Lesson 36: Who Did Christ Die For?

Previously…

Because of man's rebellion at the Fall, the perfect world that Yahweh created was destroyed. Yahweh is perfectly holy and righteous and cannot just ignore the sin. So, throughout the Old Testament, God patiently explained how He views justice and restitution. And He also assured people through different events and prophecies that He would send a Messiah to save man. God Himself would provide the solution to mankind's sin because mankind cannot save themselves.

When the time was right, Yahweh sent God the Son, Jesus Christ, to live a perfect life and then die on mankind's behalf. Jesus' death on the cross was:

i. the death that paid for man's sin as well as

ii. the way God "transferred" (imputed) Jesus' righteousness into mankind.

This is how every person who believes God's promise of salvation through the death of Christ will be declared righteous.

What Jesus did on the cross was an incredibly important event in history. Because of that, we want to be clear about the answers to some of these common questions.

A	B	C	D	E
Who did Christ die for?	Why must people believe in Jesus to be saved from eternal death?	Is mankind's personal response to Jesus the most important impact of the Cross?	How can God be so cruel to "send people to hell"?	The Bible talks about "election". Does this mean God alone decides who gets saved and who does not?

A. Who did Christ die for?

Did Jesus die only for the Jews? No.

Did He die only for certain groups of people? No.

When Jesus died as a substitute for man, it was for all mankind.

The Old Testament account of historical events teach this as well.

Flood: Before the Flood, God warned all people through Enoch and Noah that judgment was coming. For 120 years, **everyone** was given the opportunity to listen to Yahweh and turn from their wicked ways. But aside from Noah and his family, no one else did.

> **2 Peter 2:5**
> And God did not spare the ancient world—except for Noah and the seven others in his family. Noah warned the world of God's righteous judgment. So God protected Noah when he destroyed the world of ungodly people with a vast flood.

Exodus: Moses and Aaron warned the people about the plague judgments. **Everyone** was given the opportunity to respond. Some Egyptians did believe Yahweh's words and were saved from hail, the seventh plague.

> **Exodus 9:20**
> Some of Pharaoh's officials were afraid because of what the LORD had said. They quickly brought their servants and livestock in from the fields.

By the time God announced the final plague judgment, the death of the firstborn, everyone in Egypt had already experienced nine judgments. All had been warned and given sufficient time to believe Yahweh's words. How did the Israelites and the Egyptians respond?

We learnt that not only did all the Israelites believe, God also saved non-Israelites who believed Him. Together, they left Egypt.

> **Exodus 12:38**
> A rabble of non-Israelites went with them, along with great flocks and herds of livestock.

Jesus: When God sent Jesus to die on the cross to be the substitute and blood atonement, it was for **everyone**.

> **1 John 2:2**
> He himself is the sacrifice that atones for our sins—and not only our sins but the sins of all the world.

> **John 3:16**
> "For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.

Jesus Himself said that when He is "lifted up from the earth" (meaning when he dies on the cross), His death will be able to save people everywhere from every era, nationality, language and people group.

> **John 12:32–33**
> 32 And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself." 33 He said this to indicate how he was going to die.

Jesus is not saying that the whole world will be saved. He is saying that all people are "saveable" by Him and that if they believe, they would be saved because of His work on the cross.

The apostle Paul also taught that Jesus died for everyone:

> **1 Timothy 2:1–7**
> 1 I urge you, first of all, to pray for all people. Ask God to help them; intercede on their behalf, and give thanks for them. 2 Pray this way for kings and all who are in authority so that we can live peaceful and quiet lives marked by godliness and dignity. 3 This is good and pleases God our Savior, 4 who wants everyone to be saved and to understand the truth.
>
> 5 For, There is one God and one Mediator who can reconcile God and humanity—the man Christ Jesus. 6 He gave his life to purchase freedom for everyone. This is the message God gave to the world at just the right time. 7 And I have been chosen as a preacher and apostle to teach the Gentiles this message about faith and truth. I'm not exaggerating—just telling the truth.
>
> **1 Timothy 4:10**
> This is why we work hard and continue to struggle, for our hope is in the living God, who is the Savior of all people and particularly of all believers.

Paul says that all people, both Jews and Gentiles, are included in this "everyone" that God wants to save.

Paul also explains what Jesus did when He died on the cross:

> **Ephesians 2:15b–17**
> 15 He made peace between Jews and Gentiles by creating in himself one new people from the two groups. 16 Together as one body, Christ reconciled both groups to God by means of his death on the cross, and our hostility toward each other was put to death. 17 He brought this Good News of peace to you Gentiles who were far away from him, and peace to the Jews who were near.

The cross is God's rescue plan: this is the way God saves sinful man from eternal death. People of all ethnicities everywhere have the opportunity to individually accept or reject God's solution.

But there will be two responses.

People have only these two choices. There is no other choice.

There is no "neutral" or in-between state.

Some people think that when we are born, we all start at the “neutral” state, and then we can decide to accept or reject God’s plan of salvation.

This is what some people think, but not what the Bible teaches

Instead, the Bible teaches that because of our sin nature, all mankind starts life in the sinful pagan kingdom of man. This is how the apostle John explains it:

i. Through faith, those who accept Jesus are justified (declared by God's justice to be righteous).

When a person chooses to believe in Jesus, they are saved from eternal death. They do not need to "do" anything. It is not man's work. It is the work of God alone.

> **Romans 4:1–3 (NET)**
> 1 What then shall we say that Abraham, our ancestor according to the flesh, has discovered regarding this matter? 2 For if Abraham was declared righteous by works, he has something to boast about—but not before God. 3 For what does the scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."

> **Ephesians 2:8–9**
> 8 God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. 9 Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it.

ii. What happens to people who choose to reject the cross?

God's solution to man's sin problem is the cross. It is not that there is no solution.

But those who choose to reject God's solution are permanently separated from Him and the eternal life that He offers. This is how Paul describes these unbelievers.

> **Ephesians 4:18 (NIV)**
> They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts.

They have not believed that Jesus has taken their place as their substitute and have rejected God's free gift of salvation. So they have no relationship with God and have not been credited with Christ's righteousness. Therefore, they remain under God's condemnation.

> **John 3:18 (NIV)**
> Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.

Does this mean that Jesus did not die for them? No. Jesus died for everyone. Jesus' death payment is big enough to pay for the sins of everyone who has ever lived. The reason not everyone is saved is because people reject the cross of Christ.

B. Why must people believe in Jesus to be saved from eternal death?

Some people wonder why Christians are so fussy and insist that people must believe in Jesus to be reconciled to God and receive eternal life. They wonder why it's not enough to just believe:

- there is a god or
- believe in Yahweh (as the Jews today do).

In fact, there are people who get very offended with what Jesus Himself says.

> **John 14:6**
> Jesus told him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me.

Here is one way to understand this:

God's Judgment on the Pagan Kingdom of Man	God's Only Solution for Salvation
Global Flood	The Ark
Death of the Firstborn	The Passover Lamb
Eternal Death	Jesus Dying on the Cross

- At the global Flood, God provided His solution: the ark.
  - ➡ Those who refuse to get into the ark, meaning those who reject God's solution, would die in the Flood.
- In the Exodus account, God provided a way for the firstborn to live: kill the Passover lamb.
  - ➡ Those who refuse to kill a substitute lamb, meaning those who reject God's solution, would lose their firstborns.
- Likewise, for the problem of eternal separation from God and eternal death: God provided Jesus to die as a substitute for mankind.
  - ➡ Those who refuse to believe in Jesus' work on the cross as their substitute, meaning those who reject God's solution, would face eternal death.

When people reject the loving Creator-God's **one and only solution for sin**, which is Jesus, they are judged.

In fact, the Bible says that the cross changed the reason why God condemns mankind.

Before the cross, God condemns mankind specifically for their sin.

But today, all unbelievers are judged not just because of their sin, but specifically because they reject the cross of Jesus!

> **John 3:36 (NIV)**
> Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them.
>
> **John 3:18**
> "There is no judgment against anyone who believes in him. But anyone who does not believe in him has already been judged for not believing in God's one and only Son.

There is a massive shift in how God condemns unbelief! This means unbelieving mankind everywhere is now condemned by the cross.

God provided the way of salvation but unbelievers reject it. This makes Jesus' death on the cross the great separator of mankind.

- Those who believe in the cross are saved.
- Those who reject the cross are judged.

Christians are therefore not being "fussy" when we insist on sharing the good news of Jesus and His work on the cross for all mankind as the only way for salvation.

Just as Noah told people that the only way to be saved was through the ark, and as Moses said the only way for firstborns to be saved was through the slaying of the lamb, so today, the only way to be saved is through believing in Jesus and His work on the cross for us.

But then how did God save people in the Old Testament when Jesus had not yet lived and died on the cross?

This is what God said through the apostle Paul.

> **Romans 3:25–26**
> 25 For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. People are made right with God when they believe that Jesus sacrificed his life, shedding his blood. This sacrifice shows that God was being fair when he held back and did not punish those who sinned in times past, 26 for he was looking ahead and including them in what he would do in this present time. God did this to demonstrate his righteousness, for he himself is fair and just, and he makes sinners right in his sight when they believe in Jesus.

During the time of the Old Testament, people were saved when they trusted in Yahweh's promise of a future saviour.

This salvation was possible because Yahweh reached forward in time to place that person's sin on Jesus at the cross. And at the same time God took Jesus' righteousness and credited it to that believer.

This was how Yahweh could forgive Abraham and count him as righteous. In fact, this is also how God forgave and saved every Old Testament believer!

> **Romans 4:1–3 (NET)**
> 1 What then shall we say that Abraham, our ancestor according to the flesh, has discovered regarding this matter? 2 For if Abraham was declared righteous by works, he has something to boast about—but not before God. 3 For what does the scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."

So the reason why God can show such great loving patience for sinners who do not deserve it is because of Jesus' death on the cross. This means that whenever God is gracious or merciful to anyone throughout human history, it is because of the cross.

God did not throw away His justice and righteousness. Rather, the cross shows God's amazing grace side by side with His righteousness!

Similarly, today, whenever anyone puts their trust in Yahweh for salvation, God reaches back in time to place their sin on Jesus and take His righteous life to credit it to the believer. That is how we became justified because God looks backwards into the past to apply the work of Christ onto us.

The cross then is our source of God's grace throughout all time: past, present and future.

C. Is mankind's personal response to Jesus the most important impact of the cross?

It is true that what Jesus did on the cross affects many believers personally and emotionally. It causes people to believe, feel grateful towards God and also want to live for Him.

However, we must not think that is all there is. The cross has a direct effect on the whole universe! In fact, the angelic realm is affected too.

The apostle Peter, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, wrote about something that is not easy to understand. He mentioned what Christ did in the spiritual realm after He died on the cross.

> **1 Peter 3:18–20 (NIV)**
> 18 For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit. 19 After being made alive, he went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits— 20 to those who were disobedient long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water,

Bible scholars do not all fully agree on what Peter is talking about here. However, many share this common understanding: Jesus went down to where a particular group of evil spirit beings (demons) had been imprisoned by God for something they did during the time of Noah.

Jesus proclaimed a message of victory to them, saying He had defeated them and Satan permanently. So Satan's attempts throughout history to thwart God's plan of salvation had failed.

All throughout history, we see Satan trying to destroy the Jews to prevent the promised Saviour from coming as God had announced in Eden (Genesis 3:15). Perhaps Satan thought he could stop Yahweh's plans.

But with Jesus' birth, life, death and resurrection, Satan had lost forever. This is what the writer of Hebrews explains.

> **Hebrews 2:14–15**
> 14 Because God's children are human beings—made of flesh and blood—the Son also became flesh and blood. For only as a human being could he die, and only by dying could he break the power of the devil, who had the power of death. 15 Only in this way could he set free all who have lived their lives as slaves to the fear of dying.

Jesus' death on the cross disrupted, or affected, the supernatural world of the spirit beings! Jesus permanently defeated Satan and his power over death!

Paul also mentioned how Jesus' death on the cross is a victory over Satan.

> **Colossians 2:13–15**
> 13 You were dead because of your sins and because your sinful nature was not yet cut away. Then God made you alive with Christ, for he forgave all our sins. 14 He canceled the record of the charges against us and took it away by nailing it to the cross. 15 In this way, he disarmed the spiritual rulers and authorities. He shamed them publicly by his victory over them on the cross.

By His death, Jesus overpowered the spiritual forces! This is significant because for all of history up to this point, mankind has lived under the influence of the invisible realm of angels.

Psalm 8:4–6 (NIV)
4 what is mankind that you are mindful of them,
human beings that you care for them?
5 You have made them a little lower than the angels
and crowned them with glory and honor.
6 You made them rulers over the works of your hands;
you put everything under their feet:

While Yahweh is the sovereign Ruler of the universe, under Him were the spirit beings and under them were humans. But when Christ died and rose again, God overturned the order of the universe!

Hebrews 2:5–9
5 And furthermore, it is not angels
who will control the future world we
are talking about.

6 For in one place the Scriptures say,

"What are mere mortals that you should
think about them, or a son of man that
you should care for him? 7 Yet for a little
while you made them a little lower than the
angels and crowned them with glory and honor. 8 You gave them authority over all things."

Now when it says "all things," it means nothing is left out. But we have not yet seen all things put under their authority. 9 What we do see is Jesus, who for a little while was given a position "a little lower than the angels"; and because he suffered death for us, he is now "crowned with glory and honor." Yes, by God's grace, Jesus tasted death for everyone.

With His death, Jesus destroyed the controlling influence of the spirit beings over mankind. And after Jesus' resurrection, God caused Him to ascend physically through the heavens up to a position at His right hand, above all spirit beings.

Ephesians 4:10
And the same one who descended is the one who ascended higher than all the heavens, so that he might fill the entire universe with himself.

Hebrews 4:14 (ESV)
Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.

Jesus is known as the Second, or Last Adam. This title tells us that He is a fully physical human being who is perfectly righteous. And this human is now physically in heaven in control of all creation!

1 Corinthians 15:45
The Scriptures tell us, "The first man, Adam, became a living person." But the last Adam—that is, Christ—is a life-giving Spirit.

Ephesians 1:19–22
19 I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God's power for us who
believe him. This is the same mighty power 20 that raised Christ from the dead and seated
him in the place of honor at God's right hand in the heavenly realms. 21 Now he is far
above any ruler or authority or power or leader or anything else—not only in this world but
also in the world to come. 22 God has put all things under the authority of Christ and has
made him head over all things for the benefit of the church.

For the first time in history, Yahweh has placed a human, a representative of the human race, in charge of the universe! God has completely changed mankind's position through the death and resurrection of Christ! This act that God did was never previously mentioned in the Old Testament but is revealed in the New Testament.

So we must not be mistaken to think that the cross of Christ just affects people personally. It's not just a private thing that happens in our heart. No, it has massive universal impact in the physical realm and in the supernatural spiritual realm of angels and demons. The cross of Christ impacts all of the universe.

D. How can God be so cruel to "send people to hell"?

Some people think that God **actively** "sends people to hell". And they get angry with Him for that. However, this is not true.

Actually, according to the Bible, the way God saves and judges is not the same. His mercy is greater than His wrath. How do we know this? Look at what He said to Abraham.

Genesis 12:3 (ESV)
I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

God blesses "those" (plural or many) who bless Abraham but curses "him" (singular or one) who dishonours Abraham. God is more keen to bless than to curse. Again, here is what God said when He gave the Ten Commandments.

Exodus 20:5–6
5 You must not bow down to them or worship them, for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous
God who will not tolerate your affection for any other gods. I lay the sins of the parents
upon their children; the entire family is affected—even children in the third and fourth
generations of those who reject me. 6 But I lavish unfailing love for a thousand generations
on those who love me and obey my commands.

God will lavish love for a thousand generations on those who obey Him but for those who disobey Him, only their third and fourth generations will be affected! God is genuinely concerned for people and He would rather bless than curse!

Similarly, we see this same character of God when He saves and judges.

How God saves

Yahweh is directly and personally responsible for doing good to man. To save a person, **God actively does** some very important things:

- He offers His grace, meaning His love, to people who do not deserve it.
- He provides payment of sin (atonement) through Jesus.
- He gives guidance through the Holy Spirit to help people understand His message of salvation so that they can believe.

Based on this, people decide if they will accept God's solution.

But this is very different from how God judges.

How God judges

God judges when **people actively reject** His solution to their sin problem and the salvation that Jesus gives. People choose for themselves to reject. So people are directly and personally responsible for their own eternal death.

How do we know this? Again, we understand this better because of the Flood and the Passover.

At the global Flood

God told all people of the coming global judgment and graciously provided a way to be saved from the Flood.

- The people **actively rejected** God's solution and were judged in the floodwaters.
- Only Noah and his family **believed** and entered the ark.

At the Passover

God told the people about the coming judgment of the death of the firstborn in all households. He graciously provided a way of escape.

- The Egyptian families **actively rejected** God's solution and their firstborns were judged.
- The Israelites **believed** and killed the lamb and entered the house covered by the blood.

In both these events, Yahweh lovingly provided salvation from the coming judgment. It is the same when Jesus saves mankind.

At Jesus' second coming

Jesus Himself explains the difference between how He judges and saves.

In Matthew 25, Jesus describes what will happen when He returns to earth to judge the Gentile nations. At this judgment, Jesus will separate good and evil.

> **Matthew 25:31–34, 41**
> 31 "But when the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit upon his glorious throne. 32 <u>All the nations will be gathered in his presence</u>, and he will separate the people as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. 33 He will place the sheep at his right hand and the goats at his left.
>
> 34 "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, <u>you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the creation of the world</u>.
>
> 41 "Then the King will turn to those on the left and say, 'Away with you, <u>you cursed ones, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his demons</u>.

The important detail we want to notice is that from the creation of the world, Yahweh had prepared the Kingdom of God for everyone! That was His plan for all mankind—that everyone should live with Him in His Kingdom.

The "eternal fire" or lake of fire is God's way of permanently separating evil from good forever. Yahweh had **originally** prepared this lake of fire for "the devil and his demons". He did this when the devil rebelled, along with the fallen angels who followed him. The lake of fire will be their eternal prison for the crime they had committed against Yahweh.

This lake of fire was not meant for mankind! In other words, in Yahweh's original plan, **He did not intend to send people into the lake of fire**.

But because of their rebellion, anyone who rejects God's gracious offer of salvation will be thrown into the lake of fire to join the devil and his fallen angels. This will also be their eternal prison.

How will they end up there? By their own personal choice to reject God. No one can say that God planned for them to be thrown there.

Put another way, even at birth, sinful people are already on their way to eternal death. And that's where they would go if they continue to actively reject God's solution for sin. But if they accept God's solution, they will be saved from eternal death and placed into eternal life.

So, God does not actively "send people to hell". God actively works to save people from eternal death!

E. The Bible talks about "election". Does this mean God alone decides who gets saved and who does not?

In the Bible, we see that Yahweh "elects". We see that:

- **God chose** Abraham and his descendants for a very special job: they were supposed to record Scripture and share His good news of how to be saved with the whole world.
- By specifically choosing Abraham's descendants, Isaac and Jacob, **God did not choose** his other descendants, Ishmael, the sons of Keturah or Esau.

Some wonder if this "choosing" means that God chooses whom to save and whom to judge, meaning who will go to eternal life and who will go to eternal death.

It is important to understand that this choosing is not about personal justification or salvation.

- It does not mean that He chose Abraham, Isaac and Jacob for eternal life and
- Ishmael, the sons of Keturah and Esau for eternal separation from Him.

This choosing is about God's purposes for **national Israel**. God is working with them as a **corporate entity**.

Paul explains this in Romans. He first highlights what Yahweh's choosing of the nation of Israel means for them practically.

> **Romans 3:1–2, 9:3b–5 (NIV)**
> 1 <u>What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew</u>, or what value is there in circumcision?
> 2 Much in every way! First of all, the Jews have been entrusted with the very words of God.
> 3…Theirs is the adoption to sonship; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. 5 Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of the Messiah, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen.

Paul says national Israel (and not other nations) has been given particular blessings by Yahweh.

Privileges National Israel Received from Yahweh:

1. God's revelation
2. Adoption as God's son
3. The privilege of seeing God's (Shekinah) glory
4. The covenants (Abrahamic, Mosaic, Land, Davidic, New)
5. The Mosaic law
6. The Temple worship
7. The promises (land, descendants, worldwide blessing)
8. The Patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob)
9. Through their lineage, the Promised Messiah for the world, who is a Jew.

This **national election** is God's **corporate plan for Israel in world history**.

We will see how Paul presents this information in Romans 9:11–23. (To help us follow his reasoning, we will examine this a section at a time, highlighted in blue).

To explain God's choice of national Israel, Paul raises the situation between Esau and Jacob.

> **Romans 9:11–13 (NIV)**
> 11 Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad—in order that God's
> purpose in election might stand: 12 not by works but by him who calls—she was told, "The
> older will serve the younger." 13 Just as it is written: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."

God elected Jacob and not Esau. This selection was:

- based entirely on God's sovereignty ("by him who calls") and
- not based on any human works ("not by works", "before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad").

Paul quotes from two different Old Testament passages and we will see that both passages are related to God's selection of nations, not individuals.

i. Quote 1: "The older will serve the younger"

When God supernaturally caused Rebekah to conceive, her twins jostled within her.

> **Genesis 25:21–23 (NIV)**
> 21 Isaac prayed to the LORD on behalf of his wife, because she was childless. The LORD answered his prayer, and his wife Rebekah became pregnant. 22 The babies jostled each other within her, and she said, "Why is this happening to me?" So she went to inquire of the LORD.
>
> 23 The LORD said to her,
>
> "Two nations are in your womb,
> and two peoples from within you will be separated;
> one people will be stronger than the other,
> and the older will serve the younger."

In replying to Rebekah, God specifically said "two nations" and "two peoples" were within her. He was not referring to Esau and Jacob as individuals. He was focusing on them as chief representatives of their descendants, their people groups.

In saying that the older will serve the younger, God was saying that He sovereignly chose national Edom (the nation that would come from Esau) to serve national Israel (the nation that would come from Jacob).

God was selecting certain people groups for certain destinies.

We further know this to be true because in biblical history, at no point in time did Esau, the individual, serve Jacob, the individual.

Rather, with God's foreknowledge on how national Edom would behave, He was saying that His judgment would be on them as a nation. And this indeed happened in history. The Edomites hated and regularly attacked the Israelites. So God allowed King David to conquer them, such that down throughout history, Israel was stronger than Edom. In this way, the older did serve the younger.

In electing the nation of Israel, Yahweh was not saying that all of Jacob's descendants would be justified and have eternal life.

Neither was God saying that all of Esau's descendants would not be justified and therefore end up in the lake of fire.

The context or topic of this passage is not about justification at all. It's about Yahweh's sovereign plans for nations.

ii. Quote 2: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated"

Paul's second quotation comes from Malachi.

Romans 9:11–13 (NIV)
11 Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything
good or bad—in order that God's purpose in election
might stand: 12 not by works but by him who calls—she
was told, "The older will serve the younger." 13 Just as it
is written: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."

Quote 1

Quote 2

Malachi 1:1–3
1 A prophecy: The word of the LORD to Israel through Malachi.

2 "I have loved you," says the LORD.

"But you ask, 'How have you loved us?'

"Was not Esau Jacob's brother?" declares the LORD. "Yet I have loved Jacob, 3 but Esau I have hated, and I have turned his hill country into a wasteland and left his inheritance to the desert jackals."

Was Yahweh saying that He hated Esau, the man? No, this would be a misunderstanding.

In saying "Jacob I loved, Esau I hated", it is helpful to recognise that it is a Hebrew expression to show preference in selection for a purpose.

- God sovereignly elected or preferred to have a covenant with Jacob's nation.
- God did not prefer Esau's family for the covenant.

How do we know that “being preferred” is the correct understanding of the Hebrew expressions of “loved” and “hated”?

We know this because it is the same Hebrew expression that is used to describe Jacob’s wives, Rachel and Leah.

When Laban tricked Jacob into marrying Leah, this is what the Bible said.

Genesis 29:30–32 30 So Jacob slept with Rachel, too, and he loved her much more than Leah. He then stayed and worked for Laban the additional seven years.	Notice that the Bible says that Jacob loved Leah. However, he loved Rachel more. While loving both women, Jacob preferred Rachel over Leah.
31 When the LORD saw that Leah was unloved, he enabled her to have children, but Rachel could not conceive.	“Unloved” in Hebrew [*śānēʾ*] is the same word translated as “hated” as in the phrase “Yet I have loved Jacob, but Esau I have hated [*śānēʾ*]”. But Jacob did not hate Leah. He simply preferred Rachel.
32 So Leah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him Reuben, for she said, “The LORD has noticed my misery, and now my husband will love me.”	In giving birth to Reuben, Leah hoped that Jacob would then prefer her over Rachel. She hoped to be the preferred wife, not that she was hated by Jacob.

Therefore, when Yahweh said “Yet I have loved Jacob, but Esau I have hated”, we recognise that Paul is pointing out through both quotations that Yahweh had chosen Jacob’s family to be part of the Abrahamic Covenant.

God was not saying that He had rejected Esau and would send him to the lake of fire.

The context or topic of this passage is not about justification at all. Neither is it about individuals.

After explaining God's choice between Jacob's nation and Esau's nation, Paul recognises that some might accuse Yahweh of being unfair for electing one nation over another.

So he addresses that by referring to an incident that happened between Yahweh and Moses.

> **Romans 9:14–16 (NIV)**
> 14 What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! 15 For he says to Moses,
>
> "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy,
> and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion."
>
> 16 It does not, therefore, depend on human desire or effort, but on God's mercy.

Yahweh's choice of national Israel was not dependent on:

- human desire (meaning what mankind wants) or
- human effort (meaning mankind cannot work to earn this for themselves).

God's choice of national Israel was based on His will and whom He chose to show mercy to.

iii. Quote 3: "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion"

After Yahweh punished the Israelites for worshipping the golden calf at Mount Sinai, He threatened to destroy all of them and start the nation afresh with Moses.

Moses pleaded with God on behalf of the people. He argued for God to continue His care for national Israel and not amend His plan to focus on him alone.

In their conversation, God kept focusing on Moses while Moses kept trying to focus God's attention on national Israel. Then Moses made a request.

> **Exodus 33:15–19**
> 15 Then Moses said, "If you don't personally go with us, don't make us leave this place.
>
>
>
>
> 16 How will anyone know that you look favorably on me—on me and on your people—if you don't go with us? For your presence among us sets your people and me apart from all other people on the earth."
>
> 17 The LORD replied to Moses, "I will indeed do what you have asked, for I look favorably on you, and I know you by name."
>
> 18 Moses responded, "Then show me your glorious presence."
>
> 19 The LORD replied, "I will make all my goodness pass before you, and I will call out my name, Yahweh, before you. For I will show mercy to anyone I choose, and I will show compassion to anyone I choose.

Yahweh agreed to Moses' request to reveal Himself, but just to Moses alone, and not to national Israel.

Yahweh has the right to decide whom He would reveal Himself to, as well as when and how.

This was the context of what He meant by showing mercy and compassion to Moses.

Yahweh had chosen not to show mercy and compassion to national Israel: they would not get the privilege of seeing Him in the way He was doing with Moses.

Building on his previous point, Paul showed these similarities.

	Yahweh chose	**Yahweh did not choose**
Whom to make the Abrahamic Covenant with?	**Jacob (national Israel)**	Esau (national Edom)
Whom to show His Glory to?	**Moses**	National Israel

Paul's point is that God has every right to make choices in this way.

This passage in Exodus is not about justification or salvation.

Moses was already justified (Hebrews 11:24). He already had faith in Yahweh. And the people of Israel too, had already put their faith in Yahweh (Hebrews 11:29).

Importantly, when God selected certain people groups for certain destinies, He did not overwhelm mankind's will. Yahweh would never violate the divine institution of responsible dominion He gave mankind, that is, the ability of every person to make genuine choices. Rather, He interacted with their choices.

Paul explains this further by bringing up the account of Pharaoh.

> **Romans 9:17–18 (NIV)**
> 17 For Scripture says to Pharaoh: "I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth."
>
> 18 Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden.

iv. Quote 4: "I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth"

This is what happened before God sent the seventh plague of hail on Egypt.

> **Exodus 9:13–16 (NIV)**
> 13 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Get up early in the morning, confront Pharaoh and say to him, 'This is what the LORD, the God of the Hebrews, says: Let my people go, so that they may worship me, 14 or this time I will send the full force of my plagues against you and against your officials and your people, so you may know that there is no one like me in all the earth. 15 For by now I could have stretched out my hand and struck you and your people with a plague that would have wiped you off the earth. 16 But I have raised you up for this very purpose, that I might show you my power and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.

While Pharaoh was a man, the Egyptians also saw Pharaoh as the nation. Interestingly, in the Egyptian language, there is no word for "state". "Pharaoh" was the state.

Pharaoh represented all of the pagan, idol-worshipping nation of Egypt.

Why does Paul choose to quote from this incident?

Paul is showing that Yahweh knows how history would play out. God knows that Pharaoh would refuse to let Israel go. He would then send judgment plagues. This show of power would lead people to the correct conclusion that:

- Yahweh is the real God.
- Pharaoh (whom the Egyptians worshipped as god) was not god.
- Pharaoh's magicians were not gods.
- The handmade, man-made idols that Egypt had created for themselves out of their own imaginations, were also not gods.

Paul's point is that Yahweh intentionally positioned Himself against Pharaoh to allow mankind to learn these truths.

However, Yahweh did not overwhelm Pharaoh's will.

v. Quote 5: "He hardens whom he wants to harden"

Some people think that this quote implies that Yahweh made good Pharaoh evil. And then God punished him for it. But this is simply not true.

Pharaoh was already evil. He did not acknowledge Yahweh or worship Him and he abused the Israelites as slaves. The Egyptians themselves had also chosen to treat the Israelites wickedly (Exodus 1:12–13, 5:21).

It is in this context that God said that he would "harden" evil Pharaoh's heart.

> **Exodus 4:21–23**
> 21 And the LORD told Moses, "When you arrive back in Egypt, go to Pharaoh and perform all the miracles I have empowered you to do. But <u>I will harden his heart so he will refuse to let the people go</u>. 22 Then you will tell him, 'This is what the LORD says: Israel is my firstborn son. 23 I commanded you, "Let my son go, so he can worship me." But since you have refused, I will now kill your firstborn son!'"

What does "harden" his heart mean?

The word translated as "harden" in English is the Hebrew word "*hāzaq*". Interestingly, "*hāzaq*" is only translated as "harden" in Exodus (and once in Joshua 11:20 in a similar context).

None of the other almost 290 uses of "*hāzaq*" in the Hebrew Scriptures has the idea of forcing someone or causing the person to be evil.

Rather, it appears that the better understanding of "*ḥāzaq*" is: strengthen, encourage, urge, help.

Here are two examples of the use of "*hāzaq*".

Passage	Comments
Isaiah 41:7 The carver encourages [*hāzaq*] the goldsmith, and the molder helps at the anvil. "Good," they say. "It's coming along fine." Carefully they join the parts together, then fasten the thing in place so it won't fall over.	The carver is encouraging the goldsmith at the work he has already chosen to do. There is no sense that the carver is overriding the free will of the goldsmith.
Ezekiel 13:22 You have discouraged the righteous with your lies, but I didn't want them to be sad. And you have encouraged [*hāzaq*] the wicked by promising them life, even though they continue in their sins.	Here, God is rebuking Israel for discouraging the righteous and instead, encouraging the wicked in the evil path they have already chosen. There is no sense of making the righteous person become righteous or forcing the wicked person to become wicked.

Other examples of "*hāzaq*": Deuteronomy 1:38; Joshua 1:9; Ezekiel 30:24–25; Isaiah 25:3–4.

With this understanding, we can now see that Pharaoh, of his own free will, had already chosen to reject Yahweh's command to let the people go.

So God encouraged him to carry on in this choice he had made. God strengthened him in his freewill choice.

How does this work?

Let's say we had to make a difficult and unpopular decision on a matter. We know it is the right thing to do. So we pray to God for strength. The Holy Spirit then ministers to us and enables us. He does not override our freewill choice. Rather, He gives us the resolve to stick to our decision.

Similarly, God did not make good Pharaoh turn evil. This would be against God's own character (James 1:13b–15). Rather, God encouraged Pharaoh to accomplish the evil he had already planned in his heart to do.

What happened here has nothing to do with Pharaoh's salvation.

Yahweh did not make Pharaoh an unbeliever in Him. Yahweh did not "harden" Pharaoh's heart such that Pharaoh was prevented from ever putting his faith in Him.

Yahweh simply strengthened him in his choice to refuse to let Israel go.

Despite his explanation, Paul knows some people would then say that if Yahweh had chosen different purposes for different nations, then how could He hold them nationally accountable for behaving in the ways that they have? They cannot be blamed because Yahweh had "pre-programmed" their responses.

Romans 9:19–23 (NIV)
19 One of you will say to me: "Then why does God still blame us? For who is able to resist his will?" 20 But who are you, a human being, to talk back to God? "Shall what is formed say to the one who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?'"

21 Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for special purposes and some for common use?

22 What if God, although choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath—prepared for destruction? 23 What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory—

Paul's reply to such an accusation is to say that those who had been created by God have no right to answer back to God in this way. This kind of attitude towards the Creator-God is wrong.

To make his point, Paul quotes Isaiah.

vi. Quote 6: "Shall what is formed say to the one who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?'"

Isaiah 45:9 (NIV)
"What sorrow awaits those who argue with their Creator.
Does a clay pot argue with its maker?
Does the clay dispute with the one who shapes it, saying,
'Stop, you're doing it wrong!'
Does the pot exclaim,
'How clumsy can you be?'

Paul is saying that mankind has to recognise who they are in relation to who God the Creator is. Mankind has no right to judge Yahweh.

Having such a judgmental attitude towards God is like the clay saying to the potter, "You're doing it wrong." Intuitively, people know that it would be ridiculous for the clay to question and challenge the potter in this manner.

Paul then quotes from Jeremiah to say that God has every right to do what He wants with His creation. He can make some pottery for special use and some for common use.

vii. Quote: Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for special purposes and some for common use?"

Jeremiah 18:1–11

1 The LORD gave another message to Jeremiah. He said, 2 "Go down to
the potter's shop, and I will speak to you there." 3 So I did as he told me
and found the potter working at his wheel. 4 But the jar he was making did
not turn out as he had hoped, so he crushed it into a lump of clay again
and started over.

5 Then the LORD gave me this message: 6 "O Israel, can I not do to you as this potter has done to his clay? As the clay is in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand.

7 If I announce that a certain nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down, and destroyed,
8 but then that nation renounces its evil ways, I will not destroy it as I had planned.

9 And if I announce that I will plant and build up a certain nation or kingdom, 10 but then
that nation turns to evil and refuses to obey me, I will not bless it as I said I would.

11 "Therefore, Jeremiah, go and warn all Judah and Jerusalem. Say to them, 'This is what
the LORD says: I am planning disaster for you instead of good. So turn from your evil ways,
each of you, and do what is right.'"

The pottery objects that Paul and Jeremiah are referring to are not individuals. They are nations.

God was speaking to Jeremiah about nations and their destinies.

He planned some nations for special purposes and others for common use.

However, God is not random in determining their national destinies. Rather, He clearly shows that nations have choices on how they would live and respond to Him.

On a national basis, whatever happens to a nation is dependant on how the citizens collectively respond to Yahweh.

Paul's point is that the the infinite Creator-Owner-Ruler of the world does not need to justify to finite mankind how He is running the universe.

He has every right to:

- Show the world His power through the “objects of his wrath”.
  (For example, Egypt, after a time of patiently waiting for them to let His people go).
- Show the world His glory through His “objects of mercy”.
  (For example, national Israel through whom He planned to use to reach the entire world).

In quoting Jeremiah, Paul is not talking about individual, eternal destinies.

He isn’t saying that God had chosen some people for eternal death or that every Egyptian would never be justified.

He isn’t saying that God had chosen some people for eternal life or that every Jew in Israel would be justified.

This passage in Jeremiah is not about justification or salvation. It is about how God works with nations to fulfil His plans for the world.

Understanding why Paul chose the Old Testament quotes that he did and the context of the quotes helps us understand what he is explaining. In summary, this is what he is saying.

1. Esau and Jacob	2. Yahweh and Moses	3. Pharaoh	4. Potter and clay
Yahweh was telling Rebekah the different destinies of the two nations that would come from her children. He had elected to make a covenant with the nation coming from Jacob (Israel). 	Yahweh has every right to extend mercy and grace to whomever He wants. 	Just as He chose Israel for the covenant, He chose Egypt as an instrument through whom He would reveal His power. 	Yahweh has every right to: • Show the world His power through national “objects of his wrath” (for example, Egypt). • Show the world His glory through national “objects of mercy” (for example, Israel).

Paul is not saying that God, even before a person is born, had already elected whether that person would be bound for eternal life, or condemned to the lake of fire.

None of Paul's quotes are about an individual's justification.

Consistently, in the Bible, we see that God is sovereign, and mankind also has genuine choices that they would be held accountable for.

In trying to understand the relationship between God's sovereignty and man's free will, we need to be careful not to push Scripture too far and make it say what it does not say.

Danger 1: Focusing only on God's sovereignty

Some people think that because God is sovereign, He decides who will believe and who will reject Him. It's not up to mankind at all but is totally up to God.

This way of thinking makes God out to be some kind of heavenly computer programmer who programs people in the same way that a human programs a computer to control a machine.

But this ignores the Creator-creature distinction. This thinking assumes that God's control and a human's control operate at the same level and in the same way.

If we think this way, we would end up believing that God overrides peoples' choices to get His way. In this view, people do not have free will.

However, we do not find this teaching in the Bible.

Danger 2: Focusing too much on man's free will

Other people think that God allows man to decide everything without any influence on His part. They think that God's sovereignty just means He looks into the future to see who will believe and who will not. Then He only calls those who will believe.

This idea gives man the ultimate control because God leaves decisions to man and just goes along with what man decides.

We also do not find this teaching in the Bible.

People sometimes think that it has to be one or the other: either God has sovereignty or mankind has free will. They think these two are in conflict with each other.

Actually, it is because God is **completely sovereign** that He can give mankind free will.

Why? Because no one can stop Him from fulfilling His plans.

This means He can offer mankind genuine free will and people can make whatever decisions they want, but they can never threaten or endanger God's plans and will.

Whereas, a God who is not sovereign would act to block people from making certain choices. He would have to intentionally limit mankind's free will to ensure that people never make choices that would mess up His plans! Or He would need to force them (or program them) to make certain choices so that His plans would succeed.

This means that only a sovereign, all-knowing, all-powerful Creator-God can allow people the genuine freedom to make real, freewill choices.

God's sovereignty and man's free will (that is, responsible choice) are both true. And that is where we must leave it, because the Bible does not explain more than that.

In dealing with Israel, Yahweh urges them to make a freewill decision to have a personal relationship with Him.

Isaiah 55:6–9

6 Seek the LORD while you can find him.
Call on him now while he is near.
7 Let the wicked change their ways
and banish the very thought of doing wrong.
Let them turn to the LORD that he may have mercy on them.
Yes, turn to our God, for he will forgive generously.

8 "My thoughts are nothing like your thoughts," says the LORD.
"And my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine.
9 For just as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so my ways are higher than your ways
and my thoughts higher than your thoughts.

Yahweh affirms that mankind genuinely has free will. If mankind does not have the ability to make choices, then Him saying, "Seek the LORD", "Call on him", "turn to the LORD" would be meaningless and in fact, a mockery of mankind.

However, God also makes it clear that our finite minds would not be able to fully grasp this. That is why He said that His ways are far beyond anything we can imagine.

Encouragingly, what we do see in both the Old and New Testaments, is that Yahweh's desire is that all people are reconciled to Him.

This is what He said in the Old Testament.

> **Ezekiel 18:23**
> "Do you think that I like to see wicked people die? says the Sovereign LORD. Of course not! I want them to turn from their wicked ways and live.

And this is what is said in the New Testament.

> **1 Timothy 2:1–6**
> 1 I urge you, first of all, to pray for all people. Ask God to help them; intercede on their behalf, and give thanks for them. 2 Pray this way for kings and all who are in authority so that we can live peaceful and quiet lives marked by godliness and dignity. 3 This is good and pleases God our Savior, 4 who wants everyone to be saved and to understand the truth. 5 For,
>
> There is one God and one Mediator who can reconcile God and humanity—the man Christ Jesus. 6 He gave his life to purchase freedom for everyone.
>
> **Acts 10:34–35**
> 34 Then Peter replied, "I see very clearly that God shows no favoritism. 35 In every nation he accepts those who fear him and do what is right.

Each person has to make up their own mind on what kind of relationship to have with Yahweh.

The leaders Yahweh put in place also understood this. This was what Joshua said to the Israelites:

> **Joshua 24:15**
> But if you refuse to serve the LORD, then choose today whom you will serve. Would you prefer the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates? Or will it be the gods of the Amorites in whose land you now live? But as for me and my family, we will serve the LORD."

God's will is for all mankind to be saved. However, it seems that He "calls" differently to different people.

Matthew 11:20–24

20 Then Jesus began to denounce the towns where he had done so many of his miracles, because they hadn't repented of their sins and turned to God.

21 "What sorrow awaits you, Korazin and Bethsaida! For if the miracles I did in you had been done in wicked Tyre and Sidon, their people would have repented of their sins long ago, clothing themselves in burlap and throwing ashes on their heads to show their remorse. 22 I tell you, Tyre and Sidon will be better off on judgment day than you.

23 "And you people of Capernaum, will you be honored in heaven? No, you will go down to the place of the dead. For if the miracles I did for you had been done in wicked Sodom, it would still be here today. 24 I tell you, even Sodom will be better off on judgment day than you."

More…

Jesus said these words part way through His ministry on earth, when the nation of Israel was beginning to reject Him.

But what exactly was He saying?

1. Jesus was saying that **God decides how and when He will call to people**.

   - He will call to some people "loudly": for example, He used miracles to call to Korazin and Bethsaida, Jewish cities.

   - But He didn't call as loudly to others: for example, He did not use miracles to call to Tyre and Sidon which were Phoenician (non-Jewish) cities.

2. Whether Jesus calls "louder" or "softer", **each person has a responsibility to respond** to His call. They have a choice to accept or reject.

   - When it comes to the final judgment, the Gentiles from Tyre and Sidon are going to scold the Jews from Korazin and Bethsaida for rejecting the message and grace that God gave them.

3. **God knows all the "what-ifs"**. If God had called to Tyre and Sidon "louder", using the miracles He did at Korazin and Bethsaida, Jesus said that they would have repented and believed.

Hearing this, some people wonder:

Question: If God knew that Tyre and Sidon would repent with a "louder" call, why didn't He call louder?

Answer: We don't know. Scripture does not give the answer.

More…

However, this was what Jesus said after He condemned Korazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum:

> **Matthew 11:25–30**
> 25 At that time Jesus prayed this prayer: "O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, thank you for hiding these things from those who think themselves wise and clever, and for revealing them to the childlike. 26 Yes, Father, it pleased you to do it this way!
>
> 27 "My Father has entrusted everything to me. No one truly knows the Son except the Father, and no one truly knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him."
>
> 28 Then Jesus said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light."

Jesus said that God has hidden the mysteries of why He does certain things from "those who think themselves wise and clever", meaning proud and arrogant people.

But more importantly, Jesus then goes on to graciously invite everyone to "come to me" and to "find rest" in Him. Jesus is saying that only those who come to Him in childlike faith, relying on Him and not on themselves will find peace, security and assurance.

Softly or loudly, Jesus calls to all people everywhere to come to Him for salvation. We are all personally responsible for our response to His calling.

- For those of us who have believed in Christ for salvation, we should be thankful that God called us loudly enough that we responded! We should be immensely grateful and never take His call for granted!
- For all the people whom we care about who have yet to trust God, we need to pray that Yahweh will have mercy on them and call them in a way that would help them respond positively.

The Messiah's Works are Prophesied in the Jewish Calendar

There is one more remarkable aspect we should appreciate about Yahweh's plan of salvation. We know that the death of Christ is a very significant event for mankind because it is through His death that God can justify anyone who believes in Him.

While many parts of Scripture prophesied about Messiah's death, what is fascinating is that God also gave exact timings of when the events surrounding Jesus' death would occur! Specifically, God had built it into Israel's national calendar!

Exactly what did God do? Recall that at Mount Sinai, God gave the Jewish nation their calendar. For perspective, the following table shows how Israel's calendar lines up with our modern one.

The Jewish months are based on the lunar calendar

Nisan	Iyyar	Sivan	Tammuz	Av	Elul	Tishrei	Heshvan	Kislev	Tevet	Shevat	Adar

Compared with the Gregorian solar calendar

Mar-Apr	Apr-May	May-Jun	Jun-Jul	Jul-Aug	Aug-Sep	Sep-Oct	Oct-Nov	Nov-Dec	Dec-Jan	Jan-Feb	Feb-Mar

In Leviticus 23, God put in place seven annual feasts (the word "feast" in Hebrew actually means "appointed time").

There are:

- four feasts in the spring

SPRING FEASTS

14 NISAN	15 NISAN	16 NISAN	50 days after First Fruits
Passover (Leviticus 23:5)	**Unleavened Bread** (Leviticus 23:6)	**First Fruits** (Leviticus 23:10-11)	**Weeks or Pentecost** (Leviticus 23:15-17)

- three feasts in the fall (or autumn).

FALL FEASTS

1 TISHREI	10 TISHREI	15 TISHREI
Trumpets (Leviticus 23:24-25)	**Day of Atonement** (Leviticus 23:27-32)	**Tabernacles or Festival of Shelters** (Leviticus 23:34-43)

Israel observed these “appointed times” each year and were reminded of God’s actions in saving them from Egypt and God’s continuous actions of securing them in their land and providing them food.

But there was more to Israel’s calendar. These feasts were also prophetic in nature.

The following diagram shows the dates and meaning of each of the spring feasts. But they also show how these “appointed times” were specific pictures of what Jesus would do. These spring feasts focus upon God’s redemption of Israel.

And indeed, Jesus fulfilled these pictures right down to the exact day, at His first coming!

God gave Israel their feasts as a picture of what their Messiah would do for them! In upcoming lessons, we will learn how Jesus’ actions at His first coming provided all that Israel needed spiritually to fulfil the mission that God had called them to do.

And we shall also see how the fall feasts look ahead to the work of the Messiah when He returns at His second coming.

FALL FEASTS

1 TISHREI

Trumpets
(Leviticus 23:24-25)

- The blowing of trumpets calls Israel to gather.
- It is a day of complete rest and to present an offering to God.

10 TISHREI

Day of Atonement
(Leviticus 23:27-32)

- This is the most solemn day for Israel.
- The high priest presents animal sacrifices for all Israel to pay for the nation's sins.

15 TISHREI

Tabernacles or Festival of Shelters
(Leviticus 23:34-43)

- Signals the time of the fall harvest.
- For seven days, they live in booths or temporary shelters in the fields. It reminds them of the years living in the wilderness after leaving Egypt.
- It also reminds them of being able to dwell in their land securely with God.

The fall feasts focus upon Israel's confession and restoration. And the gap of time between the spring and fall feasts is a picture of the gap between the 69th and 70th week of Daniel's prophecy about the period of seventy sets of seven (Daniel 9:24–27).

Israel's prophetic calendar really shows how meticulous and sovereign Yahweh is in the way He makes His plans and directs history. It shows He never panics nor makes hasty decisions in response to mankind's actions. He is ever ready!

Discussion Questions

Discuss the following questions as a group or use them for personal reflection.

1. What are your thoughts on the interaction between God's sovereignty and man's responsibility for their personal choices?
2. How would you respond to someone who asks why can't God just forgive our sins? Why must He insist on an exclusive way that involves such a bloody payment?
3. How easy is it to understand or explain what happened at the cross if we were to ignore the Old Testament? Think back to the lessons on Christ and take away all the Old Testament Scriptures used to explain the birth, life and death of Christ. Also take away all New Testament passages that are quotes of the Old Testament. Then try explaining the meaning and impact of the cross.

Pre-reading for next lesson: Matthew 28; Mark 16; Luke 24; John 20–21; Acts 1:1–11; 1 Corinthians 15