

# He Gave Us Scripture: Foundations of Interpretation

LESSON  
NINE

MODERN APPLICATION &  
THE NEW COVENANT  
DISCUSSION FORUM



THIRD MILLENNIUM  

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# He Gave Us Scripture: Foundations of Interpretation

## Lesson Nine: Modern Application & The New Covenant

### Discussion Forum

With

Dr. Jimmy Agan  
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Dr. P. J. Buys  
Dr. Gary Cockerill  
Dr. Howard Eyrich

Rev. Michael J. Glodo  
Dr. Ghassan Khalaf  
Dr. Jonathan T. Pennington  
Dr. Robert L. Plummer  
Dr. Philip Ryken

Dr. Paul Sanders  
Dr. Stephen J. Wellum  
Dr. Sanders L. Willson

### Question 1:

**How did New Testament authors interpret Old Testament themes in light of Christ's first and second comings?**

Most New Testament authors grew up hearing the Old Testament taught in their synagogues. This teaching played an integral part in the culture of their day. But with the coming of Christ, much of the Old Testament instruction took on a whole new significance. How did New Testament authors interpret Old Testament themes in light of Christ's first and second comings?

#### **Dr. Robert L. Plummer**

When you look at the New Testament, it's full of quotations from the Old Testament. It's quite clear that we're to understand the New Testament and the Old Testament fitting together like pieces of a puzzle, giving us the entire revelation of God. And I would classify the ways that New Testament authors use the Old Testament under two main categories: one is propositional, and two is typological. So, propositional is looking at a specific Old Testament text and looking at it as drawing a specific line as to a fulfillment that happened at one time. For example, if you look at Isaiah 53, you get a depiction of the suffering servant who is wounded and pierced for our transgressions. You look at the way that's picked up, for example, in Matthew 8 or other New Testament texts, and the author sees that, I believe, as having a onetime fulfillment in Christ. But you also see the authors of the New Testament using the Old Testament typologically, seeing God's prior interventions in history, anticipating this one climactic intervention. And often times it's like there's several steps of that before the final intervention. An example of that would be in Matthew 2. In Matthew 2 it says, "Out of Egypt [God] called [his] son." Well, that quote is from Hosea 11, which uses the language that refers back to the exodus. And so we have this kind of multiple stages of God intervening in history to deliver and save his people when it looks like there was no hope. And that reaches its final climactic sort of episode when the Son comes, and it looks like it's all over, and he has to flee to Egypt because the

king's trying to kill him. But how much more finally in this climactic episode will God fulfill his promises and bring his Son back to the Promised Land.

**Dr. Jimmy Agan**

Authors of the New Testament looked at the Old Testament, picked out main themes that were taught there, and looked at them through the lens of the coming of Christ, and then also through the lens of Christ's return. And let me just sample a few of those themes and how they were treated in the New Testament. The first one — let's start at the beginning — of creation, the first major theme in the Old Testament. The New Testament writers looked at the theme of creation in light of Christ's first coming, seeing that Jesus had come to begin a "new creation" — Paul says that in 2 Corinthians 5 — and looked at Jesus himself as a new beginning for the human race. So, Paul would call Jesus a "second Adam" in Romans 5 ... showing us that in Christ a new creation has begun, a second beginning to the human race, a new chance for humanity to be redeemed from the Fall that came with the first Adam. But then, the New Testament writers also look at creation in the lens of Jesus' second coming... when new heavens and new earth — the portrayal of the Tree of Life that was in the Garden in Genesis that now grows on both sides of a river, and this river flows through this new kingdom that has spread to encompass the whole of this new heavens and new earth. So, re-creation now in Christ, re-creation of the whole created order at Christ's return. Another main theme would be the theme of kingdom, a huge theme in the Old Testament. If we looked at the Davidic king we'd find Psalm 2 featuring very prominently in Old Testament descriptions of David and a son of David who would reign over God's people. That psalm is directly applied to Jesus in the book of Acts, chapter 4, as Jesus is the ruler who will rule over the nations. Jesus in his first coming is the king who sits on David's throne. But Jesus in his second coming shares that rule and reign with all his people. In Revelation, we read of Jesus allowing us to sit on that throne with him and citing the same language from Psalm 2. So, kingdom permeates the whole Bible — Old Testament, Christ's first coming, and then you see that theme fulfilled as Jesus shares that reign with his people at his return.

**Dr. Gary Cockerill**

New Testament authors interpreted Old Testament themes in light of Christ's first and second coming, and when we understand what they're doing, it makes a lot of sense. The God who was at work in the Old Testament to deliver his people fulfills that deliverance through the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. And so, Christ's coming is the new exodus, the new deliverance of the people of God. Christ is the new David, the new Moses, the new prophet. He fulfills everything that the prophets anticipated in the Old Testament. As David was to establish God's people in obedience, so he, as the Messiah, the new David, establishes God's people in obedience. As God in the exodus delivered his people from Pharaoh in Egypt, from bondage, brought them into covenant with himself so that they could serve and live for him, so in Christ's death and resurrection, he delivers us from the bondage of sin so that we can live in fellowship with God and reflect his character. So, what Christ has done was pictured and foreshadowed in the work of God within the Old Testament. And of course, it

foreshadows his second coming as well. In his second coming there will be the final victory over evil. God delivered them from evil. There was a victory over Pharaoh and those who had oppressed them in the Old Testament. That final victory over evil will be manifest. It's been won on the cross, but it will be manifest at Christ's second coming. And so, all that was anticipated by life in the Promised Land in the Old Testament, life in the presence of God — the fullness of the presence of God — all that will be fulfilled then in the new heaven and the new earth when Christ returns. All that Jerusalem symbolized as the place of God dwelling with his people and then living in fellowship with him will reach its greatest fulfillment at the return of Christ in the New Jerusalem, the heavenly city. The Bible has always been... the point has been God restoring fellowship with his people. God lived among them in the covenant of the Old Testament as he dwelt in the tabernacle in the midst of the people of God, but sin prevented their close approach. So God came in the person of his only son, the Lord Jesus Christ in whom the presence of God fully dwelt to deliver us from that sin so that God now dwells within the people of God as the new temple, and we will dwell with him forever in the new heaven and the new earth. It's very interesting to me, if I had lived in Jesus' time, if I had touched a leper, the leper would make me unclean. But when Jesus touched the leper, he made him clean. And that's exactly what he did by taking on our humanity and redeeming us from sin so that we can live in the presence of God.

### **Question 2:**

#### **How did Christ fulfill the theme of warfare against evil in his first coming?**

**God as a divine warrior is a theme that runs through the whole of the Old Testament. And it shouldn't surprise us that, as God incarnate, Jesus fulfilled this theme during the inauguration of his earthly ministry. So, how did Christ fulfill the theme of warfare against evil in his first coming?**

#### **Dr. Stephen J. Wellum**

One of the ways that Christ's work is described in the New Testament is that he wins victory over Satan and the powers ... It's an important theme that goes all the way back to that initial gospel promise in Genesis 3:15. As sin comes into the world, Adam and Eve fall under the temptation of Satan, you have that initial gospel promise that's developed through the Old Testament — that the head of the serpent will be crushed, that in the context of Genesis 3 sin and evil will be overturned, Satan will be defeated, and it will come through the seed of the woman. As you trace that out through the Old Testament and move to the New Testament, the New Testament says that in the first coming of the Lord Jesus, he comes to do that work. He comes in his life. Right from the very beginning, we see at the beginning of his ministry the temptation with Satan. He comes as the obedient Son who will not give in like Adam did. He will obey the Father's will throughout his life, even unto death on the cross. In his life and ministry we begin to see Satan put to flight. We see that in his

exorcising of the demonic, his healing of diseases. All of those diseases eventually are tied to sin and the Fall and all of the corruption that has taken place. And so we begin to see that foretaste of the coming of the kingdom, that which will be culminated on the cross. The cross is the key moment. You think of Colossians 2, which speaks of the powers being stripped. Or Hebrews 2, describing Christ's victory over death, by his death defeating Satan who holds the power of death. In the cross we see Satan's power defeated. We see it defeated, it's important to say, because sin is defeated. Sometimes people will pick up the victory theme and almost set it over against Christ as our substitute, the one who pays for our sin. But biblically, he — in paying for our sin, satisfying God's righteous requirements, meeting all of our need before God, also then in defeating sin — defeats death. "The wages of sin is death." So death is defeated, and then the power of the Evil One is broken over us. So that, in his coming, in his cross, in his resurrection — the resurrection is a great demonstration that death can no longer hold him, that Satan's power is gone — in that, he has now won the victory. It is a kind of, obviously a foretaste of the end ... Basically the war was done yet there was still more to take place. Well, Christ's cross has defeated Satan's power; it has now been broken. Yet, there's still the intervening period as his people come to salvation, as the gospel goes to the ends of the earth. He will come back, and he will bring to completion what he began in his first coming. That is the way the New Testament describes the victory of Christ over sin and death and the Devil himself.

### **Dr. Jimmy Agan**

There's a lot we could say about Jesus and his warfare against evil. I want to summarize that under three headings: Jesus conquered Satan, Jesus conquered sin, and Jesus conquered death. Let's start with talking about how Jesus in his first coming defeated Satan. One way he did that was in the wilderness temptation as he refused the temptations of the Devil. Another way he did that was in prayer. We may not always realize this, but Jesus prayed that Satan would be defeated. He says to Peter on the night of his arrest, "Satan has desired to sift you as wheat, but I have prayed for you." So Jesus, through head-on, one-on-one combat with the Devil in the wilderness, defeats those temptations. Then also, through petitioning his heavenly Father for his followers, like Peter, when their faith is frail, Jesus defeats the Devil. Jesus also defeats and conquers sin. We know that. We look at the cross and we see how Jesus satisfies God's wrath. He takes our penalty on himself. Sin has no more claim over us in its penalty, its condemnation. What we may not appreciate is that Jesus also defeats sin in its power. Its power to corrupt us is broken by the fact that Jesus pays the debt, and then he pours out on us his Holy Spirit. So, even as Jesus in his first coming has died on the cross and later poured out the Holy Spirit, in both ways, he's defeating sin in the lives of his people. Finally, we can't ignore the fact that, in the resurrection, Jesus conquers death. He conquers death, not only the physical aspects of death — he's going to give us new life; we will share in the resurrection glory that he has — but he also shares with us the comfort and the hope that we have now, that death may not beat us into submission and fear and cause us to waver in our trust of God and his promises because Jesus has defeated it. If I could add one note to the end of this discussion about Jesus conquering evil, it would be the

note of urgency. In Jesus' miracles you see a sense of urgency, especially when he performs a miracle on the Sabbath. In Luke 13 a synagogue ruler says, "Hey, couldn't you do this another day? I mean, any other day? If you'd just wait a few hours the sun will set, it won't be the Sabbath anymore." And Jesus says, "No. Is it not necessary that this woman be freed from Satan's bondage which has kept her for eighteen years?" So Jesus has a sense of urgency in defeating evil in all its forms on our behalf.

### **Dr. Philip Ryken**

If you read through the story of the Old Testament people of God, time and time again they needed a warrior to defend them, and the greatest warrior of the people of God is God himself. And so, when you have the coming of Jesus Christ as the Messiah, he is the victor over the Devil and over all his works. And you see that in so many ways in the Gospels. You see it first of all just in the ministry that Jesus had of power over the demons who were opposing the work of the kingdom of God and the way that he was able to cast out those demons and put them in their place. Or perhaps most supremely, the fight that Jesus engaged with the Devil himself in the wilderness in resisting all of his temptations. But all of that was only a prelude to the cross itself. And the Scripture is very clear that the works of the Devil are put to death through the cross so that that is the place where Jesus Christ worked out his ultimate victory over the Evil One and all his works — the cross, of course, with the resurrection, which proved that the saving work of Jesus was accepted by the Father. And the Devil ultimately will be fully defeated, but the victory of Jesus Christ is already won through the cross and the empty tomb.

### **Question 3:**

**How does Christ fulfill the theme of warfare against evil through the church today?**

**After his resurrection, Jesus intentionally set out to prepare the early disciples for the work he would do through them after he returned to the Father. He empowered them to continue the work he began, including his warfare against evil. But what about the modern church? How does Christ fulfill the theme of warfare against evil through the church today?**

### **Dr. Stephen J. Wellum**

The church has an important role in warfare in terms of the application of Christ's work. As we think of it, we just have to put a few pieces in place before we get to the point of how we actually do that. The first thing that must be said, and just the basic foundation, is that anything we talk about in terms of our engaging with warfare, sin and evil, Satan himself, is only because of what Christ has done. He comes as the one who wins the war. He's the one who defeats sin. He's the one who defeats death and the Evil One — now, by virtue of our relationship to him. So, as we are brought into faith union with him by the Spirit, we are transferred from the kingdom of the Evil



One to the kingdom of the Son, already in us. Warfare has been won by Christ, and the power of the Evil One, his rule and domain over us, has been defeated. So that, in becoming Christians, there already is an engagement with the Evil One in Christ, and all that he has done. Now, as we then live for him, as we then take the gospel to the nations, the gospel proclamation, as the Spirit of God takes what we say and applies it to people's lives, spiritual warfare is engaged so that, as people become believers, as the Spirit of God brings new life, as they are brought to faith union in Christ, sin and death is defeated in them. The Evil One's power over them is defeated. Habits that we have tied to our fallenness, lifestyles, ways of thinking, ways of living, that is defeated. There is ongoing growth in our Christian lives in terms of sanctification. All of that is seen as part of the defeat of sin and evil, and it's a warfare that goes on in our Christian lives. As we then take the gospel to the nations, we not only see people become believers, but we see, then, the effects of the church as we live our lives, pushing back the borders of evil and sin, having an impact as salt and light in the world, that, in some sense, tied to God's common grace as well as saving grace, particularly common grace, sin is restrained, and Satan's work is restrained. All of that comes through the work of the church, the preaching of the gospel, taking the gospel to the nations as we see men and women and boys and girls delivered from sin and death, coming to faith in Christ, lives changed, Satan's power broken. That is part of the ongoing ministry of the church through the preaching and teaching of the gospel.

**Dr. Ghassan Khalaf (translation)**

Jesus Christ recorded, with his first coming, a decisive victory over the Devil as he defeated him when he died on the cross and rose again from the dead. When he rose and sat at the right hand of God, it doesn't mean that he left the earth and that the Devil can do whatever he pleases. But Jesus left his body on earth. He is the head, and the church is his body. Jesus empowered his body with the power needed to finish and win the final victory on earth. Jesus supplied the church with power over demonic spirits, power to heal the sick, power to stop and face any of the deceits that the Devil uses to attack the church. Jesus knew that his body, the church, would suffer from the Devil's war and threats. Jesus said, "On this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it." Therefore, the church will continue its march against hell and will spread into every nation and country. If we go back two thousand years, we read that Jesus is the light of the world, and yet Christianity had not yet spread very wide geographically. It spread around Palestine, Egypt, Syria, and Turkey — to the countries that surrounded Palestine only. But the Bible said that Jesus was going to be the light of *the world*, the *whole* world. Did this actually happen? This was the question in the first century church because this was what was known of the world at that time. We come today and look at the church and how it has spread to *every* country, to *every* nation, *every* tribe, and *every* tongue. Among all of the nations, there are people that love and worship Jesus and live according to his teachings. So, when we see that the church has grown and spread throughout the world, this certainly doesn't say that Jesus failed or that the church is weak. Rather, it shows how quickly the church spread in spite of the persecution and the false teachings all around us. The church always advances; it spreads. Picture it! — from

Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. And now, indeed, it has spread to the five continents, to everywhere under the sun. And again we say, “Glory to the Lord Jesus Christ!”

#### **Question 4:**

### **When he returns in glory, how will Christ fulfill the biblical theme of warfare against evil?**

**Christ’s second coming is something that all Christians eagerly wait for. At the consummation, all that’s been promised in Scripture will be fulfilled. And Christ will win the battle against evil, completing the theme of spiritual warfare. When he returns in glory, how will Christ fulfill the biblical theme of warfare against evil?**

#### **Dr. Howard Eyrich**

Christ will demonstrate that theme of warfare when he returns in glory. First of all, he comes in riding on a white horse, and that is in complete contrast to the triumphal entry when he came his first time. He came there riding on a donkey, but he comes here riding on a white horse. Riding on a white horse... that was the symbol of victory. And so, he comes riding on a white horse to completely take down the enemy. The Scripture says he is instrumental in Satan and death and all those on his side, so to speak, cast into the lake of fire. And then it depicts him as sitting on the throne, ruling, and all those who have trusted him and become part of his body now enter in with him in the rulership of the eternal state. That is victory... Jesus wins. He has won. He will win. The victory is ours because Christ is victorious.

#### **Dr. Stephen J. Wellum**

When we think of our Lord’s work, we often think of it in terms of first coming and second coming. He, in his first coming, life, death, resurrection, has brought the kingdom to this world. He has brought the new covenant era. He has brought the full forgiveness of sins. He has defeated sin, defeated death, defeated the Evil One. All of that’s taken place in his first coming. Yet, there is a time gap between first coming and second coming. In his second coming, we often think of it as consummating what he’s already began, finishing, completing what has already started ... At his second coming, built upon his first, a victory is sure, but he will complete and bring to pass all that he has already done. So that you think of, say, of 1 Corinthians 15, there’s a kind of sequencing to history. Christ’s first coming is the first fruits — his resurrection. There’s then a period of time before he comes again. When he comes again, he will then put sin and death and the Devil completely under his feet so that evil will be destroyed. The books will be balanced. Final judgment will take place where, in a public way, sin and death is dealt with. Those who are not his will be cast in judgment for everlasting. Those who are his will enjoy the fruit and benefit of the new heavens and new earth, and then we will see everything brought to its end, everything brought to its consummation. But it’s built upon what he’s first done. We still look forward to the consummation of that, and as the church, we live between the

times, between the ages. We still experience suffering and trials and difficulties. Yet, the victory is sure. And we then say with the church of every age, “Come Lord Jesus.”

### **Question 5:**

**What did Paul mean in Ephesians chapter 3 when he spoke of "the mystery made known to me by revelation"?**

**Jesus’ contemporaries had a fixed idea of how the kingdom of God was going to come and what it was going to look like. But Jesus’ teaching revealed that God’s plan was much different than they’d anticipated. Paul talked about this in Ephesians 3:3-10 when he said that “the mystery” had been revealed to him. But what did Paul mean in Ephesians chapter 3 when he spoke of “the mystery made known to me by revelation”?**

#### **Rev. Michael J. Glodo**

Paul speaks of the mystery made known to him by revelation in Ephesians 3. Some traditions take that as meaning no one could have ever known this; it was something that was unanticipated, speaking particularly of the gospel going to the Gentiles. But that’s not exactly what Paul means here. He uses the term “mystery” in the sense to maybe describe, by way of analogy, the fruit that comes out on the branches of a tree. It was hidden before, but it wasn’t something that came out of nowhere. Because Paul in Ephesians is looking back to the Old Testament revelation, seeing that God had anticipated a temple, that this temple would bring the nations together, seeing that now that Christ has been raised and the foundation of the apostles and the prophets has been laid upon Christ the cornerstone, that God is building his whole creation into a temple for his habitation. So this mystery isn’t something that didn’t rise out of the Old Testament but is actually the natural fruition of the Old Testament or, we would say, redemptive history.

#### **Dr. Ghassan Khalaf (translation)**

When we read Ephesians, especially chapter 3, we see Paul talking about the hidden mystery in ancient times that was revealed to the prophets and apostles, including Paul himself. Paul said here that God’s thought was to bless the nations later on in his beloved Son Jesus Christ, to send Jesus as Abraham’s descendent, and through him, to reach all people and nations. This idea was present in the Old Testament, but it was not as evident. For example, God said to Abraham, “Through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed.” And there are verses that say, for instance, “Praise the Lord, all you nations; extol him, all you peoples.” And Paul mentioned several verses that talk about God’s love for all nations. He did this in places like Romans 15. But it was “mysterious” for the Jews because they didn’t put together the verses that taught of God’s love for all nations and the rest of the people. So, they kept his love as a secret for themselves and said, “We are the chosen people, and God doesn’t wish to save any of the other people.” In Ephesians 3, Paul said essentially that what was

hidden and unclear in the past, God had now made clear. Because when Christ called Paul, he said to him, “I will send you to the nations to be my witness before the rulers and kings of nations and my people Israel.” Paul revealed God’s love to all people. We see this in Ephesians as well as in Colossians. And his message was similar to John 3:16 where John said, “For God so loved the world” — meaning God loves all — “that he gave his one and only Son.” So, what once was “unclear,” now caused an intellectual disturbance between the Jews because they didn’t like the Gentiles and didn’t want them to be saved. But Paul came and revealed that God’s purpose was to reach all nations and people through his Son. This is the significance of what the apostle Paul said. The Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body — that is, the church — and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus — that is, in having the Holy Spirit. And this is what happened at Cornelius’ house when the Holy Spirit came on the Gentiles — on Cornelius and his family who were not Jews. Here, Christ’s body was completed, and Jews and Gentiles in the church became partners in the inheritance, the body, the Holy Spirit and the promise. Here we can say, “Hallelujah.”

### **Dr. P. J. Buys**

When the apostle Paul speaks of this mystery, he usually refers to God’s ultimate plan of salvation that has to be proclaimed to all the nations of the world. And in the light of his Jewish background before his conversion, he knew and understood nothing of that, and he was strongly against it and against the Christians and persecuted them. And then the Lord opened his mind and he saw God’s great plan of salvation for all the nations of the world. And that changed his old worldview and his old lifestyle and old attitude to people of other tribes and nations.

### **Dr. Stephen J. Wellum**

The book of Ephesians is such a wonderful letter that we have of the apostle Paul. It’s a letter that captures so much of God’s plan right across redemptive history and the fulfillment that has come in Jesus Christ. Particularly in Ephesians 3, he speaks of the mystery that has been revealed. He already picks up that theme of mystery in Ephesians 1:9, 10 where he says that in Christ all things have been summed up. “Mystery,” in Paul, has a very, very specific meaning and definition. Often in a contemporary culture we think of mystery in terms of mystery novels and something’s mysterious. But for Paul, it’s really a revelation term. Mystery is that which was hidden in ages past, part of God’s eternal plan, that as history unfolds it becomes disclosed; it becomes known. And of course, in Ephesians 3, what he is speaking of in terms of “that which was hidden in God’s eternal plan which is disclosed” is the relationship of the Jew and Gentile into the church. As you go back into the Old Testament era, we begin with Adam and see the universal effects of God’s plan. God has made us image bearers. He has tied us to creation. In light of sin and the Fall, there is a separation of those who are God’s and those who are not. And in the Abrahamic covenant, especially, you see the redemptive purposes, where through Abraham and his seed, he is going to be the means by which salvation will come to the world, and it will bring a blessing to all nations. So “the nations” picks up that universal focus of God’s purposes, but through a man, a nation, ultimately

through the Lord Jesus Christ. As you walk through the Old Testament, there is many, many Abrahamic passages that are picked up. That Israel as people, who are a means by which the Savior will come, will also incorporate the Gentiles, that in God's purposes, Jew and Gentile will be brought together in Christ in one new man, the church. And that's what Paul is speaking of in Ephesians 3, so that in Christ now, in this place in redemptive history, we see more clearly God's eternal plan. We see that in him, Jew and Gentile, which were separated under the old covenant, have now been brought together. Both have been reconciled to God. Both have been reconciled to each other. The old covenant which divided Jew and Gentile has now been brought to fulfillment so that in the church we now are an international community from every tribe, nation, people, and tongue. The mystery of God, the revelation of God is now disclosed in this place in redemptive history by bringing this one new man together. So, as Paul develops this in the book of Ephesians, he sees that in the church you see a kind of microcosm of God's incredible plan of grace. In Ephesians 3:10, for instance, he says that the church is a kind of school to the principalities and powers, the angels, as they see in us as Jew-Gentile are brought together, as reconciliation takes place, they see God's plan of salvation at work. So they see the manifold wisdom and the power of God displayed. So, the mystery theme is a glorious revelation theme, a revelation of salvation that's come in Christ, that then... comes as a benefit to us as his people brought together as Jew and Gentile into one new man.

### **Question 6:**

#### **How is living in the church today different from living in the days of Christ and his apostles?**

**There are many reasons to think that the church today is similar to the church of the first believers. After all, we worship the same God, are redeemed by the same Christ, and are filled with the same Spirit. And yet, we shouldn't underestimate the difference two thousand years can make. How is living in the church today different from living in the days of Christ and his apostles?**

#### **Dr. Jonathan T. Pennington**

It's an interesting question to ask ourselves, "What is it like for us today as Christians, after Pentecost, living in the church?" How are our lives different? And how do we interpret the Bible differently than, maybe, Peter and the other disciples following Jesus physically before his death and resurrection? It's an interesting question, and it's not one that has a very simple answer, though I think we can say a few important things. On the one hand, I really want to emphasize the continuity. That is, that I think it's a common mistake for people to write off the pre-death and resurrection time period — that is the time period reflected in the Gospels — as if it's a totally different way of relating to God. I think that would be a mistake, even as it would be to write off all of the Old Testament and David's experience. Yes, something significant did happen at Pentecost with the giving of the Spirit, but it's not as if David or Peter or Moses didn't know God personally or didn't have the Holy

Spirit and didn't have faith and relate to God in the same way. So, in the first instance, I want to really emphasize the continuity that does exist between us and people that were following Jesus physically during his earthly life. At the same time, that difference of Pentecost means a couple of things. One, it does mean, to be a Christian means that one is filled and sealed with the Holy Spirit. There is no other way. To be part of the new covenant means that the Spirit indwells you and gives us direct access to God through Jesus' completed work. And although there's a mystery there and to what David's experience was and what Moses' experience was, we know that the New Testament emphasizes some significant discontinuity. So there is this dwelling and filling of the Spirit. And one of the obvious ways is... we don't have to go to a temple. We don't have to go to certain places and do certain rituals. God's presence is given to us now through the Spirit sent by the Father and the Son. So that's significant as well. Another thing I'd want to emphasize of the discontinuity is even of a different sort, and that is something that I know I've wrestled with, and many people have as well. When you think about the urgency that existed for Peter and James and John, who were following Jesus, and the sense that they had to physically leave everything behind to be a follower of Jesus, that's a pretty significant difference between their time period and ours. And, in fact, you see that even somewhat developed in the New Testament era. That is, that while some people are called to leave everything and follow Jesus and become what we now say are missionaries — we think of people like the apostle Paul and of course those original disciples, Peter, James and John and others until their deaths — most Christians, it seems very clearly, even in the first century after Pentecost, lived normal lives — working jobs, staying in one town or city, the town they grew up in, getting married, having children, and seeking to be faithful followers of Jesus — without having to leave everything and follow, as Jesus' original twelve disciples did. So, I think it's important to recognize that. That some of the ideas that we might get from Paul, and even from the Gospels, about the necessity of actually uprooting oneself to be a follower of Jesus, don't necessarily apply in a physical sense to most believers who are called to be faithful right where they are.

**Dr. Sanders L. Willson**

You know, interpreting the Bible today is different than interpreting the Bible in the age of the apostles because we have 2,000 years of history. And everybody who interprets the Bible does it from a particular sociological location. We've all been trained in given ways. So, today we're all beneficiaries of the early church, of the medieval church, of the Reformation, of the revival periods. Every nation has its own history, and we have more experience in applying Christian doctrine now than even the apostle Paul would have had. We've seen it over 2,000 years. So we take the advantages of all that history and apply it to the application of truth to our people today.

**Dr. Ghassan Khalaf (translation)**

When we compare the early church 2,000 years ago and the church today, we can see that many things are the same because man is still the same and Christ is still dealing with the same issues in humans. But we see that circumstances have changed. And

the church back then had to face certain circumstances, and the church today has to face different circumstances. For example, the framework for life in the early church was always persecution. The church was pursued. The Jews wanted to oppose it. And when it spread in the Roman Empire, the Roman authorities wanted to persecute the Christians. And all New Testament writings were full of comforting promises because of that persecution. So, we find lots of encouragement to believers living in distress and torment. The promises in the New Testament are multiplied to strengthen the faith of those who were suffering from persecution. Christians lived in caves and worshiped in homes. When they worshiped, they couldn't do it loudly. They sang their hymns and prayers softly so their neighbors wouldn't hear them because they were persecuted all the time. They didn't worship in places designated for worship as it is today. Today we have churches that have benches, pulpits, impressive lights and large spaces. These things were not available in those days ... There is the possibility of openness and worship in specific places. But we also see something similar to what was going on in the early church, even more so in some countries, especially the Arabic countries, where some still worship in hidden places. They are careful that no one tells on them. And here we find heroism in the Christian life. We find persistence and perseverance despite difficult trials. In fact, even today, the Christian church provides more martyrs than any other religion, if you read the news bulletins issued by the United Nations. Therefore, the Christian faith is a heroic faith because it has always lived through pain and confrontation, and yet still lifts up the name of Christ on high and perseveres out of loyalty to him.

### **Question 7:**

**How should believers account for developments in God's kingdom when we apply Scripture to our lives today?**

**As God's kingdom moves forward through history it grows and develops exactly the way God intends. And this has always been true. Because of this, the way God manifests his kingdom on earth today isn't entirely the way he did it in the past. So, what does this mean for modern Christians? How should believers account for developments in God's kingdom when we apply Scripture to our lives today?**

#### **Dr. David R. Bauer**

The question of the ability to apply passages in the Bible that refer to situations or to issues that no longer exist in our own time is, of course, a very important one, because the Bible, both Old Testament and New Testament, come out of a quite different cultural background. And one of the implications of a truly historic religion, as the Judeo-Christian faith is, is that it's historically specific. And we are, of course, historically specific people as well. And sometimes our historical specificity doesn't match the historical specificity to which the biblical writers address themselves. There are some passages of Scripture manifestly — you have this in the Old Testament frequently, in the New Testament also to some extent — which cannot really be taken up and directly applied in our own time. Passages, for example, in

Deuteronomy that refer to the Edomites and how... God's people Israel were to relate to the Edomites. Or laws of patrimony as it relates to Levitical priests, for example, are not easily directly applicable to our own situation. There are people who have said and do say... that there is no passage of Scripture that cannot be preached. And in spite of what I just said with regard to the inability to apply directly many passages of Scripture, I'm inclined to agree with that. Because although you may not be able to apply directly the surface meaning of passages, if you interpret them in depth and ask not only, "What do the words in this biblical passage mean? What's the surface meaning, the surface sense, of this passage?" but probe beneath the surface and ask, "Why was this said? Why was this commanded?" And even the implications of the surface meaning of the text — "If this is what was said, what was argued, what was commanded to these people at this time, what does that imply with regard to God and our relationship to God?" When you get to this business of the reason or the rationale behind biblical statements and the implications of them, almost always it's possible to apply the passage in those ways and at those levels of understanding.

#### **Dr. Paul Sanders**

Our understanding of history is so clear and so much linked to our theology. And so, if we're looking at history from a reformed perspective, for example, we look at it as the action of God's sovereignty and the reflection of his glory in history. And so, we use that as a grid for which we analyze, not simply the events that are taking place, but what God is trying to do through all of this. It's basically, in a word, trying to make sense of what God has done in the past, even in the period of the Middle Ages when so many people, evangelicals in particular, would think that somehow God might have been on vacation. If we try to see how that whole period of history, Western church history for example, fits into God's wider purposes, then we have a wider view of what God is doing and we have a wider view of our place in this tapestry of history which goes from eternity to eternity.

**When we look to apply the Scriptures to our lives, it's important to recognize how God's kingdom has been developing and unfolding since Old Testament times. Looking at the theme of spiritual warfare, we can see that in the inauguration, continuation, and consummation of God's kingdom, Christ has been working, is working, and will work to overcome his enemies. This helps us see what joys we have to look forward to when Christ returns.**

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