

# Chapter 1

## God's Plan

**Because God values relationships—He offers you a restored relationship!  
In scripture, personal relationships are called “covenant” relationships.  
A typical example of a covenant relationship is the marriage covenant.**

**T**he Bible tells how God created our world, and then planted a garden. He placed Adam in this Garden of Eden. God gave Adam authority over the garden and provided a wife, Eve. Life for Adam was magnificent; close fellowship with God was routine. God even walked in this garden. (Genesis 1:1-2:25)

God placed two trees in the garden to introduce the concept of choice. Adam and Eve had a choice to obey—or disobey God. One tree was the *tree of life*. However, the other tree was named the *tree of the knowledge of good and evil*. God instructed Adam not to eat from the tree that would ultimately teach him about *evil*—but Adam disobeyed. This disobedience drove humankind outside the Garden of Eden—and into our present world—to gain first-hand knowledge of what is *good*—and what is *evil*. (Genesis 2:9-3:24)

Adam's very first sin disrupted the relationship between God and man. Fortunately, God cared deeply about this broken fellowship, and went forward with a plan to provide the world a Messiah. God's mighty Savior left a throne in heaven—and went to the earth in a human form to rescue Adam, Eve, and their offspring—to include you and me. Every person since Adam has disobeyed God at least once—accordingly we all have all broken fellowship with God. Therefore, each person needs a personal Savior.

God had a dynamic plan for providing salvation. Jesus excelled as a teacher, a healer, even as a worker of miracles. But none of those things could bridge the gap between a holy God and a sinful man. A perfect God must hold to perfect justice; accordingly, the offenses (sins) of man must be punished. Because punishment could not be avoided the critical question was—who would take the punishment?

Scriptures tell us that before Jesus died, sin was placed upon him, so that a perfect sacrifice would pay the penalty for our sin. (2 Corinthians 5:21) His body became a blood sacrifice as Jesus took the punishment that you and I deserve—because the shedding of blood is the only payment for sin that God accepts. (Hebrews 9:22) Moreover, in his resurrection, Jesus demonstrated authority over death.

God provided a way to eradicate the penalty for sin—and to obtain eternal life—but only on his terms. Each person must acknowledge that he or she has rebelled (sinned) against God—and believe that the shed blood of Jesus—received as a gift—paid the complete penalty for that sin. This is an awesome gift, right?

It is not sufficient to believe that God exists. (James 2:19) It is never enough for a person to behave in a religious manner, or have another person ask God for forgiveness on his or her behalf. The bottom line is that each person must go directly to the Savior. (Hebrews 7:24-27) People must humble themselves before God—as scripture testifies that God *crowns the humble with salvation*. (Psalm 149:4)

God offers each man, woman, and child a personal, restored relationship—for any person who believes him. Belief in God is important because to not believe what God says, is to imply that he is a liar. As an illustration of this point, both the Old and New Testament state that God accepted Abraham simply because *Abraham believed God*. (Genesis 15:6; James 2:23) God is able to forgive any sin—but he chooses to not forgive the sin of unbelief.

Faith in Jesus can be compared to faith in an airplane. When a passenger boards an airplane, that person believes the plane will fly and land safely. The passenger does not put faith in his or her own ability to fly. In a similar manner, trust God. Trust him to save you, to forgive you, and to one day safely transport you to heaven. Your belief shows faith in God's abilities, promises, and faithfulness.

There is an intimate relationship between God and his people. The Father accepts all persons who believe him as children. (Romans 8:16) God's children are highly valued, and greatly loved. It is God's very nature to love; scripture tells us that *God is love*. (see 1 John 4:16)

## **Eternal Covenants**

The closest relationships are called “covenant” relationships. The best example of a covenant relationship is the marriage covenant. Each person demonstrates whom he or she trusts by the covenants they enter. Just as a bride and groom demonstrate covenant faith in each other, we are called to place binding, covenant faith in God. The central book of end-times prophecy, titled *Revelation*, is a story about eternally binding covenants.

During the end-times, every person will accept an everlasting covenant. Just as with God's covenants with Israel in the Old Testament, each of the three covenant relationships presented in Revelation is depicted with a mark on the forehead or hand. (Deuteronomy 6:6-8) This type of mark may seem odd—but consider that a common covenant symbol today, the wedding ring, distinguishes (marks) the left hand of husbands and wives.

Without doubt, it will be convenient to accept the covenant offered by the preeminent world leader—a confident and powerful man commonly called the Antichrist. Initially the leader of a restored Roman Empire, Antichrist enters the rebuilt Israeli temple on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, and claims to be God. Paul stated that Antichrist *sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God*. (see 2 Thessalonians 2:4)

Belief in a person's own religion is another covenant option. In other words, a person can put their faith in religion, but not in God. Israel's teachers in the early first century, the Pharisees, made this mistake. They wore long flowing religious robes (Mark 12:38), prayed in a most impressive manner (Mark 12:40), and routinely fasted (Matthew 9:14). A typical first-century Israeli citizen thought that these men set the gold standard for religious behavior—and saw Pharisees as being first-rate in the eyes of God.

However, those who followed such religion were in perilous danger. Jesus warned about the fate of Pharisees—and their congregations—when he said to them, *“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men’s faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to.”* (Matthew 23:13-14)

### *God’s Covenant*

God offers every person a restored relationship, a covenant of forgiveness and peace. This covenant incorporates all believers as members of the body of Christ. At the last supper before death, Jesus took bread and said, *“Take and eat; this is my body.”* (see Matthew 26:26) Paul later wrote that *we are members of his body*. (Ephesians 5:30)

Jesus sealed this blood-covenant with his death on the cross. At this last supper, Jesus also took wine and said, *this is my blood of the covenant*. (Matthew 26:28) Blood atonement was required for our sin because *without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness*. (Hebrews 9:22)

**TABLE 1-1: REVELATION—A STORY OF THREE COVENANTS**

Covenant	Scripture Depicting *
Trust in Antichrist	<i>He also forced everyone, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on his right <u>hand</u> or on his <u>forehead</u>,</i>  <span style="float: right;">(Revelation 13:16)</span>
Trust in Religion (Babylon)	<i>This title was written on her <u>forehead</u>:</i> <i>MYSTERY</i> <i>BABYLON THE GREAT</i> <i>THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES</i> <i>AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.</i>  <span style="float: right;">(Revelation 17:5)</span>
Trust in God	<i>“Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the <u>foreheads</u> of the servants of our God.”</i>  <span style="float: right;">(Revelation 7:3)</span>

\* COVENANTS DEPICTED AS A MARK ON THE HAND OR FOREHEAD. (Deuteronomy 6:6-8)

Jeremiah foretold the covenant relationship God offers to every person on earth; the New Testament restated this covenant centuries later. (Jeremiah 31:33-34; Hebrews 8:10-12; 10:16-17)

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*“This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel\* after that time,” declares the Lord.*

*“I will put my laws in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.*

*No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,” declares the LORD.*

*“For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.”*

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\*ALL BELIEVERS ARE CITIZENS OF ISRAEL. (Ephesians 2:11-13)

Upon accepting this covenant, God transforms each believer’s *heart* and *mind*. Each believer begins to understand and love God; believers personally “*know the Lord*,” as if the Lord were a family member.

God defined covenant relationships using terms familiar to first century Israelis. The Suzerain-Vassal covenant defined the relationship between a great king and a subject. The great king claimed absolute sovereignty and demanded total loyalty. The vassal was required to “love” his suzerain; and in return, the king promised the vassal protection. In the New Testament, Jesus is that great king; loyalty and love are the centerpieces to our relationship with God.

Royal Grant covenants are the unconditional grant of a king to a loyal servant. From this covenant come additional concepts about kings, servants, and even God’s grace—his undeserved favor. Parity covenants bind participants to mutual friendship and respect. Jesus epitomized loving friendship and respect; he called believers friends, brothers, and sisters. (John 15:15; Mark 3:35) We are members of the family of God; in fact, the Father has made us joint heirs with Christ. (Romans 8:17)

Once God accepts a person, his or her salvation is secure. This is important because no person is “good enough” to earn a place in heaven. The completion of the covenant is based on God’s faithfulness. God has *set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.* (2 Corinthians 1:22)

God’s covenant is also a type of marriage covenant—a celebration of eternal flesh. Paul wrote about this completion of this covenant, “*For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.*” *This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church.* (Ephesians 5:31-32; Revelation 19:9)

If you comprehend this covenant, know that God imparted your understanding as a gift. *The LORD confides in those who fear him; he makes his covenant known to them.* (Psalm 25:14)

## **Revelation**

Revelation contains seven letters that Jesus sent to seven churches in first-century provincial Asia—an area that today is a part of Turkey (Revelation 2, 3). Next, the visions depicting the end of our Age begin with a scrolled document supernaturally closed with seven seals. Some theologians describe this document as being the title or deed for planet earth. As each of the seven seals are broken, Jesus reasserts ownership of earth.

The first four seals bring the “four horsemen of the apocalypse” onto the scene—the spirits of (1) conquest, (2) war, (3) famine, and (4) death. The fifth seal is a cry from the martyrs—calling for justice—for God to avenge their deaths. Hearing the martyrs’ cry, God sees a planet (earth) covered with blood. God responds at the sixth seal by showing the murderous and life-disrespecting people of earth another planet (the moon) turned a frightening blood red color. At the same instant, he shakes the globe with worldwide earthquakes. With the seventh seal, there is silence in heaven and seven angels are given trumpets.

The first of seven trumpets burns a third of the earth—a description of global, thermonuclear war. The second trumpet describes an attack on warships at sea. The next two trumpets bring contaminated drinking water, and a darkened global atmosphere. The fifth trumpet opens a bottomless pit and demonic locusts come from the pit. With the next trumpet, four angels riding horses are released from the Euphrates River; released to kill a third of the persons on earth. Then the seventh angel sounds the last trumpet, and loud voices are heard in heaven, as excitement grows.

The pouring of the seven bowls of God's wrath upon the earth complete the destruction of God's enemies, with judgments similar to the plagues that Moses brought against Pharaoh. The first bowl brings painful sores. With the next two bowls the water in oceans, rivers, and springs become blood, just as Moses turned the water of the Nile River into blood. The fourth bowl causes the sun to flare and scorch men with fire. In contrast, the fifth bowl plunges the world into darkness. The sixth bowl dries the great Euphrates River, to allow armies to cross on the way to the battle of Armageddon. The last bowl is the most severe and destroys the false church, named Babylon. This judgment also brings hailstones and earthquakes that demolish the earth.

After the seventh bowl, Jesus returns to earth and fully defeats his enemies. Jesus then establishes a kingdom on a restored earth for one thousand years, and God's people reign with Christ. After the thousand years, the final heaven, the New Jerusalem, comes as the final dwelling place for God and his people.

Numerous personalities shape and define the end-time story. In the corner of righteousness are our heroes—the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit! Prophets, saints, and all those who revere his name serve God. (Revelation 11:18) Angels bring the fight on God's behalf, while a cast of millions in heaven cheers.

In the opposite corner are Satan, the Antichrist, and the false prophet. On earth, the kings (rulers of nations) and most of the earth's inhabitants align with this evil trinity. Fallen angels (demons) also support this massive rebellion against God.

Three separate religious bodies, which scripture depicts as three women, are also central to the story. The women are the Bride (the faithful church), Babylon (the prostitute church), and God's chosen nation, Israel.

The writer of Revelation, John, is also a participant. As events unfold, John is in the throne room of God. Most historians believe John to be the actual Apostle, and credit him with writing the gospel of John, 1<sup>st</sup> John, 2<sup>nd</sup> John, and 3<sup>rd</sup> John. He was the youngest and the last of the twelve Apostles to die. John saw Jesus die on the cross; there Jesus instructed John to take care of Mary. (John 19:26-27) John was tender in his relationships; he reclined next to Jesus at the Last Supper. (John 13:23-25) But John also had a fiery side to his personality; Jesus called him a *Son of Thunder*. (see Mark 3:17)

The fight is between good and evil. The battle is for the eternal souls of the men, women, and children.

## **Role Models**

Simeon and Anna were in the *temple courts* in Jerusalem at the time of the formal dedication ceremony for the newborn Jesus. Israel's most prominent religious leaders did not understand the significance of this event—but Simeon and Anna did. Simeon and Anna knew the Old Testament scriptures that foretold the first time Jesus came to earth; they fully understood what was happening.

Anna *never left the temple*; in other words, she *never* left the place where Old Testament scripture scrolls were stored. Thoroughly knowing these scriptures, Anna could speak with authority to Joseph and Mary. God promised Simeon that *he would not die before he had seen Israel's Messiah*. Simeon comprehended that Jesus was the Savior of the world, and declared that he could now be dismissed (die) in peace—knowing that God had provided a way to eternal life.

At a critical point in world history, Simeon and Anna faithfully applied their understanding of scripture in order to encourage two very courageous parents, Joseph and Mary.

## **THE STORY OF SIMEON AND ANNA:**

*Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the coming of the Messiah to Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the promised Messiah.*

*As Simeon was influenced by the Holy Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When Joseph and Mary brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Jewish Law required, Simeon took Jesus in his arms and praised God, saying: “Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.”*

*The child’s father and mother were greatly encouraged—in fact, they both marveled at what was said about their son. Then Simeon blessed them and spoke of the immense greatness of Jesus to Mary, his mother: “This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. Simeon then prepared Mary for her witnessing Jesus’ death—a sword will pierce your own soul too.*

*There was also a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshipped night and day, fasting and praying. Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the coming of the Messiah.*

Luke 2:25-38 (paraphrase)