

Living in Christ

saint mary's press

# The Paschal Mystery

Christ's Mission of Salvation



Brian Singer-Towns

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# Introduction

As 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 served as 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 textbook 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 active participants 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 wish for you. I hope that as you study this student book, you take what it teaches about Jesus Christ and the Paschal Mystery seriously. 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

## Section 1

# **God's Plan for Salvation: The Big Picture**

# Part 1

## The Goodness of Creation

God has a plan and *you* are a part of it. Modern science has come a long way in explaining the creation, the growth, and even the end of stars and galaxies. We have some very 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 it was created by God.

God created the universe out of love. His creation is good, and God loves all of it, every photon, 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 have a special place. God has made us “little less than a god, \ crowned . . . with glory and honor” (Psalm 8:6). God has a plan and *you* are a part of it.

The topics covered in this part are:

- Article 1: “The Primeval History” (page 11)
- Article 2: “Creation Reflects the Glory of God” (page 14)
- Article 3: “Human Beings: The Summit of Creation” (page 17)
- Article 4: “The Garden of Eden: The Perfect Life” (page 21)

## 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 God 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. This is why the first two chapters of Genesis have a special place 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. In the accounts of creation, 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. **Primeval history** means that these are symbolic accounts about things that happened long before we have any historical records—written or **archaeological**—of any kind. These texts probably came from several different ancient Jewish sources. Under 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. In the primeval history, God is revealing some very important truths. We will take a closer look at those truths in the next articles.



### **primeval history**

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

### **archaeology**

The scientific study of the material remains of past human life.

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### figurative language

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

### literary forms (genres)

Different kinds of writing determined by their literary technique, content, tone, and purpose (how the author wants the reader to be affected).

## Religious Truth and Scientific Truth

The primeval history in the Sacred Scripture teaches religious truth, not science. We know this because these chapters are written in figurative language (see the “Literary Forms in the Bible” sidebar on page 13). **Figurative language** uses symbolic images, stories, and names to point to a deeper truth. Figurative language 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 twenty-four-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.

Pope Benedict XVI taught that faith and reason support each other. If there seems to be a contradiction between faith and reason, then we have misunderstood one or both of them.



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## Catholic Wisdom

### Benedict XVI on Science and Faith

Pope Benedict XVI often taught that science and faith should complement each other:

*Christianity does not posit an inevitable conflict between supernatural faith and scientific progress. The very starting-point of Biblical revelation is the affirmation that God created human beings, endowed them with reason, and set them over all the creatures of the earth. (2006 Address to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences)*

Another example is the account in Genesis 2:21 in which God makes the first woman from one of the first man's ribs. Through this text God is revealing 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. But Genesis 2:21 is not trying to teach that God literally made the first woman from a piece of the first man. In trying to "prove" this, some people even say that men have one less rib than women, but, of course, this is not true.

Religious truth and scientific truth will 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 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, a conflict God never intended. †

### Literary Forms in the Bible

Before talking about the meaning of the creation accounts in Sacred Scripture, it is helpful to understand its **literary form**. This is also called the literary genre. A newspaper, for example, has many literary forms: news stories, editorial opinions, comics, advice columns, box 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.

God did not take away the creativity of the human authors as they wrote the books that would eventually become Sacred Scripture. So Sacred Scripture also has many literary forms. The figurative language in Genesis, chapters 1–11, is one kind of literary form. But Sacred Scripture also contains hymns, parables, short stories, law codes, hero stories, prophetic oracles, Gospels, letters, proverbs, religious histories, and even love poetry. How many of these can you find in the Bible?

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 literary forms they used.

Article

## 2 Creation Reflects the Glory of God



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Human beings have experienced a particular kind of awe-inspiring moment throughout all of history. A group of people is returning home from a hunting expedition or from tending their flock or from a well-played game at a neighboring school. They gaze into the evening sky as they travel. The clouds are tinged with beautiful shades of red and purple, and the setting sun reflects golden rays off the land. “Praise God” or maybe even “Yeah, God!” someone says, 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;  
     give praise in the heights.  
 Praise him, all you angels;  
     give praise, all you hosts.  
 Praise him, sun and moon;  
     give praise, 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,  
     majestic above earth and heaven.

(Psalm 148:1–3,12–13)

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



© Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY

## Creation: The Work of the Three-In-One

The Scriptures joyfully proclaim that creation is evidence for the power of God. 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. Or maybe more accurately, space and time are the creation of God.

Sometimes Christians mistakenly believe that creation is the work of only God the Father. The Scriptures testify that creation is the work of all three 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 says “a mighty wind swept over the waters” (1:2) of the abyss but this can also be translated “the spirit of God” was over the waters, because in Hebrew the word *ruah* means “breath,” “wind,” and “spirit.” 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. God and God alone freely created the universe without help from anyone or anything.

## Creation Seen and Unseen

In the time we live in, people put a lot of emphasis on science. This means we tend to believe in things we can observe through our five senses. But the Scriptures and **Tradition** teach that part of God’s creation includes things



### Tradition

This word (from the Latin *traditio*, meaning “to hand on”) refers to the process of passing on the Gospel message. Tradition, which began with the oral communication of the Gospel by the Apostles, was written down in the Scriptures, is handed down and lived out in the life of the Church, and is interpreted by the Magisterium under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.



unseen too. We profess our belief in this every time we say 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 unseen 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 heavenly realm? **Angels.** Angels are witnessed to in both the Scriptures and Tradition. They are spiritual beings who are 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 stops Abraham from sacrificing Isaac (see

### Angels in the Scriptures

Here's a list of the three angels the Bible mentions by name and the two it mentions by type:

Angel	Biblical Appearances
Raphael	Raphael appears in the Book of Tobit. He is a companion and protector of Tobiah.
Gabriel	Gabriel appears to Daniel and explains the meaning of Daniel's visions (see Daniel 8:16, 9:21). He also appears 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 also mentioned in the Book of Jude (see verse 9), and he is identified as the archangel who leads the fight against Satan in the Book of Revelation (see 12:7).
Cherubim	These angels were 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. Their purpose seems to be to serve God and proclaim his glory.

Genesis 22:11–12). An angel announces to Joseph and Mary the birth of Jesus (see Matthew 1:20 and Luke 1:26–27). Angels announce 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). †

Article

## 3 Human Beings: The Summit of Creation

As we continue our exploration of God’s plan, 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 man in his image; / in the divine image he created him; / 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

You might have noticed the phrase “male and female he created them” in the quotation from Genesis. Because this verse has the 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.



#### 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.

#### soul

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

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 suitable partner for 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 our unique gifts as men and women together. The loving relationship between a man and a woman is the first form of communion between persons, reflecting the perfect communion of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. 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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Notice the symmetry in this image of Adam and Eve. What does this communicate about Adam and Eve's relationship?

### Humanity's Role

It follows by reason that if human beings are unique among God's creatures, then we would have a unique role in his plan. Your grandparents might have used the *Baltimore Catechism* to learn about the Catholic faith when they were growing up. In a very famous answer, it said that “God made

us to know him, to love him, and to serve him in this world, and to be happy with him forever in the next.” Another way to say this is that humanity’s unique 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.

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 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 Who God Created You to Be

It could be said that the hardest challenge in life is to be who God created you to be. We’re not talking about whether you should be a postal carrier, a doctor, a priest, or a carpenter. We are talking 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 Christ.

Wouldn’t it be a perfect world if everyone lived like this? It would be a world in which everyone was patient, kind, polite, unselfish, and slow to anger (see 1 Corinthians, chapter 13). Well, guess what? The seed and the beginning of this world is already here. We call it the Kingdom of God. The Father sent his Son, Jesus Christ, 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 you believe that every person, especially those that are hard for you to love, is made in the image of God?

## Humanity's Responsibility

The creation account in Genesis summarizes the second dimension of humanity's unique role in God's plan: "God blessed them, saying 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 move 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 the great diversity of creatures that exists into being. Each living thing has its own goodness and own unique place in creation. Further, there is an order and interdependence among all creatures. Science has 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?

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## 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 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 each other.

### Original Holiness and Original Justice

Adam and Eve appear in Genesis 2:4—3:24. As was previously discussed, this account was written in figurative or symbolic language, so the elements must be interpreted symbolically (see “Symbolic Elements in the Biblical Account of Adam and Eve” sidebar).

As you read about Adam and Eve, it is important to focus on the quality of the relationships. First notice the relationship between Adam and God. God breathes his life directly into Adam, a very intimate act. God walks in

## 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 Blessing of Human Labor:

*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)*

There is a great deal of evidence that human beings have not been very good stewards of this gift. This is why it is important in our own personal prayer to ask the Holy Spirit for wisdom to guide us in making good choices to care for creation. It is God’s creation, and we are privileged to share in its care!



### original holiness

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

### anthropomorphic

Attributing human characteristics to something that is not human.

### original justice

The state of complete harmony of our first parents with themselves, with each other, and with all of creation.

the garden, talking to Adam as a friend. He is concerned for Adam's happiness and works to make the perfect partner for Adam. All of this is a symbolic way of saying that God intended the first human beings to 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 is describing God **anthropomorphically**, meaning God is depicted in a human way. This technique relies on the use of analogy—that is, it describes 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 the fact that Eve was made from a part of Adam. Their feeling no shame in each other's presence, even though they were naked, symbolizes their complete honesty and respect for each other. At the beginning their work in 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 artist who created this painting is trying to convey the Garden of Eden before the Fall. How would you describe what is being portrayed?



## Symbolic Elements in the Biblical Account of Adam and Eve

Symbol	Meaning
Adam	A word that in Hebrew means "human being." It is a symbolic name for the first man created by God.
Eve	A word that in Hebrew sounds like "living." It is a symbolic name for the first woman created by God, the mother of all the living.
Garden of Eden	<i>Eden</i> sounds like a Hebrew word meaning "delight." So it is a garden of delight, a paradise.
God's blowing the breath of life into Adam	In biblical times breath was considered the source of life. So by blowing into the man made of clay, God is sharing his divine life with the first human beings.
God's creating animals for Adam	In the first creation account, human beings are the last thing God makes, symbolizing that we are the height of God's creative work. But in the second creation account, human beings are made first, symbolizing that all the creatures of the world are made for the delight of humanity.
God's making Eve from Adam's rib	Making the first woman from a piece of the first man is a symbol of the closeness and unity that is to exist between man and woman, particularly in Marriage.
Serpent	The serpent was considered an unclean animal because it moved on the ground without feet. It was also a symbol of the Canaanite goddess Asherah. So it was a symbol of something unclean and deceitful and eventually is identified with Satan.





The state of original holiness and 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 and justice in this life and will know it completely in Heaven. †

## Part Review

1. Explain what is meant by *primeval history*. Where do you find this in the Bible?
2. Give two examples of the use of figurative or symbolic language in the first eleven 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 one or two reasons why God created two genders.
7. What is original holiness? What is original justice?

# Part 2

## The Fall from Grace

**G**od has a plan for us, but 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 is Adam and Eve's fall from their state of original holiness and justice. The result is that every person born since Adam and Eve is born with Original Sin. Original Sin deprives us of our original holiness and 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.

A key character in the account of the Fall is the serpent, the deceiver. The Scriptures and 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.

The topics covered in this part are:

- Article 5: "Adam and Eve's Disobedience" (page 26)
- Article 6: "Original Sin: A Consequence of the Fall" (page 29)
- Article 7: "Satan and the Fallen Angels" (page 31)

Article

## 5 Adam and Eve's Disobedience

In his Letter to the Romans, Saint Paul says: “What I do, I do not understand. For I do not do what I want, but I do what I hate” (7:15). He is 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 to hurt others, and even ourselves, for very selfish reasons. People who have serious addictions struggle with this experience every day. Why would God make us like this? Well, he didn't 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 God's plan. We must take a closer look at the second part of the symbolic account of Adam and Eve (see Genesis 3:1–24). You are probably familiar with this passage, but read it over again. Earlier God gives Adam and Eve only one command: “You are free to eat from any of the trees of the garden except for the tree of knowledge of good and bad. From that tree you shall not eat; the moment you eat from it you are surely doomed to die” (2:16–17). Then the serpent comes along and basically tells Eve the exact opposite. And Eve eats the forbidden fruit and gives it to Adam, who does the same.

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

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Immediately Adam and Eve realize they are naked, which is a symbolic way of saying they feel guilt and shame. They are experiencing two feelings God did not intend humans to know. They are ashamed to be seen by each other (the reason for the fig leaves) and ashamed to be seen by God (the reason they hide from him). When God confronts them about their disobedience,

they play the blame game. Adam blames Eve for his sin, and Eve blames the serpent. In their shame they cannot 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 have lost their original holiness and justice. They are no longer in loving communion with God, nor are they in harmony with each other. They must leave the Garden of Eden; they no longer live in paradise. And their disobedience will affect the future of all humanity. No other human beings will be conceived with their holiness and justice intact. This is why it is now harder for us to do what we should do and easier to do what we hate.

**The Fall** of Adam and Eve is the origin and the result of Original Sin, a topic covered more in depth in the next article.



### 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.

## What Was the Sin?

You might wonder exactly what Adam and Eve's sin was. Yes, they disobeyed God's command, but why would God not want them to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and bad (or evil)? Wouldn't having that knowledge be a good thing? To understand this we must consider the culture of the time and the use of figurative language. For the sacred author 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

## Live It!

### Facing Temptation

Most people do not intend to do evil things. We are most 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." We are asking God to keep us out of tempting situations and to help us not give in to temptations that 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. Next time you are tempted, think about what would happen if you gave in to it. What would happen the next day? the next month? years from now? How would it affect you? your friends? your family? What are the false promises? the real consequences?



### etiology

A story that explains something's cause or origin.

himself. Eating the fruit from that tree is a symbolic way of saying, “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 are made in God’s image (see 1:27) and they have the grace of full communion with God. Seduced by the serpent’s lie, “you will be like gods” (3:5), they ended up losing the grace of original holiness and justice. Their sin was a misuse of human freedom and a 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 a lack of trust in God—are at the root of every sin. †

## Biblical Etiologies

After the Fall, God describes the consequences for Adam and Eve and the serpent. This list is 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, often painful, and we die. Fortunately, God has a plan for restoring us to full communion and it is set into motion even as Adam and Eve experience the consequences of their disobedience.



Article

## 6 Original Sin: A Consequence of the Fall

Here's an interesting exercise. If you wrote down five doctrines that are essential for understanding Christianity, what would they be? 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 all be living in paradise. So we need to understand it. But always remember that sin does not defeat God. As Saint Paul said, "Where sin increased, grace overflowed all the more" (Romans 5:20).

### No One Is Exempt

**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). The Scriptures and 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 did not receive their state of original holiness for themselves alone but for all human nature. When they sinned their sin didn't affect just themselves but affected their human nature, which was passed on to all their descendants.

Perhaps this 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 the 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 two exceptions: Jesus and his Mother, Mary). We didn't do anything 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!



### 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 so lost their original holiness and became subject to death, (2) the fallen state of human nature that affects every person born into the world.



### concupiscence

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

## The Results of Original Sin

Because of Original Sin, human nature is weakened. The loss of original holiness and justice makes things that should be natural to us harder and 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, an inclination that in the history of the Church is called **concupiscence**. All of this leads to more pain and suffering in our lives.

But there is 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 had warned Adam about has come true: “From that tree you shall not eat; the moment you eat from it you are surely doomed to die” (Genesis 2:17).

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 had completely perverted human nature and destroyed our freedom to choose right and wrong, and some Protestants today still hold that belief. In response, the Catholic Church more clearly articulated her teaching on God's Revelation. 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.

## Catholic Wisdom

### Conscience

With the gift of God's grace—the free and undeserved help that he gives us to respond to his call—we are still able to know and do what is good despite our fallen state. The *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)*

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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## The Spiritual Battle

The doctrine of Original Sin is behind another important concept in the Scriptures 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 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 has already won the battle through his Passion, death, Resurrection, and Ascension. We just have to decide whose side we are going to be on! †



### 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.

Article

## 7 Satan and the Fallen Angels

The deceiving serpent is introduced 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's horns. This image is taken from Matthew 25:31–46 when Jesus separates the sheep, who are going to Heaven, from the goats, who are



going to Hell. Sometimes Satan is presented as a smooth-talking, well-dressed, but always deceptive businessman. Both of these images tell us something true about Satan. He is a liar and he is dangerous to our spiritual well-being. The danger with the media portrayal of Satan is if it leads us to believe that he is not real. He is 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, chapter 6). This supports what God has revealed through Sacred Tradition. The Devil and his demons are fallen angels. These angels, through their own free choice, totally and completely rejected God and his Reign. Because of this 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 the Scriptures (see “Satan in the Bible” sidebar). By New Testament times, he emerges as God's fierce opponent. Satan is bold enough to tempt Jesus himself at the



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

beginning of Christ's ministry (see Luke 4:1–11). The Devil is even partially responsible for the death of Christ, entering Judas before he betrays Christ (see John 13:27). Early Christians are warned to be on the alert for Satan, who is “prowling around like a roaring lion” (1 Peter 5:8) looking to devour the unwary.

### 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, and Christians have no reason to fear him. Christ has won the 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).

As we await the **Parousia**, Satan continues to have the power to tempt us to sin. But he cannot force us to do anything against our will. We have been given 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 freely made choices of human beings actually cause it. So be on the watch for Satan's temptations, but do not fear him. The power of Christ will protect you from Satan. ✚



#### Parousia

The second coming of Christ at the end of time, fully realizing God's plan and the glorification of humanity.

## Pray It!

### Deliver Us from Evil

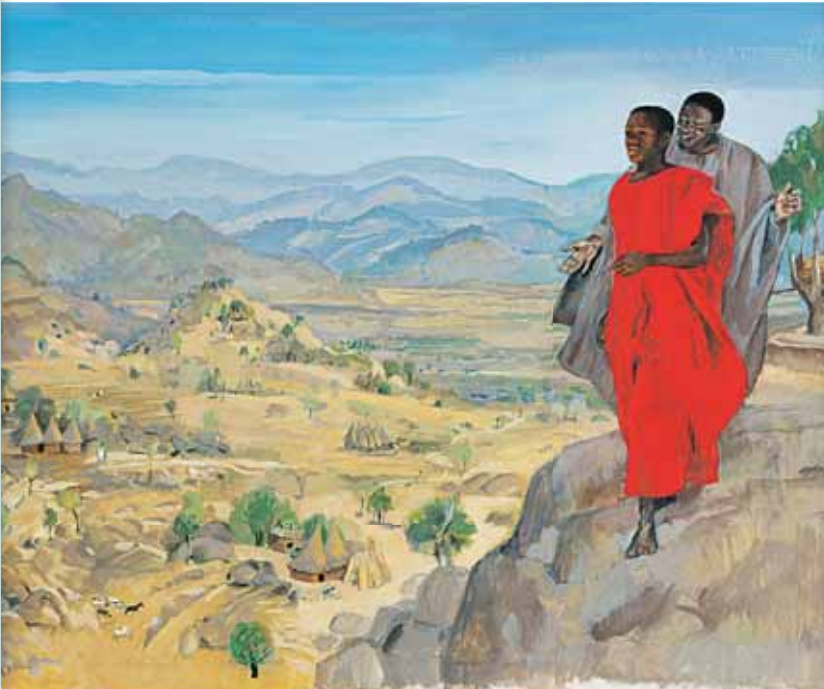
**W**hen thinking of evil, some people often see images of a red creature with horns and a pitchfork. But evil comes in much more real and concrete forms. We sometimes convince ourselves that evil is “out there,” perpetrated by other people, but the truth is that we often participate in evil. It is easy 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.

Jesus taught us to “remove the wooden beam from your eye first; then you will see clearly to remove the splinter from your brother's eye” (Matthew 7:5). Let us prayerfully acknowledge where we have fallen short and ask God to deliver us from . . . gossip . . . cheating . . . addiction . . . greed . . . racism . . . drug abuse . . . bullying . . . pornography . . . hatred . . . abortion . . . lies . . . poverty . . . violence . . . sexual promiscuity . . . selfishness . . . and all the other dark places that lead us away from him.

## Satan in the Bible

Surprisingly to some people, in Satan's earliest appearances in the Bible, he is a member of God's heavenly court. In Hebrew *Satan* literally means "adversary." In the Old Testament, he is referenced only three times: Job, chapters 1 and 2, 1 Chronicles 21:1, and Zechariah 3:1–2. In Job and Zechariah, Satan is portrayed as an angel whose role is to point out to God human sinfulness.

The New Testament has lots of references to Satan (who is also called the Devil and Beelzebul). He tempts Jesus in the desert (see Matthew 4:1–11). Jesus calls him "a murderer from the beginning" and "the father of lies" (John 8:44). He is now understood to represent the powers of evil in the world, the leader of a kingdom of darkness (see Mark 3:23–26), and "the prince of demons" (Luke 11:15). Still later he is pictured as the spiritual power behind the empires that persecuted the Israelites and the early Christians. This is particularly evident in the Book of Revelation where Satan is also symbolized as a dragon (see chapters 12–13 and 20). The different images of Satan in the Bible offer another example of why we must consider all of the Scriptures and Tradition when interpreting a specific Bible passage.



## Part Review

1. How is the loss of Adam and Eve's original holiness and justice symbolically expressed in Genesis, chapter 3?
2. Explain the deeper meaning of Adam and Eve's sin of disobedience.
3. Who is affected by Original Sin? How are they affected?
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 the Scriptures?

# Part 3

## The Path to Restoration

**G**od has a plan for us, and it will not be thwarted. After Adam and Eve's Fall from grace, we continue to see God's new plan revealed through the Scriptures and Tradition. He seeks to restore to humanity what was lost in the Fall. This begins with his promise to our first parents. It continues with the Covenants God makes with Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David. Through the Covenant, God establishes his intent to call a Chosen People to be his light for all the nations. He gives them the Law to teach them how to live in right relationship with him and with one other. Unfortunately, we see the continued impact of Original Sin as the Chosen People fail to keep up their end of the Covenant time and time again. And they suffer many terrible consequences because of their lack of faith.

You might think that God would just give up on us. But God's love, patience, and understanding have no human limits. His prophets tirelessly kept warning, directing, and comforting the Chosen People. Their message contained hints at 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.

The topics covered in this part are:

- Article 8: "God's Promise to Adam and Eve" (page 37)
- Article 9: "The Old Testament Covenants: Part One" (page 41)
- Article 10: "The Old Testament Covenants: Part Two" (page 45)
- Article 11: "Covenant Keeping: Successes and Failures" (page 48)
- Article 12: "The Growing Messianic Hope" (page 53)

Article  
8

## God's Promise to Adam and Eve

After the Fall things seem 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 now, have lost God's gifts of original holiness and justice. Their relationships with God, with each other, and with the earth are 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

When God delivers the consequences of Adam and Eve's disobedience, he says this to the serpent:

I will put enmity between you and the woman,  
and between your offspring and hers;  
He will strike at your head,  
while you strike at his 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



#### literal sense

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

#### spiritual sense

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

## Catholic Wisdom

### O Happy Fault!

Can good come out of evil? During the Easter Vigil, the *deacon* (or a cantor) sings a hymn called the Exultet, which includes the following: O happy fault, that earned so great, so glorious a Redeemer!”

“Happy fault”!? This ironic phrase speaks of the good God gave to us as a result of the sin of the first man and woman. Because humankind was now subject to suffering and sin, God sent his only Son into the world, giving us blessings better than those we had lost.

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
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
"He will strike at your head, while you strike at his heel."	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.



### fratricide

To kill one's own brother or sister.

So even as Adam and Eve are leaving the Garden of Eden, God is already making a promise, a covenant, that he will 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 will restore the original holiness and justice that was lost by Adam and Eve. As the Mother of God, Mary is the first to benefit from Christ's victory over sin. She is conceived without the stain of Original Sin and, with special grace from God, remains free from sin throughout her entire life.

## Sin Increases, 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 keep his plan of salvation going.

### Cain and Abel (Genesis 4:1–16)

Cain and Abel is a story of jealousy and **fratricide**. Adam and Eve's first two sons, Cain and Abel, are symbols of the two primary ways people fed themselves in biblical times: the

shepherds raised animals and the farmers grew crops. Both of them 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.

Again, in this account the inspired biblical author is describing God by way of an imperfect analogy that presents God in human terms, as acting in a human manner. First, he tried to warn Cain not to let sin be his master. And 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 is already taking place.

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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.



### Noah and the Flood (Genesis 6:5—9:17)

The Book of Genesis gives two versions of the generations from Adam to Noah. Humankind has greatly increased in number. And humankind has also greatly increased in sin. God saw how “no desire that [humanity’s] heart conceived was ever anything but evil” (6:5). God had no choice but to begin over again. Fortunately, there was one just man, Noah, and his family. Through Noah and his family, God is able to



continue his promise to save the descendants of Adam and Eve. But God goes one step further this time. He makes an explicit Covenant or promise with Noah and through Noah with all humankind and all creation: "Never again shall all bodily creatures be destroyed by the waters of a flood" (9:11). God marked this promise with a rainbow. God has committed to saving humanity by some different means than by destroying all sinners. His plan continues to be revealed.

### We Gained More Than We Lost

Saint Leo the Great served as Pope from 440–461. These were especially trying times, and Leo protected the Church from a number of heresies. He was a great theologian and homilist and in 1754 was declared a Doctor of the Church. Leo 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, with Whom He lives and reigns in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God forever and ever. Amen." (Sermon 73)

### The Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1–9)

*Babel* is another spelling of *Babylon*, the nation and city where the Israelite leaders were brought as captives. The Babylonians, or more likely their slaves, built tall towers called ziggurats that were the center of politics and religion. During **the Exile**, the Israelites would have remembered these as places of idolatry, the worship of false gods. So the account of the tower of Babel tells about people who tried to make themselves like gods and made god in their own image, something the Israelites had firsthand experience of. Keeping his promise not to destroy all the sinful people with a natural disaster, God instead makes them speak different languages so they cannot understand one another (another etiology). Once again God takes action to keep his plan of salvation in motion.

But something more is needed. Humanity is simply not learning how to be faithful to God. So God will take a more direct approach in his saving plan as the Book of Genesis continues. †



#### Exile, the

The period of the Israelite captivity in Babylon after the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 BC.

#### Paschal Mystery

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

Article

## 9 The Old Testament Covenants: Part One

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 mythology, their deities would never humble themselves to enter into a binding agreement with human beings.

This makes Israel unique. Their covenants are not with other kingdoms but with God. God initiates these covenants and stays faithful to them. Through them he communicates the love he has for humanity and his 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.



### **polytheism**

The belief in many gods.

## The Covenant with Noah

The covenant God made with Noah, and through Noah with the whole human race, was introduced in the previous article. One more thing to consider about this covenant is its universal nature. Directly after God makes this covenant, chapter 10 of Genesis gives a description of how Noah's descendants multiplied to become all the nations of the world: "These are the groupings of Noah's sons, according to their origins and by their nations. From these the other 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 the earth and will remain in force as long as the world lasts.

However, because of sin these nations are always in danger of **polytheism**, which is the false belief in many gods. They are 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 is still at work among these nations. The Bible lifts up several non-Jewish leaders as examples of God's working through other peoples (see the "God-Fearing Gentiles in the Old Testament" sidebar). The covenant with Noah will find its fulfillment in the New Covenant that Jesus Christ extends to all the people of the world.



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

## The Abrahamic Covenant

In chapter 12 of Genesis, the story of Abraham begins. Starting with Abraham, God begins a new phase of his plan to restore humanity's holiness and justice. He does this by calling a Chosen People to be in a unique relationship with him. These people will have a special role in his plan. God establishes this special relationship and its purpose in the

## God-Fearing Gentiles in the Old Testament

The Old Testament names several Gentiles, or non-Jews, who 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 the 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 (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.

Covenant he makes with Abraham. There are several places where God announces 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, verses 2-6:

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 communities of the earth  
shall find blessing in you.

In his Covenant with Abraham, God promises Abraham three things: (1) to make of him a great nation by promising Abraham many descendants, (2) to provide Abraham and his descendants a land of their own, and (3) to make Abraham and his descendants a blessing for all the nations.

The third promise is the most important one in God's saving plan. The first two promises are the necessary preconditions in order for the third promise to be fulfilled. God's plan is for Abraham's descendants, who will 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 asks 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 renames 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 escape many dangerous situations. Their stories show that God is faithful in keeping his Covenant despite human sin and weakness. Original Sin continues to have its effect. The Israelites will come to worship false gods and goddesses and will be guilty of a variety of sins. This is explored more in a later article. But God remains faithful and his will cannot be overcome by human sin and weakness. God's Covenant with Abraham prepares 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. †

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

Article

# 10 The Old Testament Covenants: Part Two

In this article we continue looking at the covenants God made with various people in the Old Testament. Through these covenants God was establishing a 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. He tells the Israelites that they are "a people sacred to the LORD, your God; he has chosen you from all the nations on the face of the earth to be a people peculiarly his own. It was not because you are the largest of all nations 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 fathers" (7:6–7).

## The Mosaic Covenant

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

God summons Moses to the mountaintop and renews with Moses the Covenant he made with Abraham. And he gives Moses a set of laws that the Israelites must 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 old not in the sense of being obsolete, but it is old in the sense that it has been fulfilled in Jesus Christ who is the New Law.

From this point on, the Covenant and the Law are so closely linked that they are understood to be two sides of the same coin. Keeping the Law is the most important sign of faithfulness to the Covenant. Breaking the Law is the same as



### 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.

### theophany

God's breaking into the human dimension so an individual's and community's understanding of God is deepened or changed.

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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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 “teaching.” Through these laws God teaches his Chosen People how to be in right relationship with him and with one another. The Old Law is a step in God’s plan for restoring our original holiness and justice. It will become the rule by which the prophets will measure the faithfulness of the kings and the people.

### The Davidic Covenant

There is one more promise God makes in the Old Testament that can also be called a covenant. This promise is delivered to King David by the prophet Nathan. David wishes to build a permanent dwelling for the **Ark of the Covenant**, the sacred box in which the tablets with the Ten Commandments are kept. God instructs Nathan to tell David not to build this Temple (see 2 Samuel 7:4–13). Instead David’s heir will build it. God then promises David that “your house and your kingdom shall endure forever before me; your throne shall stand firm forever” (verse 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.

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



### 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. It was placed within the sanctuary where God would come and dwell.

## Pray It!

### Frightening Theophanies

When God appears to someone in the movies, it is sometimes presented as a joyous moment. There is a beautiful white light and angels are singing in the background. But in the Bible, more often than not, God’s appearances fill those who experience them with fear at encountering the mystery of God. When God established his Covenant with Abraham, “a deep, terrifying darkness enveloped [Abraham]” (Genesis 15:12). Before Moses received the Ten Commandments, Mount Sinai was “wrapped in smoke” and “trembled violently” (Exodus 19:18). It is almost as if it is 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, who reminds us that “whoever loses his life for my sake and that of the gospel will save it” (Mark 8:35). Amen.



## The Ark of the Covenant

The Ark of the Covenant is described in Exodus 25:10–22. It is to be constructed of precious wood and metal to emphasize its sacred purpose. The tablets containing the Covenant Commandments are to be placed in it. At the top of the Ark, gold statues of two cherubim (angels who serve God) are to be placed with their wings creating a seat. The Ark is to be shaped like a throne, because it will be the seat of God Almighty, King forever.



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Article

## 11 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 have probably covered this history in greater detail in a previous course. In this article we summarize 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, settle in the land of Canaan, they have no central government. They have no king, no high priest, no president. They exist as a **confederation** of tribal groups. When faced with a threat, such as an outside invader, God raises up a hero who rallies one or more tribes in defense of their land. These leaders are called judges, but they are not judges as we have them today. Though they may have settled disputes, they 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 forget the Law and the Covenant again and again. “Abandoning the LORD, the God of their fathers, who had led them out of the land of Egypt, they followed the other gods of the various nations around them, and by their worship of these gods provoked the LORD” (Judges 2:12). God allows them to fall into the hands of their enemies. When they realize their sin and repent and call out to God for deliverance, God raises up a judge to lead the victory against their enemies. Then for a while, the Israelites keep the Covenant before repeating the cycle again.

The Book of Judges shows another step in God’s plan of salvation. God wants his Chosen People to be completely committed to him, which they can do by keeping the Law and the Covenant. As long as they do this, they will not need an intermediary, such as a king, to lead them. But they prove incapable of doing this.

Deborah, the only woman judge of Israel, is depicted with her palm tree (see Judges 4:5).



### confederation

An alliance of tribes or nations with no central authority.

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