

The Talmid



Talmid תלמיד a Hebrew word that means “a true disciple who desires to be what the Rabbi Jesus is.”

Whoever claims to live in Him must walk as Jesus did. 1 John 2:6 (NIV)

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STUDY TO SHEW THYSELF APPROVED UNTO GOD, A WORKMAN THAT NEEDETH NOT TO BE ASHAMED, RIGHTLY
DIVIDING THE WORD OF TRUTH. 2 TIMOTHY 2:15



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DISCIPLESHIP IN AN EVIL DAY (Part 5)

The Great Announcement

“All authority in heaven and on earth has
been given to me.” [Matthew 28:18](#)

Exodus and Conquest

The Gospel and the Kingdom

Jesus possesses all authority in heaven and on earth, but what does that mean for us here and now? This article offers a map of redemptive history, locating our position (“You are here”) and the coordinates for our mission in the world today. What is

Christ’s kingdom and is it here now—and if so, in what sense? Today, on the left and the right, there are interpretations of the kingdom that seem closer to the misunderstanding of Jesus’s contemporaries. Retracing the unfolding plot is vital for understanding the context of the Great Commission.

The Big Map: Exodus and Conquest

“Of course Jesus Christ has all authority in heaven and earth—he’s *God*.” This is true enough, but it is only part of the story. The New Testament attributes this status as much to his *humanity*:

[Philippians 2:8-11 \(NASB\)](#)

⁸ Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

⁹ For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name,

¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

¹¹ and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Similarly, we read in Hebrews that although “we do not yet see everything in subjection to him,” we do “see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus,

crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone” ([Hebrews 2:8-9](#)).

Our Lord has accomplished something in history—in his life, death, resurrection, and ascension—that qualifies him to be the judge and justifier of the ungodly. Jesus is both the Lord of the Covenant who commands and the Servant of the Covenant who fulfills all righteousness and wins for us forgiveness, the new birth, resurrection, and the renewal of the whole creation. As God, he *is* Lord; as human, he **“was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead” ([Romans 1:4](#)).**

Exodus and Conquest in the Old Testament

Starting with Matthew’s Gospel is like walking into a movie in the middle. We have to go back to the Old Testament in order to see the thickening plot of which Jesus Christ is the central character. The exodus-conquest motif unfolds from Genesis to Revelation, but if we do not see how it plays out differently in our era between Christ’s two comings, our interpretation of the church’s mission will be skewed.

In one sense, we can trace the exodus-conquest story all the way back to creation, when God separated the waters to create dry land: a holy place for fellowship with his covenant partner. Taken from **“darkness” and “void” ([Genesis 1:2](#))** to a lavish garden, the world was fashioned into the glorious theater of God’s kingdom. God himself passed through the waters, fulfilling his mission of creating the cosmos, and then entered into his royal enthronement with the earth as his footstool. As God’s viceroy—and our representative head—Adam too was to fulfill his commission and win the right for himself and his posterity to eat from the Tree of Life. Adam and Eve were given the mandate to be fruitful and multiply, to rule and subdue, driving out God’s enemy who would corrupt the garden and tempt God’s covenant partner into rebellion.

Yet the central event in the Old Testament, which reverberates throughout the history of Israel, is the exodus from Egypt. The Song of Moses re-

counts, **“The LORD is a warrior; the LORD is his name. Pharaoh’s chariots and his army he has hurled into the sea” ([Exodus 15:3-4 NIV](#))**. God remembered his covenant oath to Abraham in [Genesis 15](#). The covenant with Abraham was an unconditional pledge. Beyond an earthly seed and land, God promised Abraham and Sarah a seed who would bring everlasting blessing to the families of the earth. Moses too was a beneficiary of this promise, but the covenant that he mediated at Mount Sinai was temporary and conditional. It pertained to the nation of Israel and depended on the nation’s strict observance of the law mediated by Moses.

Between the exodus and conquest lay a vast desert, where God met his people through Moses at Mount Sinai and then on the way to Canaan, where God pitched his tent **“outside the camp” ([Exodus 33:7](#))**. Yet even though they had been eyewitnesses of God’s miraculous deliverance from Egypt, the people continually questioned God’s purposes and Moses’s leadership. Like Adam, they demanded the food they craved instead of relying on God’s Word and Spirit. Consequently, that entire generation—including Moses—was barred from entering the land of Canaan.

Under Joshua, a new generation of Israelites entered the Promised Land, driving out the idolatrous and violent nations against whom God had been storing up his wrath. Again we hear echoes of the original commission given to humanity. Like Adam, Israel is to subdue the enemies of God, driving out the serpent from God’s holy garden, and to participate in God’s just judgment of the nations. Repeatedly, the kingdom of God in the land of Canaan is likened to a feast: eating and drinking with God and each other in a land flowing with milk and honey. [Psalm 68](#) recounts the march of God’s kingdom, from the exodus to the conquest of Canaan.

Eventually, when the temple was also constructed as a more permanent residence, God commanded it to be built with three major areas: the outer court of the Gentiles, the inner court of the Jews, and the Most Holy Place where the high priest entered once a year to offer the atoning sacrifice on the horns of the altar, above the ark of the covenant containing the tablets of the law.

Yet even in the Promised Land, Israel lost the point of the story. [Psalm 78](#) recites this history, moving back and forth between the repeated failures of God’s people and the unfailing faithfulness of the Covenant Lord. In-

stead of allowing the types and shadows of the law to point them to the coming **“Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world”** ([John 1:29](#)), they turned to the idols of the pagans whom they had failed to drive out of the land. **“For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings. But like Adam they transgressed the covenant; there they dealt faithlessly with me”** ([Hosea 6:6–7](#)). Like our own first parents, Israel demanded the food they craved instead of sharing in Yahweh’s feast. On the basis of the oath that Israel swore at Mount Sinai, there is no hope. The prophets are sent as God’s covenant attorneys, prosecuting the case and invoking the sentence: exile from the land. The northern kingdom was taken captive to Assyria, and eventually Judah too was carried off into Babylon. For the end of exile nothing less is required than a faithful Adam, a true Israel, an obedient son.

Exodus and Conquest in the New Testament

Moses prefigured Christ in many ways, but the typology (foreshadowing) is never complete. God gave his law and promises through Moses. When Israel sinned, the mediator could prevail in his plea that God would restrain his wrath for the moment. The elaborate ceremonies and sacrifices that God delivered through Moses provided a temporary **“covering over”** of transgressions. These rites directed Israel’s faith to the true Lamb of God. Yet Moses’s mediatorial ministry was partial and temporary. Neither Moses nor the priests could forgive sins or heal the straying hearts of God’s people. Moses’s ministry was great. However, note what the Word of God has to say:

[Hebrews 3:3 \(NASB\)](#)

³ **For He has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, by just so much as the builder of the house has more honor than the house.**

[Hebrews 3:5-6 \(NASB\)](#)

⁵ **Now Moses was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken later;**
⁶ **but Christ was faithful as a Son over His house—whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our**

hope firm until the end.

An Old Testament **“type”** is like a trailer for a movie. While the Red Sea was a preview, Christ’s cross was the ultimate judgment itself. And unlike Moses and the Israelites, Jesus passed through this sea only by first being drowned in it. Paul even identifies the cross as his Red Sea crossing ([1 Corinthians 10:1–6](#)). But also unlike Moses, Jesus was not barred from entering the Promised Land, but opened the gates of Paradise for his people and entered as their conquering pioneer.

Like Moses and the Israelites, Jesus was tested in the wilderness—his forty days recapitulating Israel’s forty years. Instead of demanding the forbidden fruit (like Adam) or the food he craved (like the unbelieving generation in the wilderness), Jesus answered Satan’s temptation with God’s Word. All of Jesus’s replies to Satan in the temptation ([Matthew 4:1–11](#)) are taken from Moses’s speech in [Deuteronomy 6:13, 16](#); and [Deuteronomy 8:3](#).

After his faithful completion of the trial, enduring temptation and fulfilling all righteousness, Jesus bore our judgment in his own body. And then he was raised by the Father and the Spirit into the Sabbath rest of everlasting glory. This is the **real exodus**, through which the Son **“ransomed for God people from every tribe and language and people and nation”** ([Revelation 5:9](#)). And now, in the last scene of his earthly ministry, Jesus is about to ascend, commencing the **conquest**: this time not merely of a sliver of real estate in Palestine, through the military sword, but of the whole earth, through the sword of his Word and Spirit.

Ascended in Conquest

It is not surprising that if Jesus had to correct the disciples’ misunderstanding of the nature of the real exodus, some serious instruction was necessary on the meaning of the real conquest, to which the conquest under Joshua merely pointed as a type and shadow. The last question the disciples ask Jesus before he ascends is, **“Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?”** ([Acts 1:6](#)) Before we turn to Jesus’s answer, it is important to remind ourselves what was behind their important question.

The Kingdom (Conquest) They Were Expecting

The messianic kingdom of peace is anticipated in many places, especially in [Isaiah 9:11](#); [Isaiah 11:9–10](#); [32](#); and [Micah 5:1](#). The redeemer-king will come from David’s house, enthroned in majesty ([Psalm 47](#); [Psalm 93](#); [Psalm 96](#); [Psalm 97](#); [Psalm 99](#)). Jesus himself appealed to [Daniel 7](#) for his title as Son of Man. God *is* king in status, governing all of history for the ultimate purpose of establishing his universal reign.

However, on the last day he will finally be *acknowledged* as king in all the earth. He will reign not only as Creator, Provider, and Lawgiver but as Redeemer, Judge, and Consummator. Ranking next to the Shema found in [Deuteronomy 6](#) (“**Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God is one ...**”), the *Qaddish* is a Jewish prayer that arose in the Babylonian captivity. It reads,

“Glorified and sanctified be his great name in the world he has created according to his own pleasure. May he establish his royal dominion and start his deliverance of his people, and may he bring his Messiah and redeem his people in the time of your life, and in your days, and in the time of the life of the whole House of Israel, with haste and in a short time; and thou shalt say Amen.”

Jesus knew this prayer well, and the Lord’s Prayer echoes its petitions.

Before and immediately after Jesus, various claimants to the messianic title arose, launching campaigns to drive out the Romans. In fact, even the more moderate Pharisees were trying to get everybody to rededicate themselves to the Mosaic Law in all of its details so that the Messiah could come. However, the problem is that on the basis of the covenant of law that Israel swore at Sinai (“**All this we will do**”), Israel has no hope. On that basis, *Israel* stands condemned, “**in Adam**,” like the rest of the human race.

Nevertheless, the prophets proclaim a “**new covenant**” ([Jeremiah 31:31–34](#)). This is an oath sworn by God rather than by Israel, with his promise to forgive his people and to give them new hearts. God himself will raise “**a righteous Branch**” from David who will be called, “**The LORD is our righteousness**” ([Jeremiah 23:5–6](#)). This new covenant looks back to the promise that God swore to Abra-

ham and forward to the coming of the messianic Son of David, who will judge and save ([Isaiah 40–55](#); [Obadiah 21](#); [Micah 4:3](#); [Zephaniah 3:15](#); [Zechariah 14:16–17](#)). He will regather his scattered sheep, fulfill all righteousness, clothe them in his holiness, forgive all their sins, and make the whole earth the theater of his grace and glory forever. This final act of salvation and judgment will not be a dress rehearsal or type, like the holy wars that God commanded against the idolatrous nations inhabiting Canaan. It won’t be a preview of coming attractions. It will be the real deal. It will result not merely in temporal life and death but in a final and everlasting verdict.

In spite of diverse interpretations of the prophets about the end times, this era of first-century Jewish expectation was dominated by a distinction between “**this age**” (under the reign of sin, death, and oppression) and “**the age to come**” (under the reign of righteousness, resurrection, and peace). Yet these were usually seen as clearly marked eras with an obvious and clean dividing line in history. This age is all exile for the people of God, but in the age to come there is nothing but blessing, righteousness, and peace.

There are two very “**Gentile**” misunderstandings of the kingdom to be avoided here. *At one extreme is the idea of the kingdom as a purely spiritual reality, equivalent to the Greek idea of the immortality of the soul.* In Greco-Roman mythology, virtuous and heroic souls were thought to ascend to the Elysian Fields, and “**salvation**” was the release from the body, which Plato among others called “**the prison house of the soul.**”

There are many similarities between Eastern and Western versions of this story. This vision of the “**afterlife**” has been a tough habit to break in the West. For many of our neighbors—perhaps even Christians—the kingdom of heaven is a place of disembodied bliss, with images of angels playing harps and bouncing from cloud to cloud. Salvation becomes equivalent to “**going to heaven.**” The phrase “**passing away**” has become part of our vocabulary even as Christians, although it was introduced by Christian Science founder Mary Baker Eddy. Death is not real—or at least it is not an ominous threat but the portal to liberation from this world.

The biblical story line is radically different. It speaks of the kingdom of heaven not as an escape from this world but as a completely new form of existence for

the world and its inhabitants. Except for the Sadducees, most Jews in Jesus's day expected the coming kingdom as a total renewal of creation: the resurrection of the body, global peace and justice, fertile vineyards and lavish banquets. The contrast is not between this **"lower world"** of matter, time, and space and the **"upper world"** of timeless spirit but between **"this age"** (dominated by sin and death) and **"the age to come"** (dominated by righteousness and life).

These categories—*this age* and *the age to come*—were widely employed in Jesus's day, and he and his apostles drew on them explicitly ([Matthew 12:32](#); [Matthew 24:3](#); [1 Corinthians 2:6](#); [Galatians 1:4](#)). It is a new creation, a new covenant, and a new heavens and earth that is promised in the new age. In fact, in the **book of Revelation (especially chapter 21)**, not only do the kingdom's horizontal boundaries between nations disappear; so too does the vertical boundary between heaven and earth. Finally, God will dwell in the midst of his people as their source, center, and circumference. There will be justice and peace. The lion will lie down with the lamb, and warriors will beat their swords into plowshares.

In the New Testament, death is a tragedy—the result of sin. Yet all who trust in Christ will be raised in the likeness of his glorified body to eat and drink forever in the presence of God. God guards the souls of his saints upon their death, but, in the words of the Apostles' Creed, the ultimate hope of salvation is **"the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting"** in a renewed creation (see [Romans 8:23–24](#)). Death is neither unreal nor a natural stage of life. It is a curse for breaking God's law—the ultimate exile. Only in Jesus's exodus from the waters of judgment can we be brought safely into the age to come.

At the other extreme is the idea of the kingdom as merely the moral development of the human race toward a world of love, peace, and justice. This view, often associated with the Enlightenment and Protestant liberalism, assimilates the radically God-centered vision of the prophets to the human-centered march of enlightened progress. However secularized, this vision is in many ways a legacy of **"Christendom."** If the first **"Gentile"** mistake is to

imagine an escape from this world through the soul's ascent, this second error identifies the kingdom with the gradual ascent of humanity toward a kingdom of love, justice, and righteousness.

For the prophets, it was **God's kingdom**—descending from heaven, not evolving on earth. It would bring a final heavenly judgment to the earth, resulting in everlasting life and death. God's claim on the whole earth was even more comprehensive than that of Alexander the Great and Rome's emperors, but only God could actually bring it about. The happiness and flourishing of humanity and the rest of creation is the result, but God's glory is the motive and the goal. Forgiven and renewed, the heirs participate in the advance of this kingdom. Nevertheless, its saving realities are brought to earth directly by God, not attained by human striving.

The prophets proclaimed the forgiveness of sins, the granting of new birth, and the gathering of a remnant from all nations to Zion together with the resurrection of the dead, the final judgment, and entrance into the heavenly Sabbath as *one event*. Yet "double fulfillment" is a characteristic of biblical prophecies. Kim Riddlebarger has compared it to driving to the mountains. From the valley floor, it looks like there is one range, but as you get closer you recognize multiple peaks, each behind the other. Salvation and judgment indeed form one event, but in two distinct stages. As we see below, Jesus himself distinguished between aspects of his kingdom that are already present and its consummation yet in the future.

Jesus's disciples, apparently like John and his disciples, interpreted Christ's ministry within the exodus-conquest plot. Though less radical than the revolutionary zealots, the Pharisees were calling all Israelites to radical recommitment to the Mosaic Law in all of its details so that Messiah could come. This included ratcheting up the purity laws, barring everything unclean from the temple: anyone sick, handicapped, or diseased, and certainly all moral outcasts.

Into this environment came the last of the old-covenant prophets, John the Baptist, preparing the way for the Messiah out in the desert. However, John was not preaching revolution—the overthrow of the Romans. Instead, he was warning of the imminent judgment of Israel, preaching, **"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand"** ([Matthew 3:2](#)). Clearly, he was not

simply warning them that they needed to ask Jesus into their heart before they died; nor was he inviting them to participate in making the world a kinder, gentler place.

Like the prophets, John announced an imminent judgment *on earth*, but *from heaven*. While welcoming repentant outcasts—even prostitutes—John rebuked the religious leaders for their smug reliance on their pedigree as the descendants of Abraham and announced imminent judgment—even within the household of Israel ([Matthew 3:9–10](#)). **“I baptize you with water for repentance,”** John declares, **“but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire”** ([Matthew 3:11–12](#)).

This kingdom has not yet arrived but is *near*, John announces. It is time for all of Israel to mourn over its unfaithfulness to the covenant and to be prepared for the Messiah’s arrival. This kingdom that is **“at hand”** is nothing less than the advent of **“the wrath to come”** ([Matthew 3:2, 7](#)). Judgment begins in the house of the Lord, with the arrival of the one who will baptize with the Spirit (salvation) and with fire (condemnation).

Then one day, the Messiah came to the Jordan River to be baptized by John, and the Spirit descended as a dove and the Father declared from heaven, **“This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased”** ([Matthew 3:17](#)).

So it is hardly any wonder that John the Baptist would have expected *all of this* to happen in his lifetime, or at least in the earthly ministry of Jesus. Yet as time wore on, Jesus’s ministry seemed to fall short of John’s expectations. If Jesus is the Messiah, why has the resurrection of the dead and the last judgment not yet taken place? Why is Herod still on his throne, along with his equally wicked queen who has demanded John’s beheading? In prison awaiting his execution, John sent his disciples with a provocative question: **“Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?”** ([Matthew 11:3](#)). In

other words, **“Just let us know now if we’ve been putting our hopes on the wrong messiah.”**

Jesus answered, **“Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is the one who is not offended by me”** ([Matthew 11:4–6](#)). Jesus turned to the crowd and spoke concerning John the Baptist. No prophet has arisen greater than John, he said. **“Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he”** ([Matthew 11:11](#)). Jesus added, **“From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force”** ([Matthew 11:12](#)).

The coming **“wrath of God”** of which John spoke is not a replay of the holy wars that God commanded in Israel’s conquest. Just when it seemed that the crowds were ready to renew the Sinai covenant, Jesus gave them a different sheet of music. Jesus’s reply—namely, that the gospel is preached to the poor, with various healings as its validating signs—hardly seemed to qualify as the cosmic renewal that was promised by the prophets. Yet this seems to be exactly the character of the kingdom in its present phase.

In his first coming, Jesus is the Suffering Servant who fulfills all righteousness and bears the curse. His resurrection is the dawn of the age to come, as he is made the **“firstfruit”** of the raised and glorified saints. However, only in his second coming will there be a consummation of the kingdom’s blessings. All of the dead will be raised, the Messiah will take his throne for the last judgment, and he will welcome his sheep into the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world. When he comes again in judgment, the campaigns of Joshua will pale in comparison with **“the wrath of the Lamb”** ([Revelation 6:16](#)). Yet *for now* it is a kingdom of grace, as Christ gathers a people through the Spirit for the everlasting feast.

This is precisely what stumped everyone, including his own disciples. Jesus comes, proclaiming the forgiveness of sins as the message of his kingdom, and nobody seems to be happy. Explaining the differences between John’s **“forerunner”** ministry and his own, Jesus says (it seems with some frustration),

Matthew 11:16-19 (NASB)

¹⁶“But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the market places, who call out to the other *children*,

¹⁷and say, ‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.’

¹⁸“For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon!’

¹⁹“The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Behold, a gluttonous man and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.”

John came with the message of imminent judgment, with the deportment of a lamenting prophet, while “**the Son of Man came eating and drinking.**” Jesus comes with the gospel of forgiveness. The groom arrives for his wedding feast, dressing his bride in festive garments ([Matthew 22:1–14](#)). However, the one is too gloomy and the other is too joyful. The bad news can’t be *that* bad and the good news can’t be *that* good. Nobody seems to be up for either a funeral or a party!

Through his preaching and deeds, Jesus had inspired his followers to anticipate the imminent consummation of the kingdom. The disciples had missed the point of Jesus’s journey throughout his ministry. The mother of James and John asked Jesus if her sons could sit on Jesus’s right and left when he comes in his kingdom, but Jesus replied that she didn’t know what she was asking: namely, that they be crucified on his left and right ([Matthew 20:21–22](#)).

Every time Jesus brings up his death and resurrection, Peter tries to change the subject and Jesus rebukes him ([Matthew 16:21–28](#); [Matthew 20:17–28](#); [Matthew 26:30–35](#)). Although Jesus said, “**For this purpose [his death] I have come to this hour**” ([John 12:27](#)), the disciples were still thinking of a kingdom of power and glory. The symbol of failure rather than triumph, the cross was the last thing on their minds. They fled his crucifixion in fear and despair: “**We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel**” ([Luke 24:21](#)).

Yet on this same Emmaus road (in [Luke 24](#)), Jesus proclaims himself from all the Scriptures, and

the disciples recognize him as their resurrected Lord in the breaking of the bread. Now they understand the real meaning of the *exodus*, but surely the *conquest* would finally mean the overthrow of the Romans and the restoration of Israel. Yet at this very moment, their “**Joshua**” announces his departure. Right up to the moment of Jesus’s ascension, the last question that his own disciples ask him is, “**Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?**” ([Acts 1:6](#))

CORAM DEO (Before the face of God)

Where is God?”

My faith seemed like a burden, and the uncertain future appeared to be a dead end. And God was silent. Or if he was speaking and guiding, it was not apparent to me.

Our church facilities were foreclosed on and the congregation was split in numerous directions. I felt the weight of providing for my family. I knew I was supposed to trust God, but struggled with a sense of panic.

At one point I sensed a burning urge rising within me that seemed to say, ***You aren’t doing what you know.*** Whether that “**urge**” came from God or my own insight I don’t know. But it was right on target.

I had practiced quiet times for years, but in the crises of the past months they had become occasional and haphazard. So I renewed my commitment and set aside time in my schedule. No immediate deliverance came, although eventually God opened doors for me. What did happen was that I became able to believe that the God who brought me across this great divide could get me back. God was there after all.

I need quiet times because I need God. He is the one who makes sense of life for me, in times of crisis or calm. **J. I. Packer** writes, “The world becomes a strange, mad, painful place and life in it a disappointing and unpleasant business, for those who do not know God. Disregard the study of God and you sentence yourself to stumble through life blindfolded, as it were, with no sense of direction and no understanding of what surrounds you. This way you can waste your life and lose your soul.”

In my quiet time I find the knowledge of God that makes sense of life. A quiet time is like a looking glass, a sort of magic mirror that lets me look into the deeper dimensions of life. Through the mirror I am able to see the reality of God's presence. I can look not only at God but also at myself. Without that mirror God seems distant, and I tend to lose my Christian perspective on the world around me.

I need the mirror of a quiet time to be a normal Christian. It's like the mirror in the bathroom. I suppose I could shave without it, but a few whiskers here and there would be left uncut, and numerous razor nicks would appear. I also need the mirror on the dresser to make sure that my shirt is tucked in right and that my tie (when I wear one) is straight.

I need the mirror of a quiet time to show me that God is really present in my life. As a Christian I *believe* that he is. But my *experience* of spiritual reality tends to vary. Like most Americans, I have been conditioned to believe that my personal value depends on my productivity. Who has time to think about God when there is so much to do? As I look at my life in the mirror of my quiet time, I feel God's presence. I continue to be busy but feel less driven.

I also need the mirror to look into the depths of my soul. The lintel above the ancient Greek oracle in Delphi bore the words "**Know Thyself.**" A quiet time helps me do that. When I practice the discipline of a quiet time, I am able to look beneath my own surface. Who am I? What forces have shaped me? What needs, desires and fears direct me? Is God really at work within?

But looking in the mirror can also be threatening and uncomfortable. I have experienced quiet times when buried thoughts, motivations and unwanted emotions suddenly rose up. This scared me so much once that I stopped having quiet times for a while. Finally I picked up the mirror again because looking in it was the only way to get to the other side of my fears. In the presence of God the deep pains that surfaced were changed, cleansed and transformed. Most of all, I grew in the knowledge of God. Like Job I was able to say what I couldn't have said before: "**My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you**" ([Job 42:5](#))



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Hebrews 8 – Overview – Part 1

This study begins the overview of [Hebrews 8](#), and once again we want to simply look at the key elements of a chapter. In a very simple overview, [Hebrews 7](#) is about a better priesthood and a better High Priest, [Hebrews 8](#) is about a better covenant, and [Hebrews 9-10](#) is about a better sacrifice. It is important not to lose focus of what was actually taking place with these Hebrews. During the early days of the development of the church, there was an enormous religious and spiritual transition that the new believers had to make. It is important to appreciate that even though believers today may have a fairly full understanding of how the church is to operate and function, there was still much to be learned by these Hebrew Christians. The majority of them did not have the completed New Testament, and even if they had had it, it did not mean that they fully understood it all or even how to implement all of it into their life. They had genuine faith in Christ and many were willing to suffer for His name, but that did not mean that they fully understood everything about the Christian life. It appears that many of them apparently still wanted to incorporate much of their Jewish heritage into how the church functioned. Please remember that the Temple was still standing and the sacrifices were still continuing. All of this still had a very strong cultural and historical magnetism on them and was often very difficult to fully let go. It is easy to just imagine with all of the persecution

that was taking place that if someone did not have a strong commitment to their salvation in Christ that they might find themselves wavering between following Christ or following Judaism.

So, what that the author is doing is trying to convince them that everything concerning Christ is better than everything they had previously known. He was better than the angels, better than Moses, better than Aaron, and the covenant in His blood was better than the incessant sacrifices that were still taking place in the temple with absolutely no salvific merit whatsoever. [Colossians 2:16-17](#) declares that all they had known was just a shadow of things to come.

¹⁶So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, ¹⁷which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.

Obviously the law, the religious rituals, and the sacrifices all had a role to play in the life of Israel, but still they were not able to save. Their role was temporary and ineffective at best. Christ, however, transformed that which was a “shadow” into a real spiritual substance. [Hebrews 9:11](#) declares,

¹¹But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation.

[Hebrews 9:24](#) further declares,

²⁴For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us;

So, everything that the Jews had previously known was just a “shadow” and a “copy” of that which was to come. The law simply served as a “schoolmaster” to bring them to Christ. [Galatians 3:24-25](#) declares,

²⁴Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith.

²⁵But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.

If everything else associated with the laws given to the Jews is examined – the tabernacle, the temple, the sacrifices, the various feast days, the different services within the temple, and all of the various ceremonies – each of them were ultimately designed to point to the person of Jesus Christ. So, once this was done, they were then to be become “obsolete” and “vanish away”. Everything had finally been accomplished and consummated in the glorious person of Christ.

Now, in looking at [Hebrews 8](#) from a very simple overview perspective, there are no key verbs or imperative verbs. Once again this reveals that this chapter is mostly doctrinal in content. I.e., there is not one word of actual exhortation in this chapter. In fact, there are no reproofs, no warnings, no promises, and no historical narratives. There are two quotations from the Old Testament – [Hebrews 8:5](#) and [Hebrews 8:8-12](#). There is only one “therefore” that forces us to look back to what was previously said. One of the key terms of Hebrews is the term “High Priest” (with capital letters) and in [Hebrews 8](#) it is found only in [Hebrews 8:1](#). The term is simply a continuation of what the author has been talking about all along. The following verses below designate Jesus Christ as the “High Priest”. Please remember that even though this may not be a familiar term to us personally because we do not have “high priests” that function as they did in the Old Testament, the high priest was the central figure of the Hebrew religion. Everything revolved around his role.

[Hebrews 2:17](#),

¹⁷Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

[Hebrews 3:1](#),

¹Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus

[Hebrews 4:14-15](#),

¹⁴Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. ¹⁵For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.

[Hebrews 5:5,](#)

⁵So also Christ did not glorify Himself to become High Priest, *but it was He who said to Him: “You are My Son, today I have begotten You.”*

[Hebrews 5:10,](#)

¹⁰called by God as High Priest “according to the order of Melchizedek,

[Hebrews 6:20,](#)

²⁰where the forerunner has entered for us, *even Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.*

[Hebrews 7:26,](#)

²⁶For such a High Priest was fitting for us, *who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens*

[Hebrews 8:1,](#)

¹Now *this is* the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens

[Hebrews 9:11,](#)

¹¹But Christ came *as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation*

[Hebrews 10:21,](#)

²¹and *having a High Priest over the house of God*

So, even though the words “**High Priest**” are only used once in this chapter, they maintain the continuity of what the author expresses as his “**main point**” throughout the letter, and he expresses this in [Hebrews 8:1-2](#) when he says,

¹Now *this is* the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, ²a Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man.

This issue of Christ now being the “**High Priest**” is the “**main point**” of what the author has been saying. Some people think the main element has to do with the warnings. Some people think that the main point is about the “**faith**” of [Hebrews 11](#). The “**main point**” and the chief truth that is being stated, however, is about Jesus Christ now being the believer’s “**High Priest**” – something that most of believers do not relate to very well. So, if this one point is missed, then it is more than possible to miss the primary meaning of the entire letter. Just think about that for a few moments and let it sink in. Whether this is easy to grasp or not, this is incredibly important for the believer’s personal Christian life. We have a “**High Priest**” who is interceding for us. Why? It is because our life needs His intercession. We may think that we are strong, but apart from Christ we are not strong. We may think that we are smart, but apart from Christ we have no wisdom whatsoever. Every area of our life – our personal life, our family life, our financial life, our business life, our church life, our relational life with others – every area needs Christ’s intercession. This cannot be overemphasized enough. The problem that we all have much too often is that we have learned how to live without Christ. We have learned how to live without seeking Him and His presence in our life. We have learned how to live without seeking His strength, without seeking His guidance, and without seeking His wisdom for the decisions that we make. We have learned, as these Hebrews had, how to be outwardly religious without ever inwardly drawing near to God. The tragedy of this is monumental.

Now in looking at [Hebrews 8](#) from an overview perspective, there is one very major issue that is very important to grasp. It is the issue of [Hebrews 8](#). If we were to do a careful reading of [Hebrews 8](#) in trying to understand what it is saying, at the very outset there should be two things that just jump off of the page. First, it is the use of the word “**covenant**” and secondly it is the fact that nearly half of the chapter is a quote from the Old Testament. So, what is the issue? Well, it is answering the question as to whom the “**covenant**” from [Jeremiah 31](#) given in [Hebrews 8:8-12](#) is actually referring. Is it only to Israel, is it only to the church, or is it actually to both? That is the key doctrinal issue that has to be answered. Once again, if it only applies to Israel, then for the most part we as New Testament Christians can almost ignore it.

In understanding the biblical prophecies given in the Old Testament, it needs to be appreciated that they often have multiple applications in different timeframes. Very often they have an immediate fulfillment, but they can also have a future fulfillment. Sometimes they may be fulfilled by one entity, and then later by another. Please be assured that there are and always have been several views related to the actual fulfillment of these verses in [Hebrews 8:8-12](#). For instance, the amillennialists believe that the church replaces Israel, and so for them this covenant is thus given to the church and fulfilled by the church. The dispensationalist view states that the covenant is only for the nation of Israel and will be fulfilled at the Second Coming when all of Israel will be saved. A third view is that this is actually two covenants – one for Israel and one for the church.

My personal understanding is that there is one covenant spoken of in these verses which God will one day ultimately fulfill in Israel, but it is still a covenant that the church now participates in regarding its spiritual blessings and benefits in salvation. I.e., the church is already experiencing the benefits of the new covenant – and it should. Based on [Hebrews 8:13](#), it appears that the verses quoted have to have a dual meaning. It would not make sense for the author to be writing to these Hebrew Christians that the “**old covenant**” was going to become “**obsolete**” and “**vanish away**”, but then they would have to wait for nearly 2000 years plus for that to happen and for it to have any meaningful value for them. What would be the value in that for them? I.e., they would not be around to enjoy the blessings, so why even mention the issue? For the most part it would have absolutely no encouraging value for them whatsoever. It would be like someone telling you that you had inherited ten million dollars, but it would be 2000 years before you would actually receive it. So, from that perspective, the issue of the “**old covenant**” going to become “**obsolete**” and “**vanish away**” had to be something that was taking place in the immediate future of these Hebrews – and it actually happened in about five years from the time the letter was written.

However, it is clear that these things will happen to the nation of Israel at the Second Coming of Christ.

There are several places that help us understand this. For instance, [Romans 11:26-27](#) speaking of Israel says,

²⁶**And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: “The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; ²⁷For this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins.”**

So, when is it that “all Israel will be saved”? Well, obviously it has not happened yet and is still in the future. We know that it will not be during the Tribulation or during the Millennium, but rather will be at the Second Coming of Christ.

[Jeremiah 23:5-6](#) reiterates the same when it says,

⁵**“Behold, *the* days are coming,” says the LORD, “That I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; A King shall reign and prosper, and execute judgment and righteousness in the earth. ⁶In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell safely; now this *is* His name by which He will be called: THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.**

Well, certainly we can say with some high level of understanding that Israel surely does not “**dwell safely**” today. They may be the most hated nation on the planet. So, when will that be? Well, it does not happen during the Tribulation, but will happen at the Second Coming when Jesus Christ sets up His earthly throne in Jerusalem. Almost the identical same thing is stated in [Jeremiah 33:16](#). [Matthew 24 and 25](#) speak of the same events regarding Israel at the end of the Tribulation and the separation of the sheep and the goats.

So what this understanding should do is to help us appreciate that the author is writing to these Hebrew Christians in their current condition, and he fully wants them to appreciate the value of their coming under the “**new covenant**”. The Scriptures do not speak of two new and different covenants (one for Israel and one for the church) any more than it speaks of two old covenants. So, who these latter verses in [Hebrews 8](#) refer to is the primary theological issue that has to be resolved – Israel, the church, or both. My understanding is that its primary reference is to Israel for two different times in her history – first in 70AD when the “**old covenant**”

was abolished with the destruction of Israel and secondly at the Second Coming when all of Israel will be saved. It does appear from a purely spiritual perspective that it also has a fulfillment for the church, and is one that the church now participates in regarding spiritual blessings and the benefits of salvation.

The most repeated word in [Hebrews 8](#) is the word “**covenant**”. It is used seven (7) different times between [Hebrews 8:6-13](#). Jesus is said to be the “**Mediator of a better covenant**” in [Hebrews 8:6](#). In [Hebrews 8:7](#) it refers to the “**first covenant**”. In [Hebrews 8:8 and 13](#) it refers to a “**new covenant**”. In [Hebrews 8:9](#) it is called “**My covenant**”. However, the most significant statement made about these “**covenants**” is found in [Hebrews 8:13](#) when it states that God has made the first covenant “**obsolete**” and that it is “**becoming obsolete and growing old**” and “**is ready to vanish away**”. For a people who had based their entire spiritual existence on these various “**covenants**” that God had made with them, this was not just some small change or adjustment that was being declared. This was a monumental change that many of them were having great difficulty accepting.

Just think about this for a moment. In the Old Testament, the ark was actually called the “**ark of the covenant**” because it held the tablets that had the Ten Commandments on them. In fact, the tablets were actually referred to as the “**tables of the covenant**”. Remember that the covenants were what established a relationship between God and those to whom He gave the covenant. To make it even more meaningful, God’s blessings were directly associated with the “**ark of the covenant**”. The Israelites victories in war were linked to the “**ark of the covenant**” going into battle with them. In [Numbers 14:44-45](#) it says,

⁴⁴**But they presumed to go up to the mountaintop. Nevertheless, neither the ark of the covenant of the LORD nor Moses departed from the camp.**

⁴⁵**Then the Amalekites and the Canaanites who dwelt in that mountain came down and attacked them, and drove them back as far as Hormah.**

Probably the most significant chapter relative to what God thought about people who stole the “**ark of God**” is found in [1 Samuel 5](#). This is worth reading just so that we gain a better understanding of the value that God Himself placed on the ark of the covenant.

¹**Then the Philistines took the ark of God and brought it from Ebenezer to Ashdod. ²When the Philistines took the ark of God, they brought it into the house of Dagon and set it by Dagon. ³And when the people of Ashdod arose early in the morning, there was Dagon, fallen on its face to the earth before the ark of the LORD. So they took Dagon and set it in its place again. ⁴And when they arose early the next morning, there was Dagon, fallen on its face to the ground before the ark of the Lord. The head of Dagon and both the palms of its hands *were* broken off on the threshold; only Dagon’s torso was left of it. ⁵Therefore neither the priests of Dagon nor any who come into Dagon’s house tread on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod to this day.**

⁶But the hand of the Lord was heavy on the people of Ashdod, and He ravaged them and struck them with tumors, both Ashdod and its territory. ⁷And when the men of Ashdod saw how *it was*, they said, “The ark of the God of Israel must not remain with us, for His hand is harsh toward us and Dagon our god.” ⁸Therefore they sent and gathered to themselves all the lords of the Philistines, and said, “What shall we do with the ark of the God of Israel?”

And they answered, “Let the ark of the God of Israel be carried away to Gath.” So they carried the ark of the God of Israel away. ⁹So it was, after they had carried it away, that the hand of the LORD was against the city with a very great destruction; and He struck the men of the city, both small and great, and tumors broke out on them.

¹⁰**Therefore they sent the ark of God to Ekron. So it was, as the ark of God came to Ekron, that the Ekronites cried out, saying, “They have brought the ark of the God of Israel to us, to kill us and our people!” ¹¹So they sent and gathered together all the lords of the Philistines, and said, “Send away the ark of the God of Israel, and let it go back to its own place, so that it does not kill us and our people.” For there was a deadly destruction throughout all the city; the hand of God was**

very heavy there. ¹²And the men who did not die were stricken with the tumors, and the cry of the city went up to heaven.

Obviously, the “**ark of God**” which carried the tablets of stone with the Ten Commandments in them was not something to be handled improperly. There were deadly consequences as to how people treated that which was sacred. It is important to not lose perspective relative to this issue of just casually disregarding and treating the sacred things of God with disrespect. Just at a personal level, it seems that there is a primary difference between someone committing some sin in their life versus their treating something that is sacred in a profane way.

Not long ago someone sent me a YouTube video from a church where a pastor was getting ready to perform a baptism for a young teenage boy. However, rather than just entering into the baptismal pool, the young boy did a cannonball right into the pool. I was stunned! This should have been a sacred event in the life of this young man, but it had become a joke for all of his friends. And you know what happened? The entire church started laughing and kept on laughing. For some reason they seemed to think this was amusing, just kids being kids, just a moment of humor. However, what the young boy did was actually reveal a much deeper problem in the church – a complete disrespect for that which was sacred. I did not laugh, nor did I think it was even funny. I was appalled at the young boy for doing what he did. It was completely irreverent and profane. However I was even more shocked and stunned at the church for continuing to laugh. It was almost as if they were giving their approval. There should have been a dead silence, and someone should have escorted the young boy out of the church and not even consider letting him back into the church until there was a deep level of personal contrition and public repentance for treating something so sacred with such disrespect.

We live in a cultural period of the church where almost anything goes. It seems that people can teach almost anything that they want, demean the things of God in the process, and actually find a high level of approval and support for so doing. There is a

man who pastors a church in Grapevine Texas right outside of Dallas that regularly has nearly 20,000 in attendance each week for its Sunday service. He was doing a series on marriage, and in one of the Sunday services created a bedroom scene on the stage of the church auditorium and began to demonstrate with his wife what to do in the bedroom. It was called a “Sexperiment – 7 Days to Intimacy”. Then, to make it even worse, the pastor and his wife spent 24 hours in bed on the roof of their church and had live videos and were Skyping with people answering their questions related to sex. I wonder if Jesus would have approved. I do not think so. There was something biblically profane in what was taking place. There is absolutely not one single thing in Scripture that would even accommodate this kind of disparaging treatment of the pulpit. This is a form of spiritual profanity at best.

2 Timothy 4:3-4 says,

³For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, *because they have itching ears*, they will heap up for themselves teachers; ⁴and they will turn *their ears away from the truth*, and be turned aside to fables.

2 Timothy 2:16, speaking of that which is profane, says,

¹⁶But shun profane *and* idle babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness.

All of what has been described is what falls under **1 Timothy:4:1** when it says,

¹Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons,

Believers simply cannot treat that which is sacred in a profane way. Remember that the strongest warning in Hebrews occurs in **Hebrews 10:29** and deals with this same issue of mishandling that which is sacred,

²⁹Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?

What believers need is a heart like David had. It was David who wanted to build the temple. Why? He said

that it was because the “ark of the covenant” was still dwelling in a tent. [1 Chronicles 17:1](#) says,

¹Now it came to pass, when David was dwelling in his house, that David said to Nathan the prophet, “See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of the covenant of the LORD is under tent curtains.

In the Old Testament, a covenant had profound implications and was the most solemn, binding, and intimate contract known in the Bible. In fact, a covenant was the most permanent and binding union that two parties could possibly make. One of the problems in our Christian culture is that “covenants” no longer have the same significance that they carried in Scripture. People make promises and they break promises. People make vows and they break vows. It is no big thing. Corporations and their corporate officers steal life savings from those who faithfully worked for them. Nothing seems to be sacred anymore. However, in the ancient world and in the biblical setting a biblical covenant was extremely sacred and was the most binding agreement and pact that could be made between two parties, and in some cases was actually punishable by death if broken. A covenant was much more than just a mutual agreement between two parties. It denoted an irrevocable decision that could not be broken or cancelled by anyone. So, a covenant was not something that someone would just lightly enter into – not at all.

Just think of the “new covenant” that Jesus made on the night that He was arrested and tried. It was a binding, irrevocable covenant that He was making for His people. The “new covenant” in [Hebrews 8:13](#) clearly had to do with redemption and salvation, and because of that it had to be binding and irrevocable or we would have no hope whatsoever. How could a meaningful and lasting salvation be based on someone who always broke their promises? In [Matthew 26:28](#), Jesus made this statement,

²⁸For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission (or forgiveness) of sins.

In fact, many covenants made during the Old Testament times were confirmed by what was known as a “walk of death”. [Genesis 15](#) speaks of one of these and how God made a covenant with Abram. What is described in [Genesis 15](#) was not at all unusual simply because this was the way that a covenant was often confirmed and authenticated. [Genesis 15:9-10](#) and [Genesis 15:17-18 \(a\)](#) give a description of how this means of making a covenant was actually performed.

⁹So He said to him, “Bring Me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old female goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtledove, and a young pigeon.”

¹⁰Then he brought all these to Him and cut them in two, down the middle, and placed each piece opposite the other; but he did not cut the birds in two.

¹⁷And it came to pass, when the sun went down and it was dark, that behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a burning torch that passed between those pieces. ¹⁸On the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram,

What happened here is that the sacrificial animals were cut in half and the two pieces were laid opposite one another and the individuals who were making a covenant with each other would walk between the two pieces of the animal. This walk represented the so-called walk into death indicating the covenant partner’s commitment to die to their personal independence and forevermore live for their covenant partner and to faithfully discharge the stipulations of their covenant. To not uphold your part of the covenant was a very serious violation. In [Jeremiah 34:18-22](#) there is a description of how God would discipline those who actually broke one of these covenants.

¹⁸And I will give the men who have transgressed My covenant, who have not performed the words of the covenant which they made before Me, when they cut the calf in two and passed between the parts of it—¹⁹the princes of Judah, the princes of Jerusalem, the eunuchs, the priests, and all the people of the land who passed between the parts of the calf—²⁰I will give them into the hand of their enemies and into the hand of those who seek their life. Their dead bodies shall be for meat for the birds of the heaven and the beasts of the earth. ²¹And I will give Zedekiah king of Judah and his princes into the hand of their enemies, in-

to the hand of those who seek their life, and into the hand of the king of Babylon's army which has gone back from you. ²²Behold, I will command,' says the LORD, 'and cause them to return to this city. They will fight against it and take it and burn it with fire; and I will make the cities of Judah a desolation without inhabitant.'”

NOTES

This was a covenant made concerning the honoring of the covenant that God had made when He brought His people out of Egypt ([Jeremiah 34:12-16](#)), and the covenant “walk into death” was so serious that if either one of the covenant partners broke the covenant, God could take their life even as had been done to the sacrificial animal. The covenant was a pledge to death if either party broke the covenant. It was the killing of the animal that confirmed that each party fully understood the consequences, and it was the death of the animal by the shedding of its blood that demonstrated the severity of the commitment if violated. Covenants were binding for life. Both the old covenants of the Old Testament and the “**new covenant**” of the New Testament were initiated and established with blood. That is one of the truths that believers remember when they take the Lord's Supper – that His covenant with them was initiated and established with the shedding of His precious blood.

ENDNOTES

¹Precept.

²Precept.

³Precept.

⁴Precept.

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