

Living in Christ

The Paschal Mystery

Christ's Mission of Salvation

Second Edition

Brian Singer-Towns

Saint Mary's Press®

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Rev. Fr. Timothy J. Hall, STL
Censor Librorum
September 30, 2014

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Bishop of Winona
September 30, 2014

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Introduction

When I was a young man, I spent several years searching for something I didn't know I had lost. From birth I grew up in a devout Catholic family, as a teen I was an altar server and lector in my parish, and as a college student I continued to attend Mass every Sunday. But after a while, I felt like I was just going through the motions. If you were to see the brave face I presented to the world, you would have thought I was just fine. But inside I was a confused and lonely person.

What I didn't know then was that deep inside myself, in my soul, I was missing a crucial connection with God. I tried to fill that void in many ways. I tried making new friends, joining new groups, and reading about different religions. But it wasn't until I joined a Bible study group that was reading the Gospel of Mark that I found what my soul was missing: a close and intimate relationship with the Trinity—the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

I share this story because there is a danger in writing a student book about Jesus Christ. The danger is that it can make faith in Jesus seem like just another intellectual exercise, just another subject to master on your way to adulthood. Yet as I discovered those many years ago, yes, faith involves the intellect, but there is more to it. God wants to be in an intimate relationship of love with each of us. He has worked throughout history to reveal that desire and make it possible for us to bridge the “gap” that separates us from his love.

The Paschal Mystery is the name we give to the process of God's plan of salvation, which is principally accomplished through the life, death, Resurrection, and Ascension of Jesus Christ. This book explores that plan, from its beginnings in the Garden of Eden to its glorious conclusion at the Parousia. We will see how God has been at work throughout all of history to restore what was lost—our full and intimate communion with the Holy Trinity. Perhaps most important, we will look at how God calls each of us to be an active participant in his plan.

When I gave myself over in faith to God's loving invitation those many years ago, my whole life was renewed. I discovered a deeper and more profound relationship with God. And because of that, I entered into deeper and more loving relationships with other people. My faith in Christ saves me from sin and will save me from death. It saves me from confusion, loneliness, and despair. Every day it gives my life meaning, joy, and hope even when times are hard and when bad things happen. As a member of the Body of Christ, the Church, I have met and been loved by

many amazing and wonderful people, people who inspire me to deeper commitment in my journey of faith.

That is what I pray for you. I hope that as you study this book, you take seriously what it teaches about Jesus Christ and the Paschal Mystery. There is an important intellectual dimension to belief. We must believe in the right things, the truths revealed by God. But I also hope this will be more than an intellectual exercise for you. I pray that you will let the love of Christ that is expressed in the Paschal Mystery touch your heart and motivate your every action. I pray that you will see your study of the Paschal Mystery as an invitation from God to draw closer to him and to let this Mystery become the spiritual center of your life. Let God fill the hunger in your soul.

Blessings,
Brian Singer-Towns

Unit 1

God's Plan for Salvation: The Big Picture

In this unit, we will learn about the creation of the world and how God's creation reveals his plan for humanity. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth and all that is in them. Everything that God created was good, and it developed according to God's plan, which is for us to live in communion with him and with one another.

But we will see that when the first human beings sinned, they broke that communion. What did God do then? He didn't just leave us to struggle with sin on our own. Instead he promised right then and there to save all of humanity from sin and death.

After the Original Sin and the Fall, God put a plan in motion to send his Son to redeem humanity and restore what we lost through sin—communion with God and eternal life. God's plan of salvation culminated in the Passion, death, Resurrection, and Ascension of Jesus, the events we call the Paschal Mystery.

Throughout the course of salvation history, the pattern of events in which God revealed his presence and saving actions, God made covenants with his people, to show them that he would always be faithful and that he would never forsake them. Even though God's people continued to sin and turn away from him, God did not abandon them. God chose to remain faithful to his covenants, and he sent prophets to continually call God's people back to himself.

The enduring understandings and essential questions represent core concepts and questions that are explored throughout this unit. By studying the content of each chapter, you will gain a more complete understanding of the following:

Enduring Understandings

1. God created the entire world as essentially good.
2. Sacred Scripture uses figurative and symbolic language to convey religious truth.
3. Original Sin entered the world when Adam and Eve chose to reject a God-centered life in favor of a self-centered life.
4. After the Fall, God continued to find a way to communicate his love for humanity and his desire to restore humanity's communion with him.

Essential Questions

1. How do we know that the world is essentially good, despite the presence of sin?
2. How does Scripture use literary forms to convey religious truth?
3. If God created the entire world essentially good, why do people, beginning with Adam and Eve, choose to sin?
4. What characterized God's relationship with humanity after the Fall?

The Goodness of Creation

Introduction

God has a plan, and *you* are a part of it. Modern science has come a long way in explaining creation, growth, and even the end of stars and galaxies. We have some intriguing theories, such as the big bang theory, about how the universe came into existence. Through the gift of our intellect, we can continue to learn about the workings of the universe; through faith we know that the universe was made by God, so we know that what has been created was made out of the uncreated.

We begin this chapter by looking at the Scripture accounts of Creation. Although these accounts might not be scientifically true, we can accept them as religious truth because of what they reveal about God and his plan for creation. Creation, both visible and invisible, is the work of the Trinity.

You will read that God created the universe out of love. God's creation is good, and he loves all of it, every particle, every grain of sand, every blade of grass, and every form of life that swims, crawls, walks, or flies. And in his plan, human beings—the summit of God's creation—have a special place. God has made us “little less than a god, / crowned [us] with glory and honor” (Psalm 8:6). God has a plan and *you* are a part of it.

Article 1: The Primeval History

As we explore God’s plan, it makes sense to start with his intention in creating the world in the first place. Was God bored? Was he lonely? Was he looking for some free labor? No, no, and no! The creation stories of other ancient cultures claimed these as reasons for why the gods created the earth and human beings. But the two Creation accounts in Sacred Scripture, found in the first two chapters of the Book of Genesis, give very different reasons, which makes them special in teaching us about Creation. These chapters contain the familiar accounts of the six days of Creation, the creation of Adam and Eve, and Adam and Eve’s Fall from grace.

Although the two accounts of Creation originated at different times, both reveal important truths about God. God is revealed as the one, true God, who sustains the whole universe. He created the world out of love, because he is Love. He created the world to be good, because he is Goodness. He revealed the serpent’s words as lies, because he is Truth. Even after Adam and Eve’s sin, God’s love for humanity remains steadfast and faithful, because he is Faithfulness.

The two Creation accounts are part of a section of Genesis (chapters 1–11) called “The Primeval History” in some Bibles. *Primeval* sounds like *prehistoric*, and it means kind of the same thing. Describing the accounts of Creation in Genesis as **primeval history** means that these are symbolic accounts about things that happened long before we have any kind of historical records—written or archaeological. These texts probably came from several different ancient Jewish sources. By the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, these stories were told, refined, and edited together over the course of several centuries before they became the final text we have today. Through the primeval history, God reveals some very important truths that we will take a closer look at in this chapter.



primeval history

The time before the invention of writing and recording of historical data.

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Sacred Scripture

The sacred writings of the Old and New Testaments, which contain the truth of God's Revelation and were composed by human authors inspired by the Holy Spirit.

literary forms (genres)

Different kinds of writing determined by their literary technique, content, tone, and purpose.

Literary Forms in the Bible

Before examining the meaning of the Creation accounts in **Sacred Scripture**, it is helpful to understand **literary form** and how it relates to Scripture. Literary form is also called literary genre. A newspaper, for example, has many literary forms: news stories, editorials and opinion pieces, comics, advice columns, sports scores, and many others. They all can teach us something true, but we don't interpret a comic strip the same way we interpret a front-page news story.

We must always remember that God is the primary author of Sacred Scripture. But this does not mean that God took away the creativity of the human authors, who were inspired by the Holy Spirit. So Sacred Scripture also has many literary forms, including figurative language, hymns, parables, short stories, law codes, hero stories, prophetic oracles, Gospels, letters, proverbs, religious histories, and even love poetry. God works through all these different literary forms to reveal his truth. To interpret the Bible's truth correctly, we must take into account what the human authors intended to communicate through the different literary forms as well as what God wanted to reveal through their words.

Religious Truth and Scientific Truth

The primeval history in Sacred Scripture teaches religious truth, not science. We know this because these chapters are written in **figurative language**. Figurative

language uses symbolic images, stories, and names to point to a deeper truth. It can teach us important religious truths, but it is usually not meant to be scientifically or historically accurate. So, for example, the seven days of creation in chapter 1 of Genesis teach us that God created



the world with order and purpose. But we should not interpret this story to mean that God literally created the universe in six 24-hour days. We should also not interpret figurative language as pure fantasy; the first chapters of Genesis affirm real events that took place at the beginning of human history.

Another example of figurative language is the account in Genesis 2:21 in which God made the first woman from one of the ribs of the first man. This verse is not trying to teach that God literally made the first woman from a piece of the first man. (In an effort to “prove” this, some people even say that men have one less rib than women, but, of course, this is not true.) Instead, through this text, God reveals that men and women are intimately connected; we are equal, each gender complementing the other. Man and woman are called to be “one flesh” in the Sacrament of Matrimony.

Religious truth and scientific truth ultimately never contradict each other. God has given us both our faith and our reason, and he would not cause his gifts to us to



figurative language

A literary form that uses symbolic images, stories, and names to point to a deeper truth.

Primary Sources

Protecting Creation

In the homily for his inauguration Mass on the Solemnity of Saint Joseph, Pope Francis took his theme from Saint Joseph’s role as protector of the Holy Family. The Pope urged all human beings to be protectors—of the environment and of those who are poor, and those who are in need. The Pope said:

“In [Joseph], dear friends, . . . we also see the core of the Christian vocation, which is Christ! Let us protect Christ in our lives, so that we can protect others, so that we can protect creation! . . . [This] means respecting each of God’s creatures and respecting the environment in which we live. It means protecting people, showing loving concern for each and every person. . . . In the end, everything has been entrusted to our protection, and all of us are responsible for it. Be protectors of God’s gifts!”

(“Homily of Pope Francis, Mass, Imposition of the Pallium and Bestowal of the Fisherman’s Ring for the Beginning of the Petrine Ministry of the Bishop of Rome,” March 19, 2013)

be in conflict. If religion and science seem to contradict each other, it means that we have misunderstood one or the other. Trying to interpret the figurative language in the Bible as scientific truth is a misunderstanding that causes an unnecessary conflict between our faith and our reason.

How would you explain the difference between religious truth and scientific truth to a friend?



Faith in Action

Studying God's Creation



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Deep in the southern Arizona desert, an astronomer searches the skies as he studies God's beautiful creation. That astronomer is a Jesuit priest, and he is using one of the two telescopes set in this observatory. The larger telescope is run by the University of Arizona. The smaller telescope, run by the Vatican, is known as the VATT (Vatican Advanced Technology Telescope). The only other telescope in the world run by the Vatican is in the Vatican Observatory in Rome.

The goal of the Vatican Observatory is to promote education and research opportunities for scientists interested in astronomical research. Why would the Church be interested in maintaining an observatory? Because we can learn so much about God and the goodness of creation from studying the world around us. In fact, the Church sponsors a special group, the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, consisting of scientists from all over the world. They meet periodically to study important topics in science and to share their findings with one another.

Pope Benedict XVI considered the work of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences to be of great importance. He said: "I am convinced of the urgent need for continued dialogue and cooperation between the worlds of science and of faith in the building of a culture of respect for man, for human dignity and freedom, for the future of our human family and for the long-term sustainable development of our planet" ("Address of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI to Members of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences on the Occasion of the Plenary Assembly," November 8, 2012).

Article 2: Creation Reflects the Glory of God

Throughout all history human beings have repeatedly experienced a particular kind of awe-inspiring moment, perhaps while gazing at the stars, watching the waves on the ocean, or seeing a brilliant sunset. At such moments one might exclaim aloud or silently, “Praise God!” This is a recognition that creation itself gives glory to the Creator. God created the world to reveal his glory. Every creature is meant to share in God’s truth, goodness, and beauty.

Praise the Lord from the heavens;
praise him in the heights.

Praise him, all you his angels;
give praise, all you his hosts.

Praise him, sun and moon;
praise him, all shining stars.

.

Young men and women too,
old and young alike.

Let them all praise the Lord’s name,
for his name alone is exalted,
His majesty above earth and heaven.
(Psalm 148:1–3, 12–13)



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This image of God creating the sun and the moon is from the famous mural painted by Michelangelo in the Sistine Chapel of the Vatican.



Trinity

From the Latin *trinus*, meaning “threefold,” referring to the central mystery of the Christian faith that God exists as a communion of three distinct and interrelated Divine Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The doctrine of the Trinity is a mystery that is inaccessible to human reason alone and is known through Divine Revelation only.

Creation: The Work of the Three-in-One

Sacred Scripture joyfully proclaims that creation is evidence of the power of God. Of course, there are those who say the opposite and claim that creation simply happened, that there is no divine Creator. But faith and reason lead us to the sure knowledge that there is one God who created the universe and continues to sustain it through his love. He exists outside of space and time. Even more accurately, space and time are the creation of God. God and God alone freely created the universe without help from anyone or anything.

Sometimes Christians mistakenly believe that Creation is the work of only God the Father. Instead Sacred Scripture tells us that Creation is the work of all three Divine Persons of the **Trinity**: Father, Son, and **Holy Spirit**. The role of Jesus Christ, the Word of God and the second Person of the Trinity, is explicitly mentioned at the beginning of the Gospel of John:

In the beginning was the Word,
and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God.
He was in the beginning with God.
All things came to be through him,
and without him, nothing came to be.

(1:1-3)



The involvement of the Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Trinity, is a bit more hidden. The opening of Genesis describes “a mighty wind sweeping over the waters” (1:2). *Wind* can also be translated as “the spirit of God,” because in Hebrew the word *ruah* means “breath,” “wind,” and “spirit.” In other words, the sentence could be read as “the spirit of God sweeping over the waters.” You might also take a look at Psalm 33:6 and notice that it too says that the Lord created the heavens by his Word (Jesus Christ) and his breath (Holy Spirit). Sacred Tradition makes it clear that

Bible passages like these teach us that Creation is the work of all three Divine Persons of the Holy Trinity.

Creation Visible and Invisible

In the modern world, people put a lot of emphasis on science. This means we tend to believe solely in things we can observe through our five senses. But Sacred Scripture and **Sacred Tradition** teach that part of God's creation includes things unseen too. We profess our belief in this every time we pray the Nicene Creed, which begins, "I believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible." The invisible creation, which we usually call the spiritual, is every bit as real as the visible reality, which we call the earthly realm.

So what creatures exist in the spiritual, or heavenly, realm? **Angels**. Angels are witnessed to in both Scripture and Tradition. They are spiritual beings who are



Holy Spirit

The Third Person of the Blessed Trinity, the personal love between the Father and the Son, who inspires, guides, and sanctifies the life of believers.

Did You Know?

Angels in Scripture

The Bible mentions three angels by name and two by type. The three named angels are:

- **Raphael** Raphael appeared in the Book of Tobit. He was a companion and protector of Tobiah.
- **Gabriel** Gabriel appeared to Daniel and explained the meaning of Daniel's visions (see Daniel 8:16, 9:21). He appeared to Zechariah and Mary in the Gospel of Luke (see 1:19,26).
- **Michael** In the Book of Daniel, Michael is revealed as the protector of Israel (see 10:21, 12:1). He is mentioned in the Book of Jude (see verse 9) and is the archangel who led the fight against Satan in the Book of Revelation (see 12:7).

The two types of angels are:

- **Cherubim** These angels are close to God, directly serving him. Images of them adorned the Ark of the Covenant (see Exodus, chapter 25) and Solomon's Temple (see 1 Kings, chapter 6). They appeared in the prophet Ezekiel's visions (see chapter 10).
- **Seraphim** These angels are mentioned in Isaiah, chapter 6. They serve God and proclaim his glory.



Sacred Tradition

“Tradition” comes from the Latin *tradere*, meaning “to hand on.” Sacred Tradition refers to the living process of passing on the Gospel message. It began with the oral communication of the Gospel by the Apostles, was written down in Sacred Scripture, and is interpreted by the Magisterium under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Both Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture have their common source in the revelation of Jesus Christ and must be equally honored.

angel

Based on a word meaning “messenger,” a personal and immortal creature with intelligence and free will who constantly glorifies God and serves as a messenger of God to humans to carry out God’s saving plan.

the servants and messengers of God. They are present throughout all of salvation history and appear to human beings at key moments. For example, an angel stopped Abraham from sacrificing Isaac (see Genesis 22:11–12). An angel announced to Joseph and Mary the birth of Jesus (see Matthew 1:20 and Luke 1:26–27). Angels announced the Resurrection of Christ (see Matthew 28:2–7). The angels glorify God without ceasing, and in Heaven we will join our voices with theirs in praising and glorifying God (see Revelation 5:11).

When have you experienced awe that reminded you of God’s presence in creation?

Article 3: Human Beings: The Summit of Creation

As we explore God’s plan for creation, we face a critical question: Do human beings have a special role, a special place in God’s plan? Some people would answer this question by saying we are just the same as all the other animals; we are just a more highly evolved form of life with greater intelligence. So human life has no meaning other than what we give it. These people are wrong, however well-intentioned they might be. God has revealed that humanity indeed has a unique role, a very special place, in his plan.

Once again we turn to the Creation account in Genesis. “God created mankind in his image; / in the image of God he created them; / male and female he created them” (1:27). No other living being is created in God’s image. We are the only creature God created with a body and an immortal **soul**. Our soul, created by God, is our spiritual principle. It is what makes us most like God. The union of our body and soul is so complete that we cannot distinguish or separate one from another until our death. At our death our soul will live on until it is reunited once again with our resurrected body.

“Male and Female He Created Them”

You may have noticed the line “male and female he created them” in the quotation from Genesis. Because this verse follows the literary form of Hebrew poetry, each line is a different way of saying the same thing. The biblical author is telling us that both sexes are made in the image of God. God created men and women to be of equal dignity, yet with distinct characteristics. Both maleness and femaleness reflect God’s infinite perfection.

God created men and women for each other. “The Lord God said: ‘It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suited to him’” (Genesis 2:18). The Genesis account makes it clear that we are not meant to be solitary creatures. God created us to be in communion with each other, a partnership in which we bring together our unique gifts as men and women. The loving relationship between a man and a woman is the first form of communion between persons, reflecting the perfect communion of the Trinity. In the union of a man and a woman in marriage, God even shares with us his creative power to bring new life into the world!



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soul

Our spiritual principle, it is immortal, and it is what makes us most like God. Our soul is created by God at the moment of our conception. It is the seat of human consciousness and freedom.

Humanity’s Role

It follows by reason that if human beings are unique among God’s creatures, then we have a unique role in his plan. Humanity’s special role in God’s plan has two dimensions: (1) to be in communion with God and to respond to his love by loving him in return, and (2) to serve him, particularly as stewards of his creation. Let’s take a closer look at each of these dimensions.

Notice the symmetry in this image of Adam and Eve. What does this communicate about their relationship?

Love for God

Of all God's creatures, we are the only ones who can freely choose to return his love, to choose to share in his own life. God has given us free will and self-knowledge. Because of this we have a dignity that surpasses all other creatures. We are not just something, we are someone!

The greatest testimony to human dignity and our importance in God's plan is the Incarnation. From the beginning humanity has been destined to "reproduce the image of God's Son made man, 'the image of the invisible God' (Colossians 1:15)" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church [CCC]*, 381). When the fullness of human dignity was lost through Original Sin, God put in motion a plan to restore what we had lost. When the time was right, the Son of God assumed our human nature, restoring the fullness of human dignity. Jesus Christ, true God and true man, became the firstborn of God's sons and daughters. Through Baptism we are his brothers and sisters, sons and daughters of God.



Live It!

Be Whom God Created You to Be

Perhaps the hardest challenge in life is to be whom God created you to be. We're not talking about whether you should be an athlete, a doctor, a priest, or a teacher, but about believing that you and every person you meet are made in the image and likeness of God. This means treating yourself and every person the same way you would treat Jesus.

Wouldn't it be a perfect world if we did this? Everyone would be patient, kind, unselfish, and slow to anger (see 1 Corinthians, chapter 13). Guess what? The seed of this perfect world is already here. We call it the Kingdom of God. The Father sent his Son, Jesus, who announced the Kingdom of God and made it present through his life, suffering, death, and Resurrection. The Holy Spirit empowers us to live it. So what do you need to do to truly be the person God created you to be? How will you show that every person is made in the image of God? Take time to answer these questions. Follow up by making your answers a part of how you live.

Our Responsibility for Creation

The Creation account in Genesis summarizes the second dimension of humanity's unique role in God's plan: "God blessed them, and God said to them: 'Be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it. Have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and all the living things that crawl on the earth'" (1:28). This passage teaches us that God has given human beings all the other creatures for our benefit. He has put the earth and everything that lives on it in our care.

God willed into being the great diversity of creatures that exists. Each living thing has its own goodness and its own unique place in creation. Further, there is an order and interdependence among all creatures. Scientists have discovered how complex these relationships are in the plant and animal world. The removal of just one species can threaten a whole ecosystem. And God has given us the responsibility for nurturing his creation. We must respect each creature's goodness and place in the order of creation. We are called to care for the earth until the time Christ returns and brings about "a new heaven and a new earth" (Revelation 21:1).

These people are rescuing animals from an oil spill. How would you rate humanity's care of the earth in recent years?



© SEAN GARDNER / Reuters / Landov

Do human beings have a special place in God's plan? How do you know?



original holiness

The original state of human beings in their relationship with God, sharing in the divine life in full communion with him.

original justice

The original state of Adam and Eve before the Fall, a state of complete harmony with themselves, with each other, and with all of creation.

Article 4: The Garden of Eden: The Perfect Life

How would you describe the perfect life? Can you even imagine what such a life would be like? Would you be on a tropical island, with perfect weather every day, with delicious food nearby just waiting to be picked and eaten? Well, one man and one woman did have a perfect life, at least at first. Adam and Eve started out not only in a perfect place, the Garden of Eden, but also in perfect relationship with God and with each other.

Original Holiness and Original Justice

Adam and Eve appear in Genesis 2:4–3:24. Because this account was written in figurative or symbolic language, the elements must be interpreted symbolically.

As you read about Adam and Eve, it is important to focus on the quality of their relationships. First, notice the relationship between Adam and God. God breathed his life directly into Adam, a very intimate act. God walked in the garden, talking to Adam as a friend. He was concerned for Adam's happiness and worked to make the perfect partner for him. All of this is a symbolic way of saying that God intended the first human beings to

Pray It!

Prayers for Creation Stewardship

In God's plan, he gave the care of all creation to human beings. In the Church's Liturgy, we ask for God's help in caring for the earth. This is the opening prayer for the Mass for the Sanctification of Human Labor. Pray to ask God to guide you in making good choices to care for creation.

O God, who willed to subject
the forces of nature to human labor,
mercifully grant
that, undertaking in a Christian spirit what we are to do,
we may merit to join our brothers and sisters
in practicing sincere charity
and in advancing the fulfillment of your divine work of creation.

(Roman Missal)

share in his life, to be in direct communion with him. We call this state **original holiness**.

In this Scripture account, the human author of Genesis describes God anthropomorphically, meaning God is depicted in a human way. This technique relies on the use of analogy—that is, describing God as being like a human being and with human characteristics. We must, of course, understand that this analogy, like any description of God, is imperfect. “Our human words always fall short of the mystery of God” (CCC, 42). However, by describing him with human characteristics the biblical author emphasizes God’s closeness to Adam and Eve.

Next, notice the relationship between Adam and Eve and their relationship with the rest of creation. Adam and Eve were of one mind and one body, a relationship symbolized by Eve’s being made from a part of Adam. They felt no shame in each other’s presence, even though they were naked. This symbolizes their complete honesty and respect for each other. At the beginning their work of caring for the garden and producing food was not a burden. This symbolizes their harmony with the rest of creation. This state of complete harmony between Adam and Eve and the rest of creation is called **original justice**.

The state of original holiness and original justice is God’s will, his plan for all humanity. God wants us to be happy. That happiness comes from our friendship and full communion with God, with other people, and with creation. Even though this plan was interrupted, God’s will is not blocked. Those with faith in God—the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—will experience a taste of original holiness

The artist who created this painting is trying to convey the Garden of Eden before the Fall. How would you describe what is being portrayed here?



Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Massachusetts, USA / Gift of Maxim Karolik for the M. and M. Karolik Collection of American Paintings, 1815–1865 / Bridgeman Images

and original justice in this life and will know it completely in Heaven.

How does faith in God help you to glimpse original holiness and original justice in this life?

Chapter Review

1. Explain what is meant by *primeval history*. Where do you find an example in the Bible?
2. Give two examples of the use of figurative or symbolic language in the first two chapters of Genesis.
3. What is the relationship between Creation and the Trinity?
4. What are angels and what do they do?
5. Give a theological definition of the word *soul*.
6. Give two reasons why God created humans as male and female.
7. What is original holiness?
8. What is original justice?

The Fall from Grace

Introduction

God has a plan for us, but as you will read in this chapter, our first parents, Adam and Eve, decided not to cooperate with the plan. They disobeyed God's direct command, and this sin resulted in an event called the Fall. The Fall refers to Adam and Eve's fall from their state of original holiness and original justice. The result is that every person (except Jesus and Mary) born since Adam and Eve is born with Original Sin. Original Sin deprives us of our original holiness and original justice and is a wound in our relationship with God. It weakens our ability to resist temptation, making it easier for us to commit sin.

This chapter introduces a key character in the account of the Fall: the serpent, the deceiver. Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition identify the serpent as Satan, a fallen angel who is opposed to God. Satan and the other fallen angels rejected God completely. Now Satan tempts others to do the same. But God's power is infinite, and his saving plan will prevail over the power of Satan and evil.



Original Sin

From the Latin *origo*, meaning “beginning” or “birth.” The term has two meanings: (1) the sin of the first human beings, who disobeyed God’s command by choosing to follow their own will and thus lost their original holiness and became subject to death, (2) the fallen state of human nature that affects every person born into the world, except Jesus and Mary.

Fall, the

Also called the Fall from Grace, the biblical Revelation about the origins of sin and evil in the world, expressed figuratively in the account of Adam and Eve in Genesis.

Article 5: Adam and Eve’s Disobedience

In his Letter to the Romans, Saint Paul said: “What I do, I do not understand. For I do not do what I want, but I do what I hate” (7:15). He was describing an experience that all people since Adam and Eve have had, with the exception of Jesus Christ and his Mother, Mary. You have probably had this experience. We sin even when we know it is wrong. We make choices that hurt others, and even ourselves, for very selfish reasons. People who have serious addictions struggle with this experience every day, but all of us are capable of doing what we know is wrong. Why would God make us like this? Well, he didn’t—not exactly. The attractiveness of sin and the many ways we delude ourselves into thinking sin is okay are, to a large degree, results of the sin of our first parents.

The Fall

We now come to a truly tragic moment in human history. We must take a closer look at the second part of the symbolic account of Adam and Eve: Genesis 3:1–24. You are probably familiar with this passage, but read it again. Earlier in Genesis we learn that God gave Adam and Eve only one command: “You are free to eat from any of the trees of the garden except the tree of knowledge of good and evil. From that tree you shall not eat; when you eat from it you shall die” (2:16–17). Then the serpent came along and told Eve the exact opposite. Eve ate the forbidden fruit and offered it to Adam, who did the same.

Immediately Adam and Eve realized they were naked, which is a symbolic way of saying they felt guilt and shame. These are two feelings God did not intend for humans to know. Adam and Eve were ashamed to be seen by each other (the reason they covered themselves with fig leaves) and ashamed to be seen by God (the reason they hid from him). When God confronted them about their disobedience, they played the blame game. Adam blamed Eve for his sin, and Eve blamed the ser-

pent. In their shame, they could not be honest with God and accept responsibility for their actions.

All of this—the shame at their nakedness, their hiding from God, their blaming others for their choices—is a symbolic way of saying that Adam and Eve lost their original holiness and original justice. They were no longer in loving communion with God, nor were they in harmony with each other. They had to leave the Garden of Eden; they could no longer live in Paradise.

Adam and Eve’s disobedience in the Garden of Eden, known as **Original Sin**, affected all humanity. No other human beings would ever be conceived with their holiness and justice intact. This is why we now find it harder to obey God’s Commandments and easier to do what is sinful. **The Fall** of Adam and Eve is the origin and the consequence of Original Sin.

Why are Adam and Eve trying to conceal themselves in this image? What does this teach us about sin?



© Willie Rodger, reproduced by permission of the artist / Bridgeman Images, "Adam and Eve in Deep Water, Willie Rodger RSA RGI DUUniv, oil, 2000"



Live It!

Think about the Consequences

Most people do not intend to do evil things. We are often tempted when something sinful looks or feels good to us. In the Lord’s Prayer, we ask God to “lead us not into temptation,” to keep us out of tempting situations and to help us not give in to the temptations that do cross our path.

Avoiding temptation completely is impossible. Even Jesus had to face temptation. “The Spirit drove [Jesus] out into the desert, and he remained . . . tempted by Satan” (Mark 1:12–13). With God’s help we can face our temptations and see them for what they are: evil disguised as good. The next time you are tempted, think about what would happen if you decide to give in. What would happen the next day? the next month? How would it affect you? your friends? your family? What are the false promises? the real consequences? Considering the effects of your choices in this way can help you to resist temptation and choose what is good.

What Was the Sin?

You might wonder exactly why Adam and Eve's action was a sin. Yes, they disobeyed God's command, but why would God not want them to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil? Wouldn't having that knowledge be a good thing? To understand this sin, we must consider the culture of the time and the use of figurative language. For the sacred writer of Genesis, the full knowledge of good and evil belongs to God alone, who is the source of everything. So the tree symbolizes what human beings can never be: God himself. Eating the fruit from that tree is a symbolic way to say, "We don't need God; we can be gods ourselves." The tragic irony is that God had already given Adam and Eve the greatest gift possible: They were made in God's image (see 1:27), and they had the grace of full communion with God. Seduced by the serpent's lie, "you will be like gods" (3:5), they lost the grace of original holiness and original justice.

Accepting our own goodness is key if we are to recognize and respect the goodness in one another and in creation. Doing so helps us to live in right relationship with God and with one another.

Their sin was their misuse of human freedom and their lack of trust in God. They did not accept the gift of their humanity and instead tried to replace God with themselves. In some way, these two things—not accepting our own goodness and not trusting in God—are at the root of every sin.

Adam and Eve's sin showed a lack of trust in God. Have you observed similar kinds of sin in your own life?



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Article 6: Original Sin: A Consequence of the Fall

If someone asked you to list five doctrines that are essential for understanding Christianity, what would you say? Would Original Sin make your list? Of course, all the truths of our faith are important. They all fit together and support one another to help us see more clearly God's will and plan for us. The doctrine of the Trinity is the most essential truth, but without Original Sin there would have been no need for the Son of God to become flesh and live among us. We would still be living in Paradise. So we need to understand Original Sin in order to understand other doctrines of our faith. But we should always remember that sin does not defeat God. As Saint Paul said, "Where sin increased, grace overflowed all the more" (Romans 5:20).

Original Sin Affects Our Human Nature

Original Sin is the name for the fact that "Adam and Eve transmitted to their descendants human nature wounded by their own first sin and hence deprived of original holiness and justice" (CCC, 417). Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition do not explain exactly how this happens. We accept it as a mystery that we cannot fully understand. What we know is that Adam and Eve were created in a state of original holiness not for themselves alone but for all human nature. Therefore, when they sinned, their sin affected not just themselves but also their human nature, which was passed on to all their descendants.

Perhaps the following analogy will help you to understand. If for some reason a genetic abnormality develops in a person's DNA—such as nearsightedness—it may get passed on to that person's children. The children didn't do anything to deserve this physical defect, but they still receive it. In a similar way, a defect was created in Adam and Eve's human nature that now gets passed on to all people (with the exception of Jesus and his Mother,



concupiscence

The tendency of all human beings toward sin, as a result of Original Sin.

etiology

A story that explains something's cause or origin.

Mary). We didn't do anything that led us to be in this state. We were born into the state of Original Sin before we ever had a chance to commit a personal sin ourselves.

The Results of Original Sin

Because of Original Sin, human nature is weakened. The loss of original holiness and original justice makes things that should be natural to us more challenging. Relationships with others that should come naturally are marked by tension and misunderstanding. Moral decisions that should be easy and straightforward become more difficult and confused. We are more inclined to sin. This inclination is called **concupiscence**. All of these struggles lead to more pain and suffering in our lives.

Did You Know?

Biblical Etiologies



© Stefano Bianchetti / Corbis

After the Fall, God listed several consequences for Adam and Eve and the serpent. This list is one example of a literary type called an **etiology**. An etiology is a story that explains something's cause or origin. Genesis 3:14–19 gives the answers to a number of questions ancient people had:

- Why are snakes shunned by other animals?
- Why don't snakes have legs?
- Why is childbirth so painful?
- Why is it so hard for men and women to get along?
- Why is earning a living so much work?
- Why do we have to die?

Today we have scientific explanations for many of these questions. But in symbolic language, this etiology explains the spiritual result of the Fall. Life is now hard and often painful, and we die. Fortunately, God has a plan to restore us to full communion. His plan was set into motion even as Adam and Eve experienced the consequences of their disobedience.

But we have suffered an even more serious loss because of Original Sin. Our relationship with God is now clouded and hidden. We no longer naturally walk in the garden with God as with a close friend. Even though God desires to be just as close to us as he was to Adam and Eve, we struggle to find him. And the most serious loss of all is that we now experience death. What God warned Adam about has come true: “From that tree you shall not eat; when you eat from it you shall die” (Genesis 2:17).

But it is also important to recognize that Original Sin does not cause us to lose our goodness or make us completely spiritually corrupt. Some of the Protestant reformers taught that Original Sin completely perverted human nature and destroyed our freedom to choose between right and wrong, and some Protestants today still hold that belief. In response, the Catholic Church has more clearly articulated her teaching on God’s Revelation. Namely, Original Sin does not completely pervert human goodness, but it does weaken our natural powers for relating to God and for choosing to do good.

Death is a consequence of Original Sin, but death is not our final end. Jesus Christ has conquered death and opened the gates of Heaven.



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Primary Sources

The Voice of Conscience

With the gift of God’s grace—the free and undeserved help that he gives us to respond to his call—we are able to know and do what is good despite our fallen state. We may not always immediately prefer what is good, but if we allow our conscience to speak to us, we will more easily choose what is good and avoid evil. Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*, 1965) reminds us of this:

In the depths of his conscience, man detects a law which he does not impose upon himself, but which holds him to obedience. Always summoning him to love good and avoid evil, the voice of conscience . . . speaks to his heart: do this, shun that. For man has in his heart a law written by God; to obey it is the very dignity of man. (16)

The Spiritual Battle

The doctrine of Original Sin lies behind another important concept in Scripture and Tradition. The concept is this: since the Fall of Adam and Eve, the human race has been involved in a spiritual battle between good and evil. On one side of this battle is Satan, the evil one, who continues to tempt human beings to reject God and God's



Faith in Action

The Community of Sant'Egidio



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The Community of Sant'Egidio (named after a parish church of Saint Giles) was founded in Rome shortly after Vatican Council II. The founding members were high school students who simply wanted to live the Gospel in a more intentional way. With the early Christian communities as their model, the students began to visit poor people in Rome and started a school for children.

Today living the Gospel concretely is still the goal of the community, which now has sixty thousand members all over the world and includes laypeople of all ages. Members live by these essential elements:

- prayer, both privately and in common
- communicating the Gospel (evangelization)
- solidarity with the poor
- ecumenism (friendship, prayer, and the search for unity among Christians)
- dialogue (as a path to peace and cooperation among religions, and as a means of resolving conflicts)

The Community of Sant'Egidio USA has communities in several cities, including Boston, New York City, and Minneapolis–Saint Paul. The worldwide Community of Sant'Egidio has been officially recognized by the Vatican as a public lay association.

The Community of Sant'Egidio has been recognized for its work for peace and reconciliation among warring nations, particularly in Algeria, the Balkans, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The group has also been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize. All of this has come from a meeting of high school students! The Community of Sant'Egidio has grown from a small mustard seed into a mighty tree, supporting life in every way (see Luke 13:19).

laws. On the other side of the battle is God—the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—who has promised to help us win this battle against evil. In fact, Jesus Christ’s life, Passion, death, and Resurrection have already won the battle. We just have to decide whose side we are going to be on.

What do you imagine your relationship with God would be like without Original Sin?

Article 7: Satan and the Fallen Angels

Who is the deceiving serpent we first meet in the account of the Fall? Tradition identifies the serpent as **Satan**. Satan is a popular character in television, movies, and music. Sometimes he is pictured in demonic form with goat horns. This image is taken from Matthew 25:31–46, Jesus’ explanation of his Second Coming, when he will separate the sheep, who will go to Heaven, from the goats, who will go to Hell. Sometimes Satan is presented as a smooth-talking, well-dressed, but always deceptive businessman. These images tell us something true about Satan. He is a liar, and he is dangerous to our spiritual well-being. The danger in the media portrayal of Satan is that it might lead us to believe that he is not real. He and his false promises are very, very real.

The Origin of the Fallen Angels

The Bible gives us only a hint of the nature of Satan and his demons. The Second Letter of Peter has this passing reference: “God did not spare the angels when they sinned, but condemned them to the chains of Tartarus and handed them over to be kept for judgment” (2:4; see also Jude, verse 6). This mention supports what God has revealed through Sacred Tradition. The devil and his demons are fallen angels.



Satan

The fallen angel or spirit of evil who is the enemy of God and a continuing instigator of temptation and sin in the world.

This painting depicts Michael the Archangel in battle against Satan and his demons. Why does the artist depict the demonic forces as bestial?

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These angels, through their own free choice, totally and completely rejected God and his Reign. As a result they could no longer be in the presence of God and were cast from Heaven (see Luke 10:18).

The greatest of these fallen angels is Satan, also called the devil or Lucifer. Satan's identity develops over time in Sacred Scripture. Some people are surprised to discover that in Satan's earliest appearances in the Bible, he was a member of God's heavenly court. The Old Testament mentions him only three times: Job, chapters 1 and 2; 1 Chronicles 21:1; and Zechariah 3:1–2. The Books of Job and Zechariah portray Satan as an angel whose role is to direct God's attention to human sinfulness.

By New Testament times, Satan emerged as God's fierce opponent. Unlike the Old Testament, the New Testament includes many references to Satan, who is also called the devil and Beelzebub. Satan was bold enough to tempt Jesus himself at the beginning of Jesus' ministry (see Luke 4:1–11). Jesus called him "a murderer from the beginning" and "the father of lies" (John 8:44). In the New Testament, Satan is now understood to represent the powers of evil in the world. He is described as the leader of a kingdom of darkness (see Mark 3:23–26) and "the prince of demons" (Luke 11:15). The devil was even partially responsible for the death of Jesus, entering Judas and leading him to betray Jesus (see John 13:27). Early Christians were warned to be on the alert for Satan, who

Jesus recognized Satan for who he is: a deceiver who wants to turn us away from God's love. Through his life, death, and Resurrection, Jesus helps us to follow God and to resist the devil's temptations.



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was "prowling around like a roaring lion" (1 Peter 5:8) looking to devour the unwary. The New Testament also identifies Satan as the spiritual power behind the empires that persecuted the Israelites and the early Christians. This depiction is particularly evident in the Book of Revelation, which also characterizes Satan as a dragon (see chapters 12, 13, and 20).

All of these different images of Satan in the Bible offer another example of why we must consider all of Sacred Scripture and Tradition when we interpret a specific Bible passage.

Satan's Power Is Limited

As a spiritual force, Satan is powerful, but he is not all-powerful. He has already lost his war with God. Christ won his victory over Satan through his death on the Cross. Now all that remains is for Satan to be thrown into Hell forever at the Final Judgment (see Revelation 20:21).

It might be confusing to talk about a battle that has already been won on one hand, and on the other hand a battle that is still occurring. The battle that is ongoing is not a battle to determine whether good or evil will ultimately be victorious, because God has already defeated Satan. Rather, Satan continues fighting to persuade us to rebel against God.

As we await the **Parousia**, the devil continues to have the power to tempt us to sin. But he cannot force us to do



Parousia

The Second Coming of Christ as judge of all the living and the dead, at the end of time, when the Kingdom of God will be fulfilled.

Pray It!

Deliver Us from Evil

When thinking of evil, some people envision a red creature with horns and a pitchfork. But evil comes in more real and concrete forms. We sometimes convince ourselves that evil is “out there,” perpetrated by other people, but the truth is that we often participate in evil. It is easy to point a finger at the evil carried out by others, but it is extremely painful to admit the evil committed by our own hands.

Let us prayerfully acknowledge where we have fallen short and ask God to deliver us from these evils.

Lord Jesus, you taught us that repentant souls will be forgiven. Help me to turn from the selfish acts that lead me away from communion with you and with others: gossip . . . cheating . . . addiction . . . greed . . . racism . . . drug abuse . . . bullying . . . pornography . . . hatred . . . abortion . . . lies . . . poverty . . . violence . . . sexual promiscuity . . . selfishness. Help me to recognize evil for what it is and to choose to act out of love instead. In your name I pray, Amen.

**temptation**

An invitation or enticement to commit an unwise or immoral act that often includes a promise of reward to make the immoral act seem more appealing.

anything against our will. We have received grace from the Holy Spirit to resist the devil's **temptations**. The pain and suffering in the world caused by human sin may start with Satan's temptations, but the choices we freely make as human beings actually cause the pain and suffering. So be on the watch for Satan's temptations, but do not fear him. The power of Christ will protect you.

What temptations do you recognize in your own life? How can Christ help you to resist them?

Chapter Review

1. How is the loss of Adam and Eve's original holiness and original justice symbolically expressed in Genesis, chapter 3?
2. Explain the deeper meaning of Adam and Eve's sin of disobedience.
3. How does Original Sin affect human nature?
4. Describe the spiritual battle that is occurring because of Original Sin.
5. What is the origin of Satan and his demons?
6. What are some of the different ways Satan is described in Scripture?

The Path to Restoration

Chapter 3

Introduction

After Adam and Eve's Fall from grace, God sought to restore to humanity what was lost in the Fall. In this chapter, we continue to see God's plan revealed through Scripture and Tradition. This plan began with his promise to our first parents. We will then see the covenants God made with Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David. Through the covenants, God established his intent to call a Chosen People to be his light for all the nations. He gave them the Law to teach them how to live in right relationship with him and with one another. We will see the continued impact of Original Sin as the Chosen People failed to uphold their end of the covenant time and time again, suffering many terrible consequences because of their lack of faith.

You might think that God would just give up on the Chosen People. But God's love, patience, and understanding have no limits. God called judges and kings to lead his people. His prophets tirelessly warned, directed, and comforted the Chosen People. Their message contained hints of what was to come in God's wonderful plan for our salvation. God would send a Messiah, a chosen one, who would fully restore humanity's original holiness and justice. He would lead with justice, proclaim peace, and as the Suffering Servant take upon himself all our sins. And the Chosen People began to wait in hope.



literal sense

A form of biblical interpretation that considers the explicit meaning of the text. It lays the foundation for all other senses of Sacred Scripture.

spiritual sense

A form of biblical interpretation that goes beyond the literal sense to consider what the realities and events of Sacred Scripture signify and mean for salvation.

Article 8: God's Promise to Adam and Eve

After the Fall things seemed pretty bleak for the human race. We have already looked at the consequences of Adam and Eve's sin, found in Genesis 3:14–19. Adam and Eve, who are symbolic of all humanity, lost God's gifts of original holiness and original justice. Their relationships with God and with each other were more difficult and challenging. But hidden in the third chapter of Genesis is a great spiritual truth: even amidst the greatest of tragedies, God does not abandon us. For those who have faith, God will bring good even from sin and suffering.

The Protoevangelium

In Genesis, chapter 3, God delivered the consequences of Adam and Eve's disobedience. He said to the serpent:

I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and hers;
They will strike at your head,
while you strike at their heel.

(Genesis 3:15)

This verse is called the *Protoevangelium*, which is a Latin word meaning “first gospel.” The **literal sense** of this verse is that it is an etiology; it explains why snakes and people do not get along very well. But after the experience of Christ's life, death, and Resurrection, the Church Fathers saw a deeper, **spiritual sense** in this verse. They interpreted it as God's first promise to send a Savior to free humanity from the effects of the Fall. The following chart will help you to understand their interpretation:

Literal Sign	Spiritual Meaning
the serpent	Satan
the woman	Mary
the woman's offspring	Jesus Christ

Literal Sign	Spiritual Meaning
enmity between the serpent and the woman, between the serpent and her offspring	the spiritual battle between Satan and God for the future of humanity
“They will strike at your head, / while you strike at their heel” (Genesis 3:15).	Jesus Christ will win the battle with Satan. A strike at the heel is a position of weakness, but a strike at the head is a death blow.

So even as Adam and Eve were leaving the Garden of Eden, God was already making a promise, a covenant, that he would save humanity from the damage caused by Satan’s deception. In this interpretation, Mary is the new Eve and Christ is the new Adam. They restored the original holiness and justice that were lost by Adam and Eve. As the Mother of God, Mary was the first to benefit from Christ’s victory over sin. She was conceived without the stain of Original Sin and with special grace from God remained free from sin throughout her entire life.

According to Saint Leo the Great, humanity was not simply restored to our former state by Christ’s victory, however. Saint Leo, who served as Pope from 440 to 461, expressed the wonder and joy of the great mystery of God’s plan of salvation in one of his sermons:

For today not only are we confirmed as possessors of paradise, but have also in Christ penetrated the heights of heaven, and have gained still greater things through Christ’s unspeakable grace than we had lost through the devil’s malice. For us, whom our virulent enemy had driven out from the bliss of our first abode, the Son of God has made members of Himself and placed at the right hand of the Father. (“Sermon 73”)

God Remains Faithful

The accounts that follow the Fall in the primeval history serve two purposes. First, they show the growth and worsening of sin. Second, they show that no matter how bad humanity fell, God remained faithful in finding a way to preserve his plan of salvation.

Cain and Abel (Genesis 4:1–16)

The story of Cain and Abel, Adam and Eve's first two sons, is a story of jealousy and fratricide. Cain, a shepherd, and Abel, a farmer, offered the appropriate sacrifice to God. God liked Abel's sacrifice better (because he offered the best of what he raised), and Cain was jealous. He killed Abel. The first sin after the Fall was brother killing brother.



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Adam and Eve weep over their dead son, Abel. Notice the two altars in the background. The smoke from Abel's sacrifice raises straight up, a symbol that his sacrifice was pleasing to God.

Again, in this account, the inspired biblical writer described God by way of an imperfect analogy that presents God in human terms, as acting in a human manner. First, God warned Cain not to let sin be his master. Second, after the murder, God marked Cain to prevent anyone from killing him in revenge. God's promise to save the descendants of Adam and Eve was already being fulfilled.

Noah and the Flood (Genesis 6:5–9:17)

The Book of Genesis gives two versions of the generations from Adam to Noah. Humankind had greatly increased in number. And humankind had also greatly increased in sin. God saw how "every desire that [humanity's] heart conceived was always nothing but evil" (6:5). God decided to start over again. Fortunately, there was one just man on earth: Noah. Through Noah and his family, God was able to continue his promise to save the descendants of Adam and Eve. But God went one step further this time. He made an explicit covenant or promise with Noah, and through Noah with all humankind and all creation: "Never again shall all creatures be destroyed by the waters of a flood" (9:11). God marked this promise with a rainbow. He committed to saving humanity by some different means than by destroying all sinners. God's plan continued to be revealed.

The Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1–9)

Following the Flood, the Israelites resolved to build a city for themselves, with a tower “with its top in the sky” (Genesis 11:4). The account of the tower of Babel tells about a people who tried to make themselves like gods. To keep his promise not to destroy all the sinful people with a natural disaster, God instead made them speak different languages so they could not understand one another (another etiology). Once again God took action to keep his plan of salvation in motion.

All of these accounts from the primeval history reveal that humanity was simply not learning how to be faithful to God. Each time, something more was needed. As the Old Testament progresses, we see that God takes an increasingly direct approach in his saving plan by initiating and affirming specific, special covenants with his Chosen People.

How do you encounter God’s presence and his promise of salvation even when you sin?

Article 9: The Old Testament Covenants

A covenant is a solemn agreement between two parties. Among the nations surrounding ancient Israel, covenants were usually made between two kings, outlining the responsibilities the kings had toward each other. Often the stronger king promised to protect the weaker king, and the weaker king promised to pay tribute or taxes to the more powerful king. But we do not have any records of these kingdoms’ having covenants with their gods or goddesses. In their mythologies, their deities would never humble themselves to enter into a binding agreement with human beings.

This makes Israel unique. Their covenants were not with other kingdoms but with God. God initiated these covenants and stayed faithful to them. Through them he communicated the love he has for humanity and his



Paschal Mystery

The work of salvation accomplished by Jesus Christ mainly through his Passion, death, Resurrection, and Ascension.

polytheism

The belief in many gods.

desire to restore our communion with him. These covenants point us to the **Paschal Mystery**, the redemption of all humanity through Christ's Passion, death, Resurrection, and Ascension. We will look at four of these covenants—those with Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David.

The Covenant with Noah

In this chapter, you have already read about the covenant God made with Noah and, through Noah, with the whole human race. An important thing to consider about this early covenant is its universal nature. Chapter 10 of Genesis describes how, directly after God made this covenant, Noah's descendants multiplied to become all the nations of the world: "These are the clans of Noah's sons, according to their origins and by their nations. From these the nations of the earth branched out after the flood" (verse 32). This was a way of saying that God's covenant with Noah now extended to all the nations of

Did You Know?

An Enduring Relationship



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A close relationship exists between Christians and Jews because we share the same spiritual heritage, given to us by the patriarchs, Moses, and the prophets. Vatican Council II stated, "The apostle Paul maintains that the Jews remain very dear to God, for the sake of the patriarchs, since God does not take back the gifts he bestowed or the choice he made" (tj, 4).

In our own time, Pope Francis invited the chief rabbi of Rome to the papal inauguration Mass. In the invitation, Pope Francis wrote, "Placing my trust in the protection of the Most High, I eagerly hope to be able to contribute to the progress that relations between Jews and Catholics have experienced . . . in a spirit of renewed collaboration, and in service of a world that might be more and more in harmony with the Creator's will."

the earth and will remain in force as long as the world lasts.

However, because of sin these nations were always in danger of **polytheism**, which is the false belief in many gods. They were also always in danger of worshipping their nation and their king instead of God, which is another form of idolatry. Yet the covenant with Noah assures us that God was still at work among these nations. The Bible lifts up several non-Jewish leaders as examples of God's working through other peoples. These Gentiles, or non-Jews, were instrumental in God's plan of salvation. The following chart lists the most prominent ones:

Name	Importance
Melchizedek	The king of Salem and a "priest of God Most High" (Genesis 14:18). With Abraham he offered bread and wine in thanksgiving after a successful battle.
Rahab	A Canaanite woman who risked her life to help protect Joshua's spies in the city of Jericho (see Joshua 2:1–21).
King Cyrus	The Persian emperor who conquered Babylon and ended the Jewish Exile (see Ezra 1:1–4). He allowed the Judean slaves to return home and even helped to fund the reconstruction of Jerusalem (see 3:7).
Ruth	A Moabite woman who married an Israelite man. She is remembered for her trust in God and her commitment to her Jewish mother-in-law.

The rainbow was God's sign to Noah of his love for humanity and his promise to save us.

The covenant with Noah, which applied universally to all peoples, found its fulfillment in the New Covenant that Jesus Christ extends to all the people of the world.

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circumcision

The act, required by Jewish Law, of removing the foreskin of the penis. Since the time of Abraham, it has been a sign of God's covenant relationship with the Jewish people.

patriarch

The father or leader of a tribe, clan, or tradition. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were the patriarchs of the Israelite people.

The Abrahamic Covenant

The story of Abraham begins in chapter 12 of Genesis. Starting with Abraham, God began a new phase of his plan to restore humanity's holiness and justice: he called a Chosen People to be in a unique relationship with him. These people had a special role in his plan. God established this special relationship and its purpose in the covenant he made with Abraham. There are several places where God announced his covenant to Abraham: 12:1–3, 13:14–17, 15:1–19, and 17:1–27. But the later announcements are, for the most part, further elaborations on the covenant first made in chapter 12:

I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you. All the families of the earth will find blessing in you. (Verses 2–3)

In his covenant with Abraham, God promised Abraham three things: (1) to make of him a great nation by promising Abraham many descendants, (2) to provide

Pray It!

Courage to Be Faithful to God

When God appears to someone in a movie, the moment is often presented as joyous, accompanied by a white light and angels singing. But in the Bible, God's appearances usually fill those who experience them with fear at encountering the mystery of God. When God established his covenant with Abraham, "a great, dark dread descended upon him [Abraham]" (Genesis 15:12). Before Moses received the Ten Commandments, Mount Sinai was "enveloped in smoke" and "trembled violently" (Exodus 19:18). We might interpret this as God's way of saying, "This isn't going to be easy." It is true: our life with God requires courage. Let us pray:

God, give me the courage . . .
 . . . to be present to you despite my fears,
 . . . to keep my promises to you even when there are obstacles,
 . . . to know you are here with me even in the turmoil of my life,
 . . . to live the New Law taught by and embodied in Jesus Christ.
 Amen.

Abraham and his descendants with a land of their own, and (3) to make Abraham and his descendants a blessing for all the nations.

The third promise was the most important one in God's saving plan. The first two promises were the preconditions necessary in order for the third promise to be fulfilled. God's plan was for Abraham's descendants, who would later be called Hebrews, Israelites, and finally Jews, to be an example to all other people of how to live in right relationship with the one, true God. God asked Abraham and his descendants to commit to these things: (1) to walk with God—that is, to recognize the one, true God (see Genesis 17:1), (2) to be blameless—that is to live a life without sin (see 17:1), and (3) to practice **circumcision** as a physical mark of the covenant (see 17:9–14).

Abraham and his descendants—Isaac and Jacob (whom God renamed Israel)—are called the **patriarchs**, and they are revered as saints in the Church's liturgical tradition. The remaining chapters of Genesis tell of how they escaped many dangerous situations. Their stories show that God is faithful in keeping his covenant despite human sin and weakness. Original Sin continued to have its effect. The Israelites worshipped false gods and goddesses and were guilty of a variety of sins. But God remained faithful, and his will could not be overcome by human sin and weakness. God's covenant with Abraham prepared the way for the coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, in whom the covenant is fulfilled. Through Jesus Christ, a descendant of Abraham, God's blessing is brought to all the nations.

Abraham is a gracious host to his mysterious visitors. Notice how he kneels before them in the foreground and serves them at a table in the background.



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The Mosaic Covenant

One of the most awe-inspiring events in the Old Testament is the **theophany** at Mount Sinai, which is described in Exodus 19:16–25. The Israelites had escaped from Egypt because of God's miraculous intervention and had been journeying for three months. They had come to the Sinai desert and camped at the base of a large mountain. On the third day after their arrival at the mountain, the air was filled with lightning and thunder, the ground shook, and smoke and fire appeared on the mountaintop. These dramatic signs of God's presence are meant to call attention to the critical importance of what comes next.

God summoned Moses to the mountaintop and renewed with him the covenant God made with Abraham. And God gave Moses a set of laws that the Israelites were required to follow as their part of the covenant. This Law is summarized in the Ten Commandments (see Exodus 20:1–17), but the full Law is spelled out in the rest of Exodus and Leviticus. It is summarized again in Deuteronomy. This Law is also called the Mosaic Law or the Old Law. It is called the Old Law because it has been fulfilled in Jesus Christ, who is the New Law.

From this point on, the covenant and the Law were so closely linked that they were understood to be two sides of the same coin. Keeping the Law was the most

important sign of faithfulness to the covenant. Breaking the Law was the same as being unfaithful to the covenant. The Jewish people eventually call the first five books of their Scriptures—the same five books that begin the Old Testament—the **Torah**, which is the Hebrew word for “law” or “teach-

Moses receives the Ten Commandments from God to teach the Israelites how to live in right relationship with God and one another. Obeying the Commandments was an important part of the Israelites' covenant with God.



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ing.” Through these laws God taught his Chosen People how to be in right relationship with him and with one another. The Old Law was a step in God’s plan for restoring our original holiness and justice. It became the rule by which the prophets measured the faithfulness of the kings and the people.

The Davidic Covenant

God made one more promise in the Old Testament that can also be called a covenant. This promise was delivered to King David by the prophet Nathan. David wished to build a permanent dwelling for the **Ark of the Covenant**, the sacred box in which the tablets with the Ten Commandments were kept. God instructed Nathan to tell David not to build this Temple (see 2 Samuel 7:4–13). Instead David’s heir would build it. God then promised David that “your house and your kingdom are firm forever before me; your throne shall be firmly established forever” (2 Samuel 7:16).

In this context, a “house” means a bloodline or direct line of descendants. Even though a descendant of David was always ruler of Israel or Judah (the southern kingdom), the kingdom itself was destroyed in 598 BC. After this there were no more Davidic kings. The Gospels help us to understand how this promise was fulfilled. Jesus Christ was a direct descendant of David (see Matthew 1:6, Luke 3:31). Christ established the Kingdom of God, which will endure forever and over which he reigns for eternity. Through him the covenant with David is fulfilled.

Covenants: Part of God’s Plan

Through all of these covenants—with Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David—God was establishing and affirming his Chosen People, a people who are our ancestors in faith. We find this explicitly described in the Book of Deuteronomy, which portrays Moses’ final speech to the Israelites: “For you are a people holy to the Lord, your God; the Lord, your God, has chosen you from all the



theophany

God’s manifestation of himself in a visible form to enrich human understanding of him. An example is God’s appearance to Moses in the form of a burning bush.

Torah

A Hebrew word meaning “law,” referring to the first five books of the Old Testament.

Ark of the Covenant

A sacred chest that housed the tablets of the Ten Commandments, placed within the sanctuary where God would come and dwell.

peoples on the face of the earth to be a people specially his own. It was not because you are more numerous than all the peoples that the Lord set his heart on you. . . . It was because the Lord loved you and because of his fidelity to the oath he had sworn to your ancestors” (7:6–7).

All the Old Testament covenants are part of God’s plan. They assure us of God’s loving commitment to humanity. They teach us how to live in right relationship with God and with one another. They point us toward the restoration of our original holiness and justice. But these covenants by themselves are not enough to bring God’s plan of salvation to fulfillment. So they also point the way to something more. That something more is the Messiah, Jesus Christ, whose life, death, Passion,



Faith in Action

The Assisi Network

The persecution of Jews is a sad fact of human history. The human family from which our Savior was born has often been identified as a scapegoat for problems in wider society.

During World War II, Germany implemented a program of genocide, now called the Holocaust, with the aim of purging Germany of Jews, gypsies, the disabled, Catholics, homosexuals, and others deemed undesirable.

When the persecution of Jews spread to Italy, Bishop Giuseppe Nicolini of Assisi responded quickly. He ordered Fr. Aldo Brunacci to hide Jewish people in the numerous churches, monasteries, and convents of Assisi. Some were even disguised as monks and nuns! Others who passed through Assisi were given false papers so that they might survive in other countries. Laypeople risked their own lives to make these false documents look as authentic as possible. This circle of rescue was known as the Assisi network.

During the war the people of Assisi did their best to help fulfill the religious needs of the Jews in hiding. After the war the entire town celebrated Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement, a day of fasting and the most solemn day in the Jewish calendar), and a community of nuns prepared the meal to celebrate the end of the fast.

In 1977, Bishop Nicolini and Father Brunacci were honored as Righteous Among the Nations, a title given by the State of Israel to those who risked their lives to save Jews during the Holocaust. Luigi Brizi and his son Trento, who printed the false papers, were named Righteous Among the Nations in 1997.

Resurrection, and Ascension—the Paschal Mystery—bring these ancient covenants to their final and complete fulfillment. By sending his own Son, God has revealed himself fully to the world.

How do the covenants with Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David point the way to Jesus Christ, the Messiah?



confederation

An alliance of tribes or nations with no central authority.

Article 10: Covenant Keeping: Successes and Failures

The historical books and the writings of the prophets reveal the Israelites' struggles to keep the covenant they had made with God. You might have covered this history in greater detail in a previous course. Now let's examine three important elements in the Israelites' history: the time of the judges, the time of the monarchy, and the role of the prophets.

The Judges of Israel

After the Israelites, led by Joshua, settled in the land of Canaan, they had no central government—no king, no high priest, no president. They existed as a **confederation** of tribal groups. When they faced any threat, such as an outside invader, God raised up a hero who rallied one or more tribes in defense of their land. These leaders were called judges, but they were not judges as we know them today. Though they may have settled disputes, judges were primarily military leaders. The Book of Judges contains the accounts of twelve of these charismatic leaders, telling about six of them in more detail.

There is a cycle in Judges related to the covenant. It would seem that after taking possession of the Promised Land, the Israelites forgot the Law and the covenant again and again. “[T]he Israelites . . . abandoned the Lord, the God of their ancestors, the one who had brought them out of the land of Egypt. They followed other gods, the gods of the peoples around them, and



monarchy

A government or a state headed by a single person, such as a king or queen. As a biblical term, it refers to the period of time when the Israelites existed as an independent nation.

bowed down to them, and provoked the Lord” (Judges 2:11–12). God allowed them to fall into the hands of their enemies. When they realized their sin and repented and called out to God for deliverance, God raised up a judge to lead the victory against their enemies. Then for a while, the Israelites kept the covenant before falling into the cycle of disobedience again.

The Book of Judges shows another step in God’s plan of salvation. God wanted his Chosen People to be completely committed to him, which they could demonstrate by keeping the Law and the covenant. As long as they did this, they would not need an intermediary, such as a king,

to lead them. But they proved incapable of doing this. As the period of the Judges continued, even the judges themselves became less exemplary in their behavior. Gideon introduced idolatry (see Judges 8:24–27), Jephthah sacrificed his own daughter (see 11:29–40), and Samson was driven by his own selfish concerns (see chapters 13–16). The period ended with a bloody civil war (see chapter 20). Despite these setbacks God was faithful to the covenant and did not abandon this seemingly hopeless people.



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Deborah, the only female judge of Israel, is depicted with her palm tree, where the Israelites came to her for guidance (see Judges 4:5).

The Monarchy

The history of the kings of Israel is told in First and Second Samuel and First and Second Kings and is then repeated in First and Second Chronicles. The **monarchy** began with the Israelites’ approaching Samuel, the last judge of Israel, and asking him to appoint a king. Samuel was reluctant to do this because he believed the people were rejecting God as their king. Despite this, God directed him to anoint the first king of Israel, Saul (see

1 Samuel, chapter 8). The first three kings of Israel were all heroically committed to God and promoted the Law and the covenant. All three were also tragically flawed: Saul with lack of trust, David with lust, and Solomon with greed. Despite their sin and weakness, God worked through them to unite the twelve tribes into a strong, united kingdom and eventually to build a Temple in Jerusalem, the center of authentic Israelite worship.

After Solomon's death, however, the united monarchy was split into two kingdoms: Israel and Judah. The Books of First and Second Kings chronicle the successes and failures of the kings of both kingdoms. The very first king of the northern kingdom (Israel), Jeroboam, got off to a bad start by setting up idolatrous places of worship. He and the kings who followed him "did what was evil in the Lord's sight" (1 Kings 15:26). The kings of the southern kingdom (Judah) did not do much better. "Judah did evil in the Lord's sight and they angered him even more than their ancestors had done" (1 Kings 14:22). But there were good kings of Judah, like Asa, Hezekiah, and Josiah, who brought religious reform and destroyed the places of idolatry and called the people to be faithful again to the covenant.

As another step in God's plan of salvation, the monarchy firmly established the Israelites as God's Chosen People. The practices of religious ritual and worship were established at the Jerusalem Temple. And the great kings, such as David and Solomon, foreshadowed the kingship of Jesus Christ. As earthly kingdoms, Israel and Judah did not last. But the noble intention of these Israelite nations—to be kingdoms committed to the Law and the covenant—finds its fulfillment

Samuel unexpectedly anoints David, the youngest of eight brothers, as the future king of Israel. Why do you think God's choices are often not what people expect?



in the Kingdom of Heaven and the eternal Reign of Jesus Christ.

The Prophets

The Israelite prophets played a key role in relation to the covenant. In a very real sense, they were the overseers of the covenant and the Law. As God's spokespeople they called the kings and the people to be faithful to the covenant and warned of the consequences of failing to do so. "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: Cursed be anyone who does not observe the words of this covenant, which I commanded your ancestors the day I brought them up out of the land of Egypt" (Jeremiah 11:3–4). But the prophets also assured the people that God would not abandon his covenant commitment:

Though the mountains fall away
and the hills be shaken,
My love shall never fall away from you
nor my covenant of peace be shaken,
says the Lord, who has mercy on you.
(Isaiah 54:10)



Live It!

What Would the Prophets Tell Us?

The prophets of the Old Testament often cried out against the hypocrisy of the Israelites. They pointed out the great gap between the demands of the covenant and how the Israelites actually lived. For example, Amos tells the people that their worship means nothing to God because they do not live a good and just life. Their prayers have become empty and hollow. Only when they "let justice surge like waters, / and righteousness like an unfailing stream" (Amos 5:24) will their worship have any meaning again. Today the words of the prophets remind us to be faithful to the teachings of Christ by being peacemakers, caring for the poor, and loving those whom we do not like. Our worship at Mass is most authentic when we are faithful to Christ's teachings. "Faith . . . if it does not have works, is dead" (James 2:17).

Does your faith have works? Look for opportunities each day to put your faith into action by doing good works, especially for those most in need.

The books of the prophets contain the writings of four major prophets—Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel—and the writings of twelve minor prophets. But there were many more prophets than these who are part of salvation history. These faithful men endured ridicule and torture and even risked death to speak God’s Word. They did this out of love for God’s People. They knew that the Israelites’ faithfulness to the covenant was essential for God’s plan of salvation. They already were beginning to see that God was planning something big, something new, to complete his plan to redeem all humanity and restore our right relationship with God and with one another. The prophets foreshadowed Christ’s own role as prophet, for Jesus Christ will not just proclaim the Word—he is the Word of God Made Flesh.

Why do you think the people repeatedly forgot the lessons they had learned about being faithful to their covenant with God?

**“A child is
born to us,
a son is
given us.”
(Isaiah 9:5)**

Primary Sources

On Christian Hope

Pope Benedict XVI’s second encyclical specifically addresses Christian hope. In this beautiful letter, he outlines the importance of the virtue of hope in the life of the believer. The Pope’s letter begins as follows:

According to the Christian faith, “redemption”—salvation—is not simply a given. Redemption is offered to us in the sense that we have been given hope, trustworthy hope, by virtue of which we can face our present: the present, even if it is arduous, can be lived and accepted if it leads towards a goal, if we can be sure of this goal, and if this goal is great enough to justify the effort of the journey. (Spe Salvi, 1)

You can easily find Pope Benedict’s encyclical online. It is enlightening and inspiring reading.

Article 11: The Growing Messianic Hope

Hope. It is an important virtue and a gift of faith. Hope creates in us a desire and an expectation for our salvation and the Kingdom of God. The prophets were God's instruments of hope to his Chosen People. He revealed to the prophets a vision of a **New Covenant** and a new

Location	Description	Connection to Christ
Isaiah 9:1–6	Isaiah prophesied that the “people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.” A child will be born to lead them and among his names will be “God-Hero” and “Prince of Peace.” His Kingdom will be just and peaceful forever.	Jesus Christ is the Prince of Peace and the Son of God who forever rules the Kingdom of Heaven.
Isaiah 11:1–9	Isaiah prophesied about a coming ruler from the “stump of Jesse.” He shall “judge the poor with justice” and “with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked.” Even natural enemies will play together peacefully in his Kingdom.	Jesus Christ is a descendant of Jesse (David’s father).
Isaiah 52:13–53:12	This is one of the Suffering Servant passages in Isaiah. Isaiah prophesied of a servant of the Lord who is “struck for the sins of his people.” “The LORD laid upon him the guilt of us all” and “by his wounds we were healed.”	This prophecy is an accurate description of Christ’s Passion. He suffered and died for our salvation.
Jeremiah 31:31–34	Jeremiah prophesied about a new covenant God will make with Israel and Judah: “I will place my law within them, and write it upon their hearts.”	The New Covenant is established in Jesus Christ. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, Christ lives in every believer’s heart.
Ezekiel 34:11–31	Ezekiel prophesied that God will act like a good shepherd, rescuing his people, giving them safe pasture, and healing their injuries. He will “make a covenant of peace with them” and “deliver them from the power of those who enslaved them.”	In the Gospel of John, Christ declares that he is the Good Shepherd.
Ezekiel 37:1–14	Ezekiel had a vision of a valley of dry bones being resurrected and coming alive again. “You shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves and make you come up out of them.”	With the coming of the New Covenant, all the faithful who have died will rise again, having been saved through the Passion, death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.
Zechariah 9:9–10	Zechariah prophesied about a king and a “just savior.” He shall “proclaim peace to the nations” and “his dominion will be from sea to sea.”	Jesus Christ is the promised King and just Savior.

heavenly Kingdom. This vision would be brought about through the work of a messiah, which literally means “anointed one.”

The chart outlines some of the more important prophecies of hope proclaimed by the prophets and explains how each prophecy is connected to Christ.

By proclaiming these visions of a messiah, the prophets gave the Chosen People hope for a future in which humanity’s relationship with God would be fully restored. In the centuries preceding the birth of Christ, many faithful Jews waited in expectant hope for the promised Messiah who would deliver them from their earthly and spiritual bondage. Their wait was over when Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of the Father, was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary.

What is hope? How does the virtue of hope make it easier to endure suffering and uncertainty?



New Covenant

The covenant or law established by God in Jesus Christ to fulfill and perfect the Old Covenant or Mosaic Law. It is a perfection here on earth of the Divine Law. The law of the New Covenant is called a law of love, grace, and freedom. The New Covenant will never end or diminish, and nothing new will be revealed until Christ comes again in glory.

Chapter Review

1. Give an interpretation of the *Protoevangelium* using both the literal and spiritual senses of the passage.
2. How do the accounts of Cain and Abel and Noah and the Flood explain both the effects of Original Sin and God’s promise of salvation?
3. How is God’s covenant with Noah different from his covenant with Abraham?
4. What does God promise in his covenant with Abraham?
5. Explain the connection between the Mosaic Covenant and the Mosaic Law.
6. How is God’s promise to David fulfilled?
7. Describe two Old Testament prophecies of hope and how they are fulfilled in Jesus Christ.