeyed God and ate the forbidden fruit, did they fall over dead that same day?”

“No!” they answered.

“Well, then, what did God mean when He told Adam, ‘In the day you eat of this fruit, you will surely die!’?”

From there I went on to further describe God’s definition of death: a three-dimensional separation brought on by man’s choice to disobey his Creator.

THE THREE-FOLD SEPARATION CAUSED BY SIN:

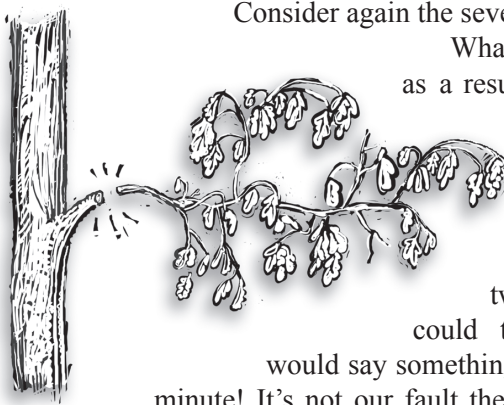
1. Spiritual death: *SEPARATION of a person's spirit and soul from God.*

On the day Adam and Eve first sinned against God *they died spiritually*. Like a branch broken from the tree, Adam and Eve's close relationship with the LORD God had died. And the news gets worse. All of Adam and Eve's descendants are a part of that same spiritually dead "branch."

"In Adam all die...." (1 Corinthians 15:22)

Despite the clear teaching of the Scriptures, many people who concede that the human race descended from Adam also insist that newborn babies are born with a pure, sinless nature.

Consider again the severed branch.



What part of it is "dead" as a result of being separated from the tree? The entire branch is dead, including the little twigs at its tip. If those twigs and leaves could talk, perhaps they

would say something like, "Now wait a minute! It's not our fault the branch got broken from the tree! We are not affected by what someone else did!" But they are affected. Similarly, God's Word declares the entire human race to be "*in Adam*." Each of us are a part of the same separated, fallen "branch," and we suffer the consequences. Like it or not, when Adam sinned, he contaminated himself *and* the entire human family yet to come from him.

The village from which I write gets its water from the Senegal River located several kilometers away. Our village has a well, but no one drinks its water. Why not? The well is contaminated. Its water is saline. Every bucket of water drawn from this well is contaminated with salt. Not a drop is pure, no, not one.

In a similar way, every person born of Adam is contaminated with sin. That is why even little children sin—naturally. Sin is part of their nature. Being good and kind requires a conscious effort and struggle, whereas being selfish and hurtful involves no special effort. The prophet David explains why we sin instinctively:

*“I was brought forth **in iniquity**, and **in sin** my mother conceived me.” (Psalm 51:5) “The wicked are estranged **from the womb**; they go astray **as soon as they are born**, speaking lies.” (Psalm 58:3) “They have **all** turned aside, they have **together** become corrupt; there is **none** who does good, **no, not one**.” (Psalm 14:3)*

The Wolof people of Senegal have several great proverbs which have helped some understand this truth. For example, they say, “*A rat does not beget offspring which do not dig.*” Likewise, sin-tainted Adam could not beget offspring which do not sin.

Another proverb says, “*An epidemic does not confine itself to the one who caused it.*” Tragic but true. Like an inherited birth defect or an infectious disease, Adam’s sin nature has spread to us and our children.

*“**Through one man** sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus **death spread to all men**, because **all sinned**.” (Romans 5:12)*

Notice the first phrase: “*Through **one man** sin entered,*” and the last phrase: “***all sinned**.*” Each of us is a sinner by birth **and** by practice. We cannot blame Adam for sins we commit. Once a person is old enough to know right from wrong, God holds him or her responsible.¹²⁶ The Scripture says:

*“**Your** iniquities have separated **you** from **your** God; and **your** sins have hidden His face from **you**.” (Isaiah 59:2)*

The entire human branch is separated from its Creator. Man is spiritually “***dead in trespasses and sin**.*” (Ephesians 2:1)

2. Physical death: *SEPARATION of a person's spirit and soul from his or her body.*

When Adam and Eve sinned, they not only died *spiritually*, they also began to die *physically*. Even as the leaves on a broken branch do not dry up instantly, so Adam and Eve's bodies did not drop dead the day they sinned. Nonetheless, their flesh had been invaded by death—an enemy from which they could not escape.

For Adam and Eve and their descendants, it was only a matter of time until physical death would catch up with them. “*Death rides a fast camel,*” says an Arab proverb. No one can escape Death. God's Word puts it like this:

“It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment.” (Hebrews 9:27)

3. Eternal death: *SEPARATION of a person's spirit, soul, and body from God forever.*

A living branch is designed to bear leaves, flowers, and fruit. Dead branches are gathered and burned. When Adam sinned against God, he forfeited the privilege for which he was designed: to glorify God and live with Him throughout eternity. Man, created to exist forever, had disobeyed his Creator-Owner. The penalty was *eternal* separation from God.

Unless the LORD in His mercy provided a remedy for Adam and Eve's sin, once their bodies died, they faced the horror of being forever quarantined in the “garbage dump” prepared for the devil and his demons. The Bible calls this “*the second death*” because it occurs after physical death. It is also called “*everlasting punishment*.”¹²⁷ The notion of a temporary purgatory from which people will one day escape is the invention of man.

If “*everlasting punishment*” seems unfair or unreasonable, perhaps it is due to our failure to understand the nature of God, the gravity of sin, and the concept of eternity.

Later, we will reflect on God's purity and sin's defilement.

As for the concept of eternity, we might as well admit it: the very word *eternity* overloads our mental capacities, since our frame of reference is *time*.

Eternity is *timeless*.

If we imagine someone spending billions of years in hell, our thinking is inaccurate. Eternity is not composed of years. It is *an eternal now*. Once people enter that inescapable realm, they will comprehend its solemn logic. Do you remember the account of the rich man who ended up in hell (chapter 3)? He is still there.

God is clear about His entrance requirements for Paradise:

*“There shall **by no means** enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie....”* (Revelation 21:27)

On this point, there will be no compromise. Just as God’s natural laws cause a severed branch to die and wither, so God’s spiritual laws require sin to be punished with *spiritual, physical, and eternal separation*.

SIN AND SHAME

It is time to return to Adam and Eve where we last saw them—attempting to hide from God among the trees of the garden.

Before they sinned, Adam and Eve had been surrounded by God’s glory and perfection. They were totally comfortable in the presence of their Creator. However, the moment they broke God’s law, they viewed themselves differently. Now they were uncomfortable—not just because of their physical nakedness, but also because of their *spiritual* nakedness.

Before they transgressed, Adam and Eve were God-conscious and *“felt no shame.”* (Genesis 2:25 NIV) Now they had become unnaturally self-conscious and felt unclean before their holy God. Adam and Eve had become the opposite of their Creator. They were now **unholy**. They no longer wanted to be in the purity and brightness of God’s presence. Like cockroaches scurrying for cover when a light is flicked on, they now *“loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be **exposed**.”* (John 3:19-20)

Adam and Eve were exposed and embarrassed. They felt out of place in the perfect garden. The sound of God’s voice filled them

with terror. They no longer wanted to be with their holy, loving Creator. Nonetheless, He came into the garden to seek them out.

It is a part of God's nature *"to seek and to save what was lost."* (Luke 19:10 NIV)

GOD SEEKING MAN

"Then the LORD God called to Adam and said to him, 'Where are you?'

So he said, 'I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself.'

And He said, 'Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you that you should not eat?'" (Genesis 3:9-11)

Notice God's first recorded question to man.

"Where are you?"

With this loving, penetrating query, God wanted Adam to recognize what sin had done to him and his wife. He wanted them to admit that they had transgressed. He wanted them to understand that their sin had come between them and their holy Lord.

Their sin was the source of their predicament. Their sin was what caused them to feel ashamed and try to hide behind trees and fig leaves. But Adam and Eve could not hide from God, nor could they escape His righteous, all-knowing judgment.

SIN EARNS DEATH

God was not joking when He informed Adam: *"In the day that you eat of it you shall surely **die**."* (Genesis 2:17) Deep down in our hearts, we know that those who rebel against their Creator deserve to be separated from Him.

Most of us have watched movies where the "bad guys" are killed and the "good guys" are victorious. Do we feel sorry for the "bad guys"? No, we figure they got what they deserved. The solemn reality is that in God's eyes, all of Adam's offspring are "bad guys."

*“They have **all** turned aside, they have **together** become corrupt; there is **none** who does good, **no, not one.**”*

(Psalm 14:3)

According to the Creator’s standard of justice, we *all* deserve the death penalty. God’s Book refers to this as:

*“**The law of sin and death.**”* (Romans 8:2)

The law of sin and death demands that every act of disobedience against God must be punished with separation from God. No exceptions. Sin brings death.

It is because of God’s holy and faithful nature that He upholds this law. By one act of sin our original ancestors separated themselves from God’s kingdom of righteousness and life, and joined Satan’s kingdom of sin and death.

Instantly, they died **spiritually**—like a branch severed from a tree. Their relationship with God was dead.

Also, they began to die **physically**—like a withering branch. It was only a matter of time until their bodies returned to the ground.

Worst of all, unless the LORD provided a remedy for their sin and shame, they faced the horrific prospect of dying **eternally**—forever separated from God in the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his demons.

The Scriptures are clear:

*“The soul who **sins** shall **die.**”* (Ezekiel 18:20)

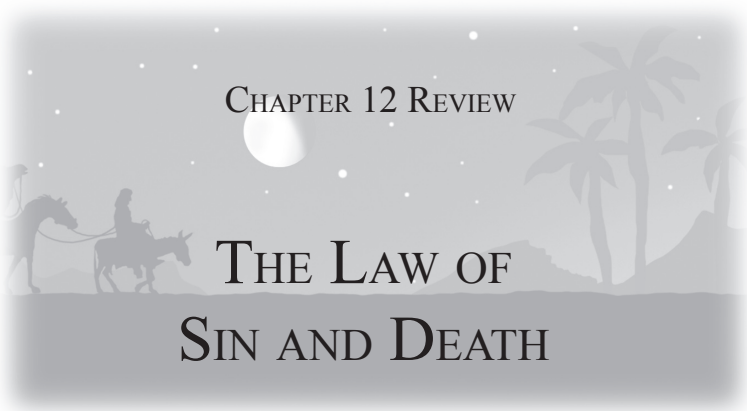
*“For the wages of **sin** is **death**....”* (Romans 6:23)

*“**Sin**, when it is full-grown, brings forth **death.**”* (James 1:15)

It is for good reason God calls this solemn reality *the law of sin and death*. It is *the LAW*.

Sin’s penalty must be carried out.

It will be carried out.



CHAPTER 12 REVIEW

THE LAW OF SIN AND DEATH

1. What word best describes death? How does a broken branch illustrate this?
2. God said to Adam, “*In the day* that you eat of it you shall surely die.” (Genesis 2:17) In what way did Adam die on the day he ate the forbidden fruit?
3. How has Adam’s sin impacted you and your family?
4. Name the three types of death that spread to the human race as a result of Adam’s one sin. Which kind of death is the most dreadful?
5. In what way does sin produce shame?
6. In your own words, explain the law of sin and death, which is stated in Ezekiel 18:20. “*The soul who sins shall die.*”

13

MERCY AND JUSTICE

What can man do
that God cannot do?
God's Book answers this riddle.

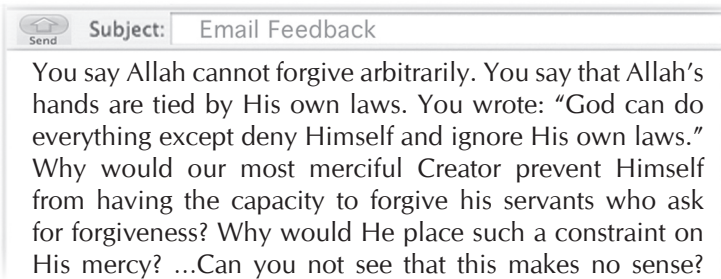
*"God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man,
that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not
do? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?"*

(Numbers 23:19)

Every day men lie, change their minds, and break their promises. God cannot do these things. The Infinitely Perfect One cannot act contrary to His own character.

"He cannot deny Himself." (2 Timothy 2:13)

Some time ago, I received this e-mail:



Even if He were to make such a law, He could break it immediately as He is all powerful! It is illogical to argue that Allah with ultimate power is limited in any way. If He wished, He could hurl us all into the fire of hell, but He is the most merciful one and is always looking to forgive his servants so they can succeed when they are judged. May Allah grant us all his forgiveness and have mercy on us on the day when we are all gathered together and must stand to be judged alone!

In light of what we considered in the last chapter, do you see a problem with this man's reasoning? Is our Creator free to ignore His own established laws and contradict His own holy character?

MERCY WITHOUT JUSTICE

Imagine this courtroom scene:

The judge is seated at the bench. Standing before him is a man found guilty of bank robbery and cold-blooded murder. The court is filled with witnesses. The wife and family of the murder victim are present along with employees from the robbed bank. News crews are on hand to record the moment.

What sentence will this murderer receive? The death penalty? Life in prison without parole?

All in the courtroom are told to rise.

Looking directly at the guilty man, the judge says, "I have observed that you are faithful in giving alms and regular in your prayers. The way you finger those prayer beads is impressive. And I hear that you are a hospitable man, always ready to share your meal with a stranger. It's a close call, but your good works have outweighed your bad works. I grant you mercy. You are pardoned and free to go."

The judge strikes the gavel.

Shocked gasps and angry murmurs fill the room...

Such a courtroom scenario is unheard of. Scales may be used to symbolize weighing the evidence regarding the accused, but once he or she is found guilty of a crime, an appropriate sentence must be passed. Whether or not the offender has done "good works" is irrelevant. We all know that.

If this good-works-outweighing-bad-works system is never used in man's earthly courtrooms, do you think such an unfair process would be used in God's heavenly courtroom?

THE RIGHTEOUS JUDGE

God is not like the judge in our imaginary story. One of His titles is "*the **Righteous Judge***." (2 Timothy 4:8) Four thousand years ago, the prophet Abraham asked, "*Shall not the Judge of all the earth do **right**?*" (Genesis 18:25)

God never sets aside justice to show mercy. To do so would erode the foundation of His righteous throne and mar the reputation of His holy name.

*"**Righteousness and justice** are the foundation of Your throne; **Mercy and truth** go before Your face."*

(Psalm 89:14)

To suggest, as our e-mail correspondent did, that God can use His "ultimate power" to disregard His own laws is to imply that "*the Judge of all the earth*" is less righteous than the sinners He will judge.

How strange that we humans should have a profound, innate sense of justice, yet resist the obvious truth that our Creator has that same sense of justice! Deep in our hearts we all know that there is nothing "great" about a judge who fails to punish evil.

The prophet Jeremiah wrote:

*"**Great** is Your **faithfulness**! 'The LORD is my portion,' says my soul, 'Therefore I hope in Him.'"*

(Lamentations 3:23-24)

Notice the prophet did not say, "Great is Your unpredictability!" or "Great is Your fickleness!" What kind of hope could we have in a whimsical god like that? God is great in *faithfulness*. Many who habitually address God as "the Merciful and Compassionate" forget that He is also the God who is "*faithful and just*." (1 John 1:9)

A one-sided perspective leads to a distorted view of God.

GOD'S BALANCED NATURE

For a bird to be able to fly, which wing is essential—the left or the right?

Obviously, the bird needs both wings to fly! Anyone who thinks a bird can fly with one wing is ignoring the nature of birds and the laws of gravity and aerodynamics.

Likewise, anyone who suggests that God can show mercy apart from upholding justice is ignoring the nature of God and the law of sin and death.

God's *mercy* and *justice* are always in perfect balance. King David wrote:

*"I will sing of **mercy** and **justice**; to You, O LORD, I will sing praises."* (Psalm 101:1)

David, who had committed some heinous sins, knew that he did not deserve God's mercy. By definition, mercy is *undeserved*.

***Justice** is receiving the punishment we deserve.*

***Mercy** is not receiving the punishment we deserve.*

The reason David could sing praises to God was that he knew the LORD had devised a way to show mercy to undeserving sinners without setting aside justice. That is why David sang "*of **mercy and justice**.*"

Forgiveness of sin is not a simple matter for our holy God. He never pardons a sinner apart from the satisfaction that the sinner's transgressions have been sufficiently judged and punished. As human beings, if someone wrongs us, we may say to him or her, "It's OK. Just forget it. It's no big deal." We may graciously choose to forgive a person like that, but the infinitely holy Judge cannot.

God's mercy never negates God's justice. He never says, "I love you, so I won't judge your sin." Nor does He say, "Since you have sinned, I don't love you." God loves sinners, but must quarantine and punish their sin.

If this is what God is like, how can He possibly extend mercy to guilty sinners?

MERCY WITH JUSTICE

Think back to Adam and Eve's situation.

Because **God is loving and merciful**, He did not want Adam and Eve to be separated from Him. He wanted them to live with Him forever and not end up in the everlasting fire.

"The Lord...is not willing that any should perish."

(2 Peter 3:9)

However, since **God is holy and just**, He could not ignore Adam and Eve's sin. He had to punish it.

"You are of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on wickedness." (Habakkuk 1:13)

So what would God do? Was there a way to punish sin without punishing the sinner? How could sin's contamination be removed and perfect purity be restored? Is there a satisfying answer to the prophet Job's question, *"How can a man be righteous before God?"* (Job 9:2) Thank God, there is.

The Scripture reveals what the Righteous Judge has done to be both *"just and the justifier"* of condemned sinners like Adam and Eve, and like you and me (Romans 3:26). Do you know what He has done to offer you mercy while upholding justice?

The answer is up ahead. Journey on.

NOT MY FAULT

For now, let's listen to the conversation that took place between our defiled ancestors and their Creator who had become their Judge.

"Then the LORD God called to Adam and said to him, 'Where are you?'"

So he said, 'I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself.'

And He said, 'Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you that you should not eat?'"

Then the man said, 'The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate.'

And the LORD God said to the woman, 'What is this you have done?'

The woman said, 'The serpent deceived me, and I ate.'"
(Genesis 3:9-13)

Why did the LORD question Adam and Eve?

He questioned them for the same reason a parent questions a disobedient child, even when the parent knows what the child has done. God wanted Adam and Eve to recognize their sin and guilt. However, instead of admitting their sin, each tried to blame another.

Adam accused God and Eve: *It's not my fault! The woman You gave me—it's her fault!*

Eve held the snake liable: *The serpent tricked me!*

Because they were humans and not programmed robots, God held each of them accountable for the choices they had made. They had no one to blame but themselves.

*"Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his **own desires** and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and **sin**, when it is full-grown, brings forth **death**."* (James 1:13-15)

Instead of following their Creator's plan, Adam and Eve followed their "own desires" which led them down the path of *sin* and *death*.

Eve was enticed and *deceived* by Satan. As for Adam, to whom the Lord had given the command not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he *deliberately* chose to disobey his Creator.

"Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression." (1 Timothy 2:14)

Deliberate or deceived, both were guilty, but it was only after Adam ate the forbidden fruit that the Scripture declares, “***Then the eyes of both of them were opened.***” (Genesis 3:7)

God held Adam, not Eve, responsible for leading humankind out of the kingdom of righteousness and life, and into the dominion of sin and death. God had privileged Adam to be the head of the entire human race, but with great privilege came great responsibility.

Adam’s sin has contaminated us all, but we cannot blame him for the choices we make.

“Each of us shall give account of himself to God.”
(Romans 14:12)



CHAPTER 13 REVIEW

MERCY AND JUSTICE

1. What can man do that God cannot do?
2. In the imaginary courtroom scene, how did the judge's mercy contradict justice?
3. Why can God not ignore justice in order to show mercy?
4. Why did God question Adam and Eve when He already knew what they had done?
5. Why did God hold Adam responsible for leading the entire human race down the path of sin and death?
6. In your own words, explain Psalm 89:14. *"Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne; Mercy and truth go before Your face."*

14

THE CURSE

The time for cover-ups and excuses was over. Adam had chosen his own path, but he would not choose the consequences of that path. All creation would keep silent as the Righteous Judge pronounced a series of curses and consequences brought on by man's sin.

THE SERPENT

The Lord began by pronouncing the doom of *"the serpent."*

*"So the LORD God said to the serpent: 'Because you have done this, **you are cursed** more than all cattle, and more than every beast of the field; on your belly you shall go, and you shall eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.'"* (Genesis 3:14-15)

Who was this *serpent* to whom God was talking? Was the Creator angry at a reptile?

God's words in Scripture sometimes include a two-level message, especially in parables and prophecies. There is the obvious *surface meaning* and then there is a less-obvious *deeper meaning*. That is the case with this pronouncement.

The curse that came upon the serpent has **two levels**.

LEVEL 1: AN ENDURING ILLUSTRATION

First, by cursing (pronouncing judgment on) the serpent, the LORD was putting before mankind an enduring object lesson. The reptile that Satan had used to tempt man to sin would henceforth slither on the ground. All serpents would have this same trait. Before Adam and Eve sinned, apparently snakes had legs like other reptiles. To this day certain snake species, such as pythons and boa constrictors, have remnants of upper-leg bones.¹²⁸

Sin produces far-reaching ramifications for guilty and guiltless alike. It is because of sin that “*the whole creation groans.*” (Romans 8:22) Even the innocent animal world has been affected.

It is for good reason man’s choice to sin is called ***the Fall***.

LEVEL 2: SATAN’S IMPENDING DOOM

The Bible says, “*No prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation.*” (2 Peter 1:20) Scripture interprets Scripture. What God announced in the second half of His curse on “*the serpent*” forces us to dig deeper into the Scriptures.

“And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.” (Genesis 3:15)

Who is *the serpent* to whom God was speaking? The Scriptures identify him as the proud angel who was “*cut down to the ground.*” (Isaiah 14:12) He is “*that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world.*” (Revelation 12:9)¹²⁹

The serpent was none other than *Satan*.

Using language fit for a serpent, the LORD was pronouncing the doom of the devil and all who follow him. There would be “*enmity*” (irreconcilable hostility) between Satan’s “*seed*” (offspring) and the woman’s “***Seed***” (Offspring). In the end, “*her Seed*” would crush the serpent’s “*head.*”

All this would be fulfilled according to God’s timetable.

THE TWO “SEEDS”

What are these two *seeds* all about? To whom do *the seed of the serpent* and *the Seed of the woman* refer?

The seed of the serpent refers to those who rebel against God even as Satan did. Those who follow Satan’s lies are, in a spiritual sense, *the children of the devil*.

“You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.” (John 8:44 NIV)

Who then is ***the Seed of the woman***?

This is a unique concept. Throughout biblical history, a person’s posterity was attributed to the man rather than the woman. Yet on the day sin entered the world, God spoke of *the posterity of a woman*. Why?

This declaration by God was the first prophecy pointing to the Messiah who would be born of a woman, but not of a man. *Messiah* literally means *The Anointed One*, or *The Chosen One*. Throughout the Bible, whenever a man was selected by God to be a leader of the people, an authorized person, such as a prophet, would anoint him (pour oil on his head) to show that he was chosen by God for a specific task.¹³⁰

However, the Messiah would be different from all others. He would be *The Anointed One*. At just the right moment in history, God’s Chosen One would enter the world to “**destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.**” (Hebrews 2:14-15)

While God did not reveal His full plan on the day sin entered the human race, this embryonic prophecy gave Adam and Eve and their posterity a glimmer of hope. This initial promise contains numerous foundational truths which God’s prophets would later develop in detail.¹³¹

THE CURSE

Following His carefully worded prophecy about *the Seed of a woman* who would crush the head of the serpent, the LORD made known to Adam and Eve some of the practical consequences of their sin. These consequences are known as *the Curse*.

“To the woman He said: ‘I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; in pain you shall bring forth children; your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.’

*Then to Adam He said, ‘Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, ‘You shall not eat of it’: Cursed is the ground for your sake; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, and you shall eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are, and **to dust you shall return.**’” (Genesis 3:16-19)*

Adam and Eve’s choice to rebel against their Creator came with a horrific price tag.

The joys of having a family would now be accompanied by trouble and pain. Instead of naturally producing grains, fruits and vegetables, earth’s cursed soil would naturally produce weeds, thorns and thistles. Rest and enjoyment would be displaced by struggle and toil. Worse, man’s fleeting life would be overshadowed by a tyrant named *Death*.

Man had lost dominion. Sin had brought a curse.

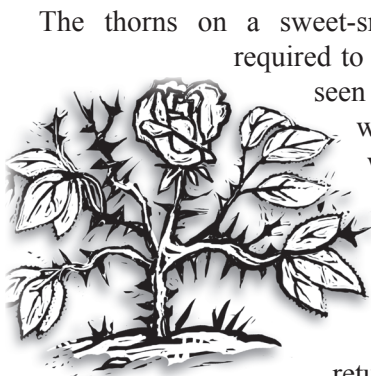
IS DEATH NORMAL?

Those who disregard the Scriptures tend to view hardship, suffering, loss, broken relationships, disease, old age and death as *normal*. Understanding the truth about sin’s curse is one of the keys to understanding why things are the way they are on our groaning planet. Many intelligent people point to humankind’s

pitiful condition as evidence for the non-existence of God. They reason this way because they do not recognize the entrance and effects of sin.¹³²

In Senegal, people sometimes say (mainly at funerals), “God created death before He created life.” Many draw comfort from that philosophy. But such thinking contradicts both logic and the Scriptures which depict death as *“the last enemy that will be destroyed.”* (1 Corinthians 15:26)

Evil, grief, hardship, suffering, and death may seem normal, but such invasive elements are no more natural to this world than cancer cells are natural to a healthy person’s body.



The thorns on a sweet-smelling rosebush, the struggle required to harvest a crop, the stubbornness seen in adorable little children, the way a husband mistreats his lovely wife, the pain that accompanies the wonder of childbirth, the diseases that ravage a body’s immune system, the cruelty of old-age, the harsh reality of death and of our bodies returning to dust—these are not a part of God’s original plan.

God did not design creation to fight against itself.

Before sin entered, man had dominion over creation. All things were in perfect submission to Adam and his wife. Righteousness and peace filled the earth. Then our first ancestor went down the path of sin and death, and with him went the defiled and dying human race.

ALL CREATION AFFECTED

“But that isn’t fair!” says someone, “Why should anyone have to suffer because of another man’s sin?”

Each of us makes our own choices and it is for those choices God holds us responsible, but it is also true that we live in a cursed world. The reality behind the Wolof proverb is self-evident: *“An epidemic does not confine itself to the one who caused it.”*

That's the nature of sin. Life is no longer fair. As a result of Adam's one sin *"the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time."* (Romans 8:22 NIV)

All are affected by sin's curse.

The good news is that, from the beginning, our Creator had a bold rescue plan. Much like a watchmaker builds into a watch a mechanism by which it can be adjusted to deal with the forces that cause it to get off time, so the Maker of the universe built into His world a "mechanism" by which He would offset the destructive forces of Satan, sin, and death. From the beginning, God had a *purpose* in allowing sin to enter as well as a *plan* to reverse sin's curse and display His grace to all who trust Him.

Grief, pain, and death were not around at the beginning of God's story, nor will they be around at the end. One day sin and its curse will be abolished. *"God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away... And there shall be no more curse."* (Revelation 21:4; 22:3) We'll learn more of this glorious future near the end of our journey.

GOD'S GRACE

Do you remember what Adam and Eve did after they ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil?

They made fig leaf coverings for themselves. It was man's first attempt to cover up his sin and shame. God did not accept Adam and Eve's self-efforts. Instead, God did something for them.

"For Adam and his wife the LORD God made tunics of skin, and clothed them." (Genesis 3:21)

God provided for Adam and Eve clothing made of animal skins. To do this, blood was shed.

Imagine the LORD selecting a couple of sheep or other appropriate animals, sacrificing them, and then making *"tunics of skin"* for Adam and Eve. God was teaching them crucial lessons about the high cost of sin, about His holy nature, and about how shamefully unfit sinners can be made acceptable to Him.

By providing this special clothing for Adam and Eve, their Creator was showing His grace to those who had just revolted against Him. They *did not* deserve God's kindness, but that's what *grace* is: **undeserved** kindness.

Justice is receiving *what we deserve* (= eternal punishment).

Mercy is *not* receiving what we deserve (= no punishment).

Grace is receiving *what we don't deserve* (= eternal life).

GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS

By killing animals for Adam and Eve, God wanted them to understand that He is not only "*the gracious God*," but also "*the righteous God*." (Psalm 86:15 NIV; Psalm 7:9) Sin must be punished with death. Imagine Adam and Eve's thoughts as they saw the blood pulsate from these beautiful, innocent creatures. God had put before them a vivid illustration: the penalty for their sin was *death*.

God Himself performed the first blood sacrifice. Millions more would follow.

Notice also that it was the LORD who "*clothed them*" with the animal skins He had provided. Adam and Eve had tried to cover their sin and shame, but their efforts did not satisfy God. He alone had the remedy for their sin problem. God wanted them to understand this. He wants us to understand this too.

SINNERS SHUT OUT

Chapter 3 of Genesis concludes like this:

"Then the LORD God said, 'Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil. And now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever'—therefore the LORD God sent him out of the garden of Eden to till the ground from which he was taken. So He drove out the man; and He placed cherubim [special angels that surround God's heavenly throne] at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life."
(Genesis 3:22-24)

Just as Lucifer and his angels were expelled from the heavenly Paradise after they exerted their will against God's will, so the man and his wife were expelled from the earthly paradise when they acted against God's will.

Thus, man was banned from God's holy presence and from *the tree of life* (not to be confused with the tree of the knowledge of good and evil). Near the conclusion of our journey through the Scriptures we will get another glimpse of this special tree in the heavenly Paradise. The tree of life symbolizes the gift of eternal life God gives to all who trust in Him and His plan.

By eating from *the tree of the knowledge of good and evil*, Adam and Eve rejected the way of everlasting life and chose the way of everlasting death. The delightful connection between heaven and earth was broken by sin.

Adam and Eve had a serious problem. So do we.



CHAPTER 14 REVIEW

THE CURSE

1. What is the significance of “the serpent” and why did God curse it?
2. Who is the promised “Seed of the woman”? What is unique about this term?
3. Name some ways the curse has affected our world.
4. Are sorrow, suffering, and death a normal part of God’s original design for His creation? Explain.
5. After Adam and Eve sinned, they felt ashamed and made fig leaf coverings for themselves. Did God accept their self-efforts? What did God provide for them to cover their shame?
6. In your own words, explain the meaning of “grace” as demonstrated in Genesis 3:21. *“For Adam and his wife the LORD God made tunics of skin, and clothed them.”*

15

DOUBLE TROUBLE

Escaped Convict Recaptured After 38 Years On the Run, announced a May 2006 news headline.

The report told of a certain Mr. Smith who had escaped from a California prison in 1968 while serving time for robbery.

For 38 years, using his mother's maiden name, he had moved from place to place, finally living in a trailer in a heavily wooded area in mid-America. It was there the authorities found him.

"He looked at the ground a little bit, then he looked up and said, 'Yeah, that's me,'" Creek County Sheriff's Detective said. "He didn't dream people would be looking for him for so long."¹³³

Even as Mr. Smith was unable to evade the persistent arm of the law, so no breaker of God's laws will escape the limitless reach of the Righteous Law-Giver and Judge.

And just who are these lawbreakers?

"Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness." (1 John 3:4 NIV)

Anyone who disobeys God's good and perfect laws is a lawbreaker. That is what Lucifer did. That is what Adam and Eve did. That's what we have done too.

All sin is against God. Many people view their sin as a small thing, but in God's sight, all unrepentant, unpardoned sinners—no matter how "good" or religious—are criminal outlaws.

OPTIMISTIC MIRAGE CHASERS

Some time ago a neighbor told me, “I’m an optimist; I think I’ll make it into paradise.”

Can his optimism and self-efforts save him from eternal punishment when it comes time to be judged?

Once while traveling through California’s Death Valley (one of the hottest deserts on earth), I saw in the distance what appeared to be a shimmering lake, but as I got closer, the “lake” disappeared. Looking ahead I saw another such “lake.” It also vanished.

It was a mirage.

A mirage is caused by light rays being refracted through layers of air of different temperatures and densities. The lakes looked real, but they were not real. Similarly, a sinner may feel optimistic about his or her chance of making it into paradise, but the Scriptures expose the truth. Adam’s descendants are “*without strength*” to save themselves from judgment (Romans 5:6).

Like a man lost in a parched desert who has spilled his only water supply, mankind is helpless to regain the everlasting life lost because of sin.

“We will surely die and become like water spilled on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again....”

(2 Samuel 14:14)

The lost man may see what he sincerely believes to be a life-saving oasis, but the “oasis” turns out to be only more blistering heat waves. The desperate, dehydrated man plods from mirage to mirage until at last, he dies.

So it is with a sinner’s optimism, sincerity, and religions of self-effort.

*“There is a way that **seems right** to a man, but its end is the way of **death**.”* (Proverbs 14:12)

In an effort to deal with their defiled condition, billions of people around the world today follow ways that *seem right* to them. They perform religious rituals, ceremoniously wash their bodies, recite mechanical prayers, refrain from certain foods, give

money, burn candles, finger beads, repeat formulas, and do what they believe to be good deeds. Others focus on submitting to their spiritual leaders, while still others hope to gain access to paradise by dying as martyrs for a cause they deem holy and just.

Is it possible they are chasing a mirage?

AN ACCURATE VIEW OF SELF

“Truth is a hot pepper,” says a Wolof proverb.

Even if it makes us uncomfortable, God tells us the grim truth about ourselves. He invites us to be honest with Him about our sin. Apart from such honesty, we are like a seriously ill neighbor lady my wife and I knew. She refused to recognize her need for a proper doctor, insisting that she would be fine. She died a few weeks later.

While on earth, the Messiah told a group of self-righteous religious leaders:

“Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous [those who think they are good enough], but sinners, to repentance.” (Mark 2:17)

Despite the clarity of Scripture, many churches, mosques and synagogues today only tell people how good they are, or that they just need to try a little harder. They don’t teach people about the pristine righteousness of God and the solemn consequences of sin.

A mosque in Canada has this message posted over its entrance:

*WE ACCEPT EVERYONE
AND TELL NO ONE HE IS A SINNER*

God has posted a different message over the entrance to Paradise:

***“THERE SHALL BY NO MEANS ENTER...
ANYTHING THAT DEFILES”***

(Revelation 21:27)

The Scripture says: “*All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*” (Romans 3:23) God accepts *no one* based on his or her own merits and tells *everyone* they are sinners.

Only those who are cleansed in a way that satisfies God’s perfect standard of justice and purity will enter Paradise.

AN ACCURATE VIEW OF GOD

One day the prophet Isaiah was given a vision of the LORD’s absolute purity and awesome glory. Isaiah wrote:

*“In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. Above it stood seraphim [special angels around God’s throne]; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one cried to another and said: ‘**Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!**’ And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke. So I said: ‘**Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.**’”* (Isaiah 6:1-5)

The burning splendor surrounding God’s throne in heaven is so great that even the perfectly pure angels cover their faces and feet. These angels are so awe-struck by God’s holiness and glory that they cannot sit in His presence. Instead, they fly around His throne, crying out, “*Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!*”

Why do most people fail to see sin for what it is? Perhaps it is because they have never seen God for Who He is. They have never contemplated His blazing purity. Isaiah was a godly prophet, yet his vision of the holy splendor of the Lord made him conscious of his own defilement and filthiness. “*Woe is me! I am a man of unclean lips!*” said he. Compared to the Lord, Isaiah knew that he and the entire nation of Israel were in desperate shape!

Later, Isaiah wrote: “*All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned **everyone** to his **own way**... We are **all** like **an unclean thing**, and **all** our righteousnesses are like **filthy rags**.*” (Isaiah 53:6; 64:6) Isaiah knew that no amount of ritual washings or self-effort could make him pure before the LORD.¹³⁴ In the estimation of our holy Creator, “*we are all like **an unclean thing**.*”

The prophet Job showed an understanding of man’s defiled condition when he asked, “***How can a man be righteous before God?** ...If I wash myself with snow water, and cleanse my hands with soap, yet You will plunge me into the pit, and my own clothes will abhor me.*” (Job 9:2,30-31) And the prophet Jeremiah wrote down these words of God: “*‘Although you wash yourself with soda and use an abundance of soap, the stain of your guilt is still before me,’ declares the Sovereign LORD.*” (Jeremiah 2:22 NIV)

An accurate view of God leads to an accurate view of self. Inadequate thoughts of our Creator leave us with inflated thoughts of ourselves.

A man dressed in filthy, disease-infested rags may imagine himself to be clean and acceptable, but that doesn’t make him so. Likewise, a sinner may imagine himself to be righteous, but that does not make him so.

When compared with God’s glory and righteousness, our best efforts are “*like filthy rags*.” (Isaiah 64:6)

A LESSON FOR ALL

One of God’s purposes in forming the nation of Israel was to teach *all* nations some vital lessons. Though the LORD was constantly faithful to Israel, the Israelites consistently failed the LORD. God wants *us* to learn from them. “*Now these things became **our examples**, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted.*” (1 Corinthians 10:6)

In Exodus, the second book of the Torah, Moses records how the Israelites failed to see sin as God sees it. With a strong arm, God had delivered them from centuries of slavery in Egypt. Yet there was much they still did not understand about the LORD and His character. They imagined they could somehow be obedient enough to escape God’s judgment.

The people of Israel were so self-confident that they told Moses,

“All that the LORD has spoken we will do.” (Exodus 19:8)

They did not see themselves as helpless sinners, nor did they comprehend God’s requirement of flawless righteousness. They had forgotten that it only took one sin to separate Adam and Eve from their Creator. To help the Israelites see their sin and feel their shame, God gave them an examination with ten points.

The Scripture describes how the LORD descended on Mount Sinai in power and glory. *“There was **thunder and lightning**, with a **thick cloud** over the mountain, and a **very loud trumpet blast**. Everyone in the camp **trembled**.”* (Exodus 19:16 NIV) Then the Voice of God boomed out ten rules:

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

1. ***“You shall have no other gods before Me.”*** To worship anyone but the LORD is sin. To fail to love God, every moment of every day, with all our heart, mind and strength, is sin. (Exodus 20)¹³⁵
2. ***“You shall not make for yourself a carved image... you shall not bow down to them nor serve them.”***
This is not limited to bowing down before an image or venerating an object. Anything that takes God’s place is a transgression of this law.
3. ***“You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain.”*** If you claim to be submitted to the one true God, but are not seeking to know Him and obey His Word, then you are taking His holy name in vain.
4. ***“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy... In it you shall do no work.”*** God required the Israelites to cease from work every seventh day to honor Him.



5. ***“Honor your father and your mother.”*** Anything less than perfect obedience is sin. For a child to disrespect or even have a bad attitude toward his or her parents is a violation of this command.
6. ***“You shall not murder.”*** God also says, *“Whoever hates his brother is a murderer.”* (1 John 3:15) Hatred for a fellow human equals murder. God looks at the heart and requires selfless love at all times.
7. ***“You shall not commit adultery.”*** This law not only refers to immoral use of the body, but also to impure desires in the mind and heart. *“Whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”* (Matthew 5:28)
8. ***“You shall not steal.”*** Taking more than is rightfully yours, cheating on taxes or an exam, or not working faithfully for your employer are all forms of stealing.
9. ***“You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.”*** To make a statement about someone or something that is less than perfectly true is sin.
10. ***“You shall not covet...anything that is your neighbor’s.”*** To crave anything that belongs to another is sin. We are to be content with what we have.

GUILTY!

After the LORD had announced these ten rules, the Scripture narrates, *“Now all the people witnessed the thunderings, the lightning flashes, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they trembled and stood afar off.”* (Exodus 20:18)

No longer were they boasting that they could do *“all that the LORD has spoken!”*

They had failed the exam.

How about you? How did you do?

If you scored less than 100% on all ten commands (that means flawless obedience 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, from the time you were born up to this very minute), then you, like the children of Israel, and like me, have failed the exam.

“Whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all.” (James 2:10)

In the first chapter of this book, we noted that the Bible is not only the world’s most sold book; it is also the world’s most shunned book. One reason it is so unpopular is because it exposes our sin and strips away our pride. It tells us: *“You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked,”* and: *“There is not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin.”* (Revelation 3:17 NIV; Ecclesiastes 7:20)

God’s Law does not make us feel good about ourselves. It is not intended to.

WHY THE TEN COMMANDMENTS?

So what is the purpose of the Law? If no one can measure up to God’s standard, why did He bother to make it known?!

One obvious reason God gave these commandments is to provide mankind with a clear moral standard for maintaining order in society. Any civilization lacking a consensus of what is right and what is wrong will be controlled by anarchy or tyranny. God knows mankind needs the rule of law in society. Yet God had some even more critical reasons for giving the Ten Commandments.

The LORD gave His Law so *“that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for **by the law is the knowledge of sin.**”* (Romans 3:19-20)

THREE FUNCTIONS OF THE TEN COMMANDMENTS:

1. God’s Law shuts up self-righteous people. *“That every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become **guilty** before God.”* The Ten Commandments tell us: No matter how good you think you are, you will never satisfy God’s standard of perfect righteousness. You are a guilty law-breaker. Stop boasting!¹³⁶

2. God’s Law exposes our sin. *“For by the law is the **knowledge of sin.**”* The Law is like an X-ray. Radiography can reveal a broken bone, but it cannot repair it. Likewise, *“by the*

deeds of the law no flesh will be justified [declared good enough] *in His sight.*” The Ten Commandments are to a sinner what a mirror is to someone with a dirty face. The mirror can show the filth, but it cannot remove it. God’s Law reveals our sin and defilement, but it cannot remove it.

A few years ago, I explained the purpose of God’s Law to a Roman Catholic middle-school math teacher in Senegal. It was for him a shocking revelation. With frustration in his voice, he commented, “OK, so the Ten Commandments teach us that we are helpless sinners before God who is holy and must judge sin, and that we cannot save ourselves by our good works or by praying and fasting. So how *can* we be made acceptable to God? What *is* the solution?”

3. God’s Law points us to God’s solution. Just as the X-ray technician in a hospital points the man with a broken leg to a qualified physician who can set the broken bone, so the Law and the Prophets point us to the only “Physician” who can “*redeem us from the curse of the law.*” (Galatians 3:13) We shall hear more about Him shortly.¹³⁷

HELP!

If you were about to drown and there was someone nearby who could save you from drowning, would you be too proud to cry for help?

Recognizing your powerlessness to save yourself from sin’s deadly penalty is not a defeat; it is the first step to victory. Man needs help—help that only God can provide.

Perhaps you’ve heard the saying: “God helps those who help themselves.” While that adage applies to some areas of life, when it comes to our sinful and spiritually-dead condition, the exact opposite is true: God helps those who know that they *cannot* help themselves.

God helps those who admit they need a Savior.

A popular African proverb says, “*Even if a log soaks a long time in water; it will never become a crocodile.*”

Neither can man change his defiled nature and make himself righteous.

CONTAMINATED

Think back to Adam. God had given him one rule:

Do not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

If Adam and Eve had obeyed their Creator-Owner, they could have lived forever, growing in a wonderful relationship with Him. But that is not what happened.

Our ancestors transgressed and their connection with God was broken. As sinners, they now tried to hide from God. They felt ashamed and attempted to cover their nakedness with fig leaves. But God sought them out, gave them a glimpse of His mercy and justice, and then put them out from His presence. Unless He provided a way back, they would be banished forever. They stood contaminated and condemned before their holy Creator and Judge.

Here is an important question: How many sins did Adam and Eve have to commit before God expelled them from the perfect Garden of Eden? One sin is all it took. No amount of previous “good” or subsequent self-effort on their part could undo the consequences of the one sin.

“Good” is God’s *normal* standard. When Adam sinned, he was no longer “good” in God’s estimation. He had become like a glass of pure water into which one puts a drop of cyanide. If you have a glass of poisoned water, will adding more pure water remove the poison? No. Neither can any amount of good works undo our sin-problem. And, even if good works could remove sin, the reality is we have no “pure water,” that is, no truly righteous works, to add to our sinful nature.

In God’s estimation, our best efforts are polluted.

Adam’s soul was contaminated by sin, as was Eve’s. And so is ours. We all come from the same contaminated source. The prophet David gives us God’s verdict:

*“The LORD looks down from heaven upon the children of men... They have **all** turned aside, they have **together** become corrupt; There is **none** who does good, **no, not one.**”* (Psalm 14:2-3)

OUR DOUBLE TROUBLE

A century-old story is told of a man in a British jail who was condemned to die. One day the cell door swung open and in walked the jailer.

“Cheer up!” said the jailer, “the Queen has pardoned you.”

To the jailer’s surprise, the man showed no emotion.

“Man, I tell you, cheer up!” repeated the jailer, holding up a document, “Here is the pardon. The Queen has pardoned you!”

At this, the man lifted his shirt and, pointing to an awful-looking tumor, said, “I have a cancer that will kill me in a few days or weeks. Unless the Queen can remove this also, the pardon is useless to me.”

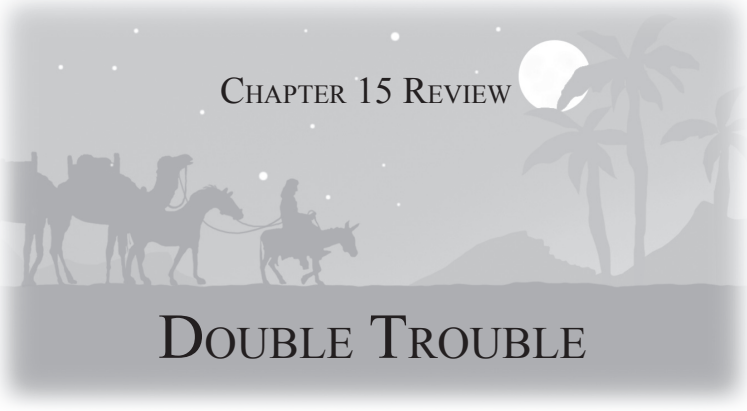
The man knew he needed more than *pardon* for his crimes; he needed *new life*.

Every member of Adam’s race is like this condemned man. As sinners by choice and sinners by birth, we have a double dilemma: We need pardon for our crimes against God *and* we need the righteous, eternal life from God that will qualify us to live in His holy presence.

To sum it up, here is our double trouble:

- **SIN:** We are *guilty sinners*. God alone can *cleanse us* from sin and rescue us from everlasting punishment.
We need *God’s pardon*.
- **SHAME:** We are *spiritually naked*. God alone can *clothe us* with His righteousness and give us His eternal life.
We need *God’s perfection*.

Our sin and shame require a double cure we cannot produce. The good news is that God has provided it for us.



CHAPTER 15 REVIEW

DOUBLE TROUBLE

1. Why is it crucial that we have an accurate view of ourselves?
2. Why is it crucial that we have an accurate view of God?
3. How many of the Ten Commandments have you obeyed perfectly?
4. Using a mirror to illustrate, explain the primary purpose of the Ten Commandments.
5. What is man's "double trouble" in the sight of God?
6. In your own words, explain James 2:10. *"Whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all."*

ENDNOTES

CHAPTER 11: EVIL'S ENTRANCE

¹²² *"How you are fallen from heaven, O **Lucifer**, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, You who weakened the nations!"* (Isaiah 14:12) In this verse, the name "Lucifer," meaning "light bearer," does not appear in the Hebrew text. It is a Latin translation of the Hebrew word *helel*, meaning "shining one." Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 provide an example of the law of double interpretation. On the surface, these passages refer to earthly kings. Isaiah refers to the "*king of Babylon*," and Ezekiel writes of the "*prince of Tyre*." Yet both passages make statements that cannot apply to mere men. When studied in light of other Scriptures (Luke 10:18; Job 1:6-12; Revelation 12:10; 1 Peter 5:8; etc.), it becomes clear that these passages are commentaries on the fall of Satan—the instigator and influencer behind these wicked kings.

¹²³ Revelation 12:4

¹²⁴ Matthew 10:28; 23:33; Mark 9:43-48

¹²⁵ Revelation 20:10-15

CHAPTER 12: THE LAW OF SIN AND DEATH

¹²⁶ A common question: What happens to babies and little children that die? Will they be judged for their inbred sin nature (Psalm 51:5; 58:3)? The Righteous Judge will do right (Genesis 18:25). He does not condemn a person for that which he or she is incapable of understanding. He holds people accountable for what they know and *could have known* had they made an effort to seek God's truth (Romans 2:11-15; Psalm 34:10; Isaiah 55:6). A human becomes accountable before God once he or she is mature enough to make moral choices (Deuteronomy 1:39; Isaiah 7:16; 2 Samuel 12:23; Matthew 18:10; 2 Timothy 3:14-17). Only God knows at what age an individual becomes accountable for his or her sins and choices. Whatever the case, God's message to each of us is: "*Behold, **now** is the accepted time; behold, **now** is the day of salvation.*" (2 Corinthians 6:2)

¹²⁷ Revelation 20:14-15; 2:11; 21:8; Matthew 25:46

CHAPTER 13: MERCY AND JUSTICE

This chapter has no endnotes.

CHAPTER 14: THE CURSE

¹²⁸ “Pythons and boa constrictors... have nub-like legs beneath their skins and tiny, half-inch claws that protrude out above the nubs but nestle close to their bellies near the anus. Actually, even the nubs are not legs but rather a remnant of upper-leg (thigh or femur) bones. The males still use the spurs—but only during courtship and fighting—not to walk. No other snakes have legs.” www.wonderquest.com/snake-legs.htm (includes photos). Some interpret this biological fact as support for their evolutionary hypothesis. The point to be grasped is: the anatomy of snakes is in harmony with what Scripture recorded thousands of years earlier.

¹²⁹ Also: Revelation 20:2; Luke 10:18 and 2 Corinthians 11:3,14: “*As **the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness,** so “**Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light.**”*

¹³⁰ Exodus 29:7; 1 Samuel 10:1; 2 Kings 9:6; Psalm 45:7

¹³¹ Chapter 18 presents three reasons why God encoded His rescue plan. One of the delights of studying the Scriptures chronologically is to discover the unfolding drama of God’s plan to deliver sinners from Satan, sin, and death. God, in His wisdom, revealed His plan progressively, “*line upon line, here a little, there a little.*” (Isaiah 28:10)

¹³² In a comic strip entitled, “You Call That Intelligent?” *Time Magazine* belittles the concept of an Intelligent Designer (God): “Couldn’t aging have been handled with more flair and dignity? For instance: What if old people instead of getting wrinkly and decrepit, just sort of poetically faded away?” (Handy, Bruce and Glynis Sweeny. *Time*, July 4, 2005, p. 90) Also, the book *The Improbability of God*, in a chapter entitled *Neither Intelligent nor Designed*, states: “Is it any more than an overweening human ego that proposes Intelligent Design for such a poorly designed creature?” (Bruce and Frances Martin in *The Improbability of God* by Michael Martin and Ricki Monnier. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2006, p. 220)

CHAPTER 15: DOUBLE TROUBLE

¹³³ Associated Press, May 20, 2006

www.abclocal.go.com/krk/story?section=nation_world&id=4189656

¹³⁴ Ceremonial washings were a part of Old Testament law (see Leviticus). They were intended to teach sinners their spiritual uncleanness before God. Since He has provided full cleansing and righteousness through the Messiah, such rituals are no longer required by God. Read Acts 10 and Colossians 2. To this day, many religions emphasize outward rituals of cleansing. This e-mail came to me from a Muslim in London: “All

non-Muslims including Christians are dirty...Muslims are so clean and near to Allah because they wash....”

¹³⁵ After God announced the Commandments orally (Exodus 20), He called Moses up into the mountain and gave him two stone tablets on which the LORD Himself wrote the Commandments (Exodus 24:12; 31:18). *“The tablets were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God engraved on the tablets.”* (Exodus 32:16)

¹³⁶ See Luke 18:9-14; Ephesians 2:8-9.

¹³⁷ The Messiah is the only One who kept all of God’s laws and could say, *“I delight to do Your will, O My God, Your law is within my heart.”* (Psalm 40:8) The Law points us to Him. *“The Law was our **tutor** to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified **by faith**.”* (Galatians 3:24) God’s solution for man’s sin is powerfully outlined in Romans 3:20-27.

