

What Must I Believe to Be Saved?
Dr. Steven R. Cook

The Terms of Salvation

God requires that certain information be received and believed before He saves someone. This means saving faith requires content. From the divine side, God has done several things to bring about our salvation. From eternity past it was planned by God the Father (Eph 1:4; 2 Tim 1:9; 1 John 4:9-10, 14), executed in time by God the Son (John 3:16; Mark 10:45; Luke 19:10), and applied to those who believe by God the Holy Spirit (John 3:6; 1 Cor 12:13; Gal 3:27; Tit 3:5; 1 Pet 1:3). It was necessary that God the Son come into the world in hypostatic union, as undiminished deity and perfect humanity (John 1:1, 14; Col 2:9; Heb 1:8; 10:5; 1 Pet 2:24), be born of a virgin (Isa 7:14; Luke 1:30-35), live a sinless life (2 Cor 5:21; Heb 4:15; 1 Pet 2:22; 1 John 3:5), willingly go to the cross (Isa 53:10; John 10:11, 17-18), die a penal substitutionary atoning death on behalf of all humanity (Rom 5:8; 1 Cor 15:3-4; Heb 2:9; 10:10-14; 1 John 2:2), and be buried and resurrected on the third day (Matt 16:21; Rom 6:9; 1 Cor 15:3-4; 12-20). This was done to satisfy God's righteousness and justice regarding our sin (Rom 3:25; 1 John 2:2), and to display His love for us as lost sinners for whom Christ died (John 3:16; Rom 5:8). This was necessary because we are totally corrupted by sin and helpless to save ourselves (1 Ki 8:46; Eccl 7:20; Isa 59:2; 64:6; Rom 3:10, 23; 5:12; Eph 1:1-3; Jam 1:14-15), and if God had not acted in love (John 3:16; 1 John 4:9-10), we would all be damned forever to the lake of fire (Rev 20:15).

God, who is infinitely loving, good, and gracious, offers us salvation freely, as a gift (Rom 3:24; 6:23), by grace (Eph 2:8-9), and conditions it on faith alone in Christ alone (John 14:6; Acts 4:12), and "not as a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Eph 2:9; cf., Rom 11:6). According to Lewis Chafer, "salvation in all its limitless magnitude is secured, so far as human responsibility is concerned, by believing on Christ as Savior. To this one requirement no other obligation may be added without violence to the Scriptures and total disruption of the essential doctrine of salvation by grace alone."¹ Charles Ryrie adds:

More than 200 times in the New Testament, salvation is said to be conditioned solely on the basis of faith—faith that has as its object the Lord Jesus who died as our substitute for sin (John 3:16; Acts 16:31). Salvation is a free gift;

¹ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1993), 371.

therefore, any statement of the terms must carefully avoid implying that we give God something. He gives it all; we receive that gift through faith (John 1:12).²

John Walvoord states:

The terms of salvation are limited to faith in Christ because of the inadequacy and insufficiency of any other approach. Salvation is pictured therefore as a gift (Rom 6:23), as obtained by those “dead through ... trespasses and sins” (Eph 2:1). Salvation is therefore not a work of man for God or a work of God assisted by man, but rather a work of divine salvation effective on those who are willing to receive Jesus Christ as Savior.³

J. Dwight Pentecost states:

The gospel is characterized by its simplicity. When the Apostle Paul declared the terms of salvation to the Philippian jailer, he said “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved ...” (Acts 16:31). The Apostle Peter, speaking concerning salvation, declared, “... there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12)—none other but the name of Jesus. Sinners, confronted with their need of salvation, frequently stumble over the very simplicity of the salvation which God offers. Since Satan cannot take away anything from the conditions of salvation or the plan of salvation—for God has already reduced it to an irreducible minimum—if Satan is to confound the minds of the sinners he must do so by addition, not subtraction. If conditions were placed by God to salvation, Satan might take away those conditions so that men would not be saved. But since there are no conditions, and salvation is a simple fact to be believed, Satan’s method of deceiving men has been to add to the simplicity of the gospel. That is why some will teach that salvation is by faith and good works; or, salvation is by faith and baptism; or, salvation is by faith plus church membership; or, salvation is by faith plus repentance. These are all attempts to darken the mind of the man who needs to be saved concerning the central issue and the basic plan of redemption.⁴

² Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *A Survey of Bible Doctrine* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1972).

³ John F. Walvoord, “The Doctrine of Assurance in Contemporary Theology,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 116 (1959): 200–201.

⁴ J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things Which Become Sound Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1996), 61.

Though faith alone is the only requirement by God, the content of faith has changed throughout the ages, depending on what God revealed at a particular time. What God revealed to Adam and Eve was different than what He revealed to Abraham, and what He revealed to Abraham was different than what He reveals to us. Before addressing the content of saving faith, let's look at what it means to believe.

What it Means to Believe

The word *believe*, in the OT, derives from the Hebrew verb *aman* (אָמַן) which means “to regard something as trustworthy, to believe in.”⁵ And in the NT, the Greek verb *pisteuō* (πιστεύω) means “to consider something to be true and therefore worthy of one’s trust.”⁶ In Genesis we see where Abraham “believed [*aman*] in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness” (Gen 15:6). When citing this passage in the NT (Rom 4:3; Gal 3:6; Jam 2:23), the writers used the Greek verb *pisteuō* (πιστεύω) in place of the Hebrew verb *aman* (אָמַן), which shows the words are synonymous. Faith, as a verb, is used of trust in God (Gen 15:6; Heb 11:6; cf. Rom 4:3), trust in Jesus (Acts 16:31; 1 Pet 1:8), and trust in Scripture (John 2:22).⁷ Biblically, faith means having an attitude of confidence in God, being certain that He will keep His Word and do as He promised, for He cannot lie (Num 23:19; Heb 6:18; Tit 1:2). When faith is exercised, it trusts solely in the object and no one else. Abraham is an example of a believer who trusted God at His Word, for “with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform” (Rom 4:20-21).

To believe is to have a mental conviction that a testimony is true or that someone or

⁵ Ludwig Koehler et al., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994–2000), 64.

⁶ William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 816.

⁷ The NT also presents faith as a noun (πίστις *pistis*), which often refers to “that which evokes trust and faith...the state of being someone in whom confidence can be placed, faithfulness, reliability, fidelity” (BDAG 818). The word is used with reference to God who is trustworthy (Rom 3:3; 4:19-21), and of people who possess faith (Matt 9:2, 22; 21:21), which can be great (Matt 15:28; cf. Acts 6:5; 11:23-24), small (Matt 17:19-20), or absent (Mark 4:39-40; cf. Luke 8:25). It is also used of Scripture itself as a body of reliable teaching (i.e. Acts 14:22; 16:5; Rom 14:22; Gal 1:23; 2 Tim 4:7). And we see faith as an adjective (πιστός *pistos*), which describes someone “being worthy of belief or trust, trustworthy, faithful, dependable, inspiring trust/faith” (BDAG 820). The word is used God (1 Cor 1:9; 10:13; 2 Tim 2:13; Heb 10:23; Rev 1:5), and of people (Matt 25:23; 1 Cor 4:17; Col 1:7; 1 Tim 1:12; 2 Tim 2:2; Heb 3:5).

something is reliable and worthy of confidence. Faith starts with mental assent and results in placing one's faith in the object itself. For example, one can assent that a chair is structurally sound and able to support a person, and then, by faith, sit in the chair and relax. Or one can assent that an automobile is safe to drive, and then, trusting the car, get behind the wheel and drive it to a desired destination. Faith always demands an object, is exercised with a view to receiving a benefit, and the object gets the credit for doing what it was supposed to do. For Christians, Jesus is the object of our faith, eternal life is the benefit we receive, and Christ gets all the glory as the One who saves. When we believe in Jesus, we acknowledge that He is the incarnate Son of God (John 1:1, 14), that our salvation was accomplished by means of His death, burial, and resurrection (1 Cor 15:3-4), and we trust in Him alone to save us eternally (Acts 4:12; 16:31). Christ alone saves. Nothing more. The following illustration is helpful:

Many people misunderstand what the Bible means by "believe." Belief basically means trust. As an example, imagine you are stranded on one side of a river. The only way across is via a tightrope suspended overhead. A man on the other side has a wheelbarrow and says he can rescue you. Being a skilled acrobat, he crosses the tightrope with the wheelbarrow successfully. Now, you believe that the man himself can cross the tightrope, but in order to be saved, you have to trust him to get you over the tightrope in the wheelbarrow! Will you believe in him or not? Similarly, trusting Jesus for salvation means trusting him to do for you what you cannot do for yourself. There's no way we can earn heaven; we must trust Jesus to carry us there.⁸

The Content of Saving Faith

Eternal salvation has always been by grace alone through faith alone; however, the content of faith (i.e., what is believed), has changed throughout the ages. According to Arnold Fruchtenbaum, "Indeed, there always was, always is, and always will be only one means of salvation: by grace through faith."⁹ Though grace and faith are constants, the content of faith has changed over time, depending on what God revealed to each person or generation, as divine revelation came in stages. William MacDonald sates, "**From Adam to Christ, God saved those who put their faith in Him on the basis of whatever revelation He gave them.** Abraham, for example,

⁸ Michael Klassen and William W. Klein, "Romans," in *The Apologetics Study Bible for Students*, ed. Sean McDowell (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 1410.

⁹ Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Ariel's Bible Commentary: The Book of Genesis*, 1st ed. (San Antonio, TX: Ariel Ministries, 2008), 275.

believed God, and it was reckoned to him for righteousness (Gen 15:6).”¹⁰ According to Norman Geisler, “**the revealed content of the gospel varied from age to age in the progress of revelation.**”¹¹ Charles Ryrie notes, “The basis of salvation is always the death of Christ; the means is always faith; the object is always God (though man’s understanding of God before and after the Incarnation is obviously different); but **the content of faith depends on the particular revelation God was pleased to give at a certain time.**”¹² Thomas Constable adds, “The basis of salvation is always the death of Christ. No one is saved except by what He accomplished at Calvary. The requirement for salvation is always faith. It is never works. The object of faith is always the Person of God. **The content of faith is always a promise from God.**”¹³ The following examples demonstrate that the content of faith has changed over time.

First, after the historic fall of Adam and Eve (Gen 3:1-7), the content of saving faith was God’s promise of an offspring of Eve who would crush the head of the serpent. In the presence of Adam and Eve, God told Satan, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel” (Gen 3:15). This is commonly regarded as the *protoevangelium*; that is, the first gospel message. The crushing of Satan’s head—a fatal blow—was accomplished by the Lord Jesus at the cross where He triumphed over sin and death. How much Adam and Eve understood about this prophecy is not known. However, it is assumed they trusted God at His word concerning the future offspring that would crush the serpent’s head. Shortly after giving the promises, God killed an animal, which meant shedding its blood, and made clothes from its hide and gave it to them to wear (Gen 3:21). Arnold Fruchtenbaum notes, “The covering of animal skins, which required the shedding of blood to give them the atonement, replaced the covering of fig leaves. Then the verse states: and clothed them. Physically, He clothed their nakedness, but spiritually, He also covered their sin by making for them their atonement.”¹⁴ And according to Charles Ryrie, “When Adam looked upon the coats of skins with which God had clothed him and his wife, he did not see what the believer today sees looking back

¹⁰ William MacDonald, *Believer’s Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 1690.

¹¹ Norman L. Geisler, *Systematic Theology, Volume Four: Church, Last Things* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2005), 484.

¹² Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, Rev. and expanded. (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1995), 140.

¹³ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable’s Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Ex 12:43.

¹⁴ Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Ariel’s Bible Commentary: The Book of Genesis*, 110.

on the cross of Calvary.”¹⁵ We should not assume that Adam and Eve understood the death, burial, and resurrection of Messiah. What they understood was God’s promise of a future offspring who would crush the serpent, and then they witnessed God killing an animal, taking its skin, and making clothing for them. When they believed God’s promise and accepted His provision, it resulted in their salvation.

Second, in the book of Genesis we have the record of Abraham’s salvation. Moses wrote that Abraham “believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness” (Gen 15:6). The content of Abraham’s faith was the promise of God concerning the Abrahamic covenant (Gen 12:1-3), especially as it related to God giving him a biological descendant (Gen 15:1-6). Abraham accepted God’s promise as true and reliable, which meant he trusted in God Himself. And when Abraham believed in Yahweh, we’re told that God “reckoned it to him as righteousness” (Gen 15:6b).¹⁶ Concerning Abraham’s faith in God, Arnold Fruchtenbaum states, “The content of his faith was the promises of God. The object of his faith was Jehovah.”¹⁷ According to J. Carl Laney Jr., “God had just promised Abraham, an elderly man with a barren wife, that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars. In spite of the physical hindrances to the fulfillment of this promise, Abraham trusted God...Because Abraham accepted God’s word as true and reliable, God declared him righteous, and therefore acceptable.”¹⁸ Paul cited Genesis 15:6 in Romans (Rom 4:3) and Galatians (Gal 3:6) when making his case that believers are justified by faith alone, and not by any works of the Law (Rom 4:4-5).

Third, in the book of Ruth we find a good example of a Gentile who came to trust in the Lord. Ruth told her mother-in-law, Naomi, “Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God” (Ruth 1:16). Here is an expression of faith in the Lord Himself. Later, God would direct Israel to serve as His witnesses (Isa 43:10), telling others, “I, even I, am the LORD, and there is no savior besides Me” (Isa 43:11). For a Gentile to be saved, it meant trusting in Yahweh alone and not pagan idols, of which there are none. It also meant not trusting in works, which is what pagan idolatry required. Concerning this verse, Warren Wiersbe states, “Ruth’s statement in Ruth 1:16-17 is one of the most magnificent confessions found anywhere in

¹⁵ Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 134.

¹⁶ In his commentary on Genesis, Allen Ross notes, “The text does not necessarily mean that Abram came to faith here. Hebrews 11:8 asserts that he left Ur by faith. Genesis 15:6 simply reports at this point the fact that Abram believed, and for that belief God had credited him with righteousness.” (Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis*, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998, 310).

¹⁷ Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Ariel’s Bible Commentary: The Book of Genesis*, 275.

¹⁸ J. Carl Laney Jr., “Soteriology”, *Understanding Christian Theology*, 238–239.

Scripture...[as] she confessed her faith in the true and living God and her decision to worship Him alone.”¹⁹ And Arnold Fruchtenbaum notes, “Ruth invoked the name of God in her oath and not the name of Chemosh. This shows in whom she truly believed.”²⁰ What’s interesting is that after Ruth married Boaz (Ruth 4:13), she was brought into the family line that led to King David (Ruth 4:18-22), and the Messiah Himself (Matt 1:1, 5). Ruth was among the Gentiles in the OT who believed in Yahweh and were saved. Other Gentile believers include Melchizedek (Gen 14:18), Rahab (Matt 1:5; Heb 11:31), and likely the Queen of Sheba (1 Ki 10:1-13), Naaman the Aramean (2 Ki 5:15-19), the Ninevites (Jonah 3:5, 9-10), Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 2:47; 3:29; 4:34-37),²¹ and the Magi who came from the east to worship Messiah (Matt 2:1-2, 11).

Fourth, during the time of Jesus’ life and ministry—but prior to His death on the cross—people were directed to believe *the gospel of the kingdom* (Matt 3:1-2; 4:17; Mark 1:14-15). The *gospel of the kingdom* directed Israelites to look to Jesus as the promised Messiah. This meant looking to Jesus as the “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29; cf. Isa 53:4-11). Faith in Jesus would result in their spiritual and eternal salvation. The object of their faith is Christ alone. John wrote, “whoever **believes in Him** will have eternal life” (John 3:15), and “God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that **whoever believes in Him** shall not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:16), and “**He who believes in the Son** has eternal life” (John 3:36). And Jesus pointed others to Himself, saying, “For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and **believes in Him** will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day” (John 6:40), and “Truly, truly, I say to you, **he who believes has eternal life**” (John 6:47; cf.,

¹⁹ Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Committed*, “Be” Commentary Series (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1993), 21.

²⁰ Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Ariel’s Bible Commentary: The Books of Judges and Ruth*, 1st ed. (San Antonio, TX: Ariel Ministries, 2006), 300.

²¹ It’s very likely that Nebuchadnezzar trusted God after being humbled by the Lord (see Daniel 4:1-37). Throughout the decades of Nebuchadnezzar’s life, he’d had interactions with Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, and the king gained knowledge about God. From his own mouth, Nebuchadnezzar said to Daniel, “Surely your God is a God of gods and a Lord of kings” (Dan 2:47), and to Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah he declared, “no other god is able to deliver in this way” (Dan 3:29). After the king had suffered for seven years, he eventually came to the place where he said, “I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever” (Dan 4:34), and “Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise, exalt and honor the King of heaven” (Dan 4:37). Though one cannot be dogmatic, Nebuchadnezzar’s final words strongly imply salvific faith in God—at least as he understood Him from his interactions with the Hebrews—and the result was one of worship to the Lord. If one accepts Nebuchadnezzar’s words as an expression of his conversion, it means he trusted in the God of Israel.

John 10:28).

The *gospel of the kingdom* also pertained to Israel's theocratic kingdom, where God would rule over His people through Jesus, the descendant of David and rightful King of the nation (2 Sam 7:16; Psa 89:3-4, 35-37; Isa 9:6-7; Jer 23:5; 33:15; Luke 1:31-33; Matt 19:28; 25:31; Rev 11:15; 20:4-6). John the Baptist preached, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt 3:2). To be "at hand" meant the earthly kingdom was being offered to Israel. Additionally, the *gospel of the kingdom* was preached by Jesus and His disciples even after John had been arrested. Mark wrote, "Now after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel'" (Mark 1:14-15; cf. Matt 9:35; 10:5-7). Norman Geisler correctly states, "The messianic kingdom is a visible, earthly, political kingdom promised to Israel in which Christ, her Messiah, will reign from a throne in Jerusalem over the whole earth, with His apostles and other disciples serving Him."²² Merrill F. Unger states, "The Gospel of the Kingdom [is] the good news that God's purpose is to establish an earthly mediatorial kingdom in fulfillment of the Davidic covenant (2 Sam 7:16)."²³ If the leadership and people Israel would change their minds (i.e., repent) and accept Jesus as their rightful King, they would experience national deliverance from Gentile tyranny, which they were experiencing, being under the rule of Rome. According to Arnold Fruchtenbaum, "Jesus went around Israel, city to city and synagogue to synagogue, proclaiming His Messiahship and preaching the gospel of the Kingdom. He was offering to Israel the Kingdom of the Jewish prophets, but the Kingdom was preconditioned by Israel's acceptance of Him as the Messianic King."²⁴ We know that Israel rejected Jesus as the Messiah (Matt 12:24-32; 27:20-23), and the result was judgment upon them (Matt 23:37-39; Rom 11:25-26). Afterwards, Jesus was crucified for the sins of the world (John 3:16; 1 John 2:2), was buried, and raised again on the third day (1 Cor 15:3-4). The crucifixion of Jesus was part of God's predetermined plan for the redemption of humanity, regardless of Israel's response. The *gospel of the kingdom* was postponed until the time of the Tribulation. According to Merrill F. Unger:

Two proclamations of the gospel of the kingdom are mentioned, one already past, beginning with the ministry of John the Baptist, carried on by our Lord

²² Norman L. Geisler, *Systematic Theology, Volume Four: Church, Last Things* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2005), 461.

²³ Merrill F. Unger, "Gospel," ed. R.K. Harrison, *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1988), 493.

²⁴ Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Footsteps of the Messiah: A Study of the Sequence of Prophetic Events*, Rev. ed. (Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries, 2003), 294.

and His disciples, and ending with the Jewish rejection of the Messiah. The other preaching is yet future (Matt 24:14), during the Great Tribulation, and heralding the second advent of the King.²⁵

The *gospel of the kingdom* that was preached by John the Baptist, and Jesus and His disciples, cannot be *the gospel of grace* that is preached by Christians today. Why? The content of the gospels are different. Paul preached “the gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20:24), which was “to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek” (Rom 1:16), whereas *the gospel of the kingdom* was solely “to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt 10:6). Furthermore, *the gospel of grace* includes “the cross of Christ” (1 Cor 1:17), telling us that “Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures” (1 Cor 15:3-4). But the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus was not communicated by the disciples when they preached the “gospel of the kingdom” (Matt 4:23). How do we know this? After Jesus had been rejected by the leadership of Israel, Matthew tells us, “Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day” (Matt 16:21). Apparently the disciples did not like what Jesus said, as Matthew tells us, “Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, ‘God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You’” (Matt 16:22). For a brief moment, Peter was an enemy of the cross, trying to prevent Jesus from going to the cross, and he was rebuked for it. The Lord said to Peter, “Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God’s interests, but man’s” (Matt 16:23). If Peter had had his way, Jesus would never have gone to the cross. The second time Jesus spoke about the events of His crucifixion (Matt 17:22-23), we’re told the disciples “were deeply grieved” (Matt 17:23b), implying they did not fully understand the significance of the cross. Jesus mentioned His crucifixion to His disciples a third time (Matt 20:18-19), but there was no response. Later, Peter tried to defend Jesus with a sword to prevent His arrest, which implied he did not understand the significance of the cross (Matt 26:51-52). Though they were saved by faith alone in Christ alone, they did not grasp the significance of the cross, for if they had, they would not have opposed His arrest or crucifixion. In fact, the disciples did not understand Jesus’ resurrection until after it happened (John 20:1-8), which is what John revealed, saying, “For as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead” (John 20:9). After Jesus’ resurrection, they finally understood His words.

²⁵ Merrill F. Unger, “Gospel,” ed. R.K. Harrison, *The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1988).

If *the gospel of the kingdom* that was preached by John the Baptist and Jesus' disciples included the death burial and resurrection of Jesus, then Peter would not have been surprised and reacted so strongly to Jesus' words. He would have thought, "oh yeah, that's what we've been preaching all along, and now the time is near for His death." But that was not Peter's reaction. Peter tried to stop Jesus from going to the cross (Matt 16:22; 26:51-52). Renald Showers correctly notes, "The language indicates that although the disciples had already been preaching one gospel [of the kingdom], up to this point Jesus had never told them about His coming death, burial, and resurrection. Therefore, the first gospel contained nothing concerning Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection."²⁶

Fifth, for those living in the church age, the content of faith is the good news that Jesus—the Messiah—died for our sins, was buried, and resurrected on the third day (1 Cor 15:3-4). When people accept this as historically true, and then place their faith in Jesus, they experience salvation. According to Fruchtenbaum, "we must believe that Yeshua died for our sins as our substitute, that He was buried and rose again, and that He therefore has provided salvation. Thus, one trusts Yeshua for one's salvation."²⁷ According to Robert B. Thieme Jr., "First Corinthians 15:3-4 defines the boundaries of the Gospel, beginning with the work of Christ and ending with His resurrection...Any Gospel message that strays from the cross or denies Jesus Christ's resurrection from physical death is inaccurate and out of bounds."²⁸ Today we understand the saving gospel message as, "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor 15:3-4). Knowing the good news of what God accomplished for us through Christ at the cross, we must then "Believe in the Lord Jesus" (Acts 16:31), and trust exclusively in Him as our Savior, for "there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). Salvation is by grace alone (Rom 3:24; Eph 2:8-9), through faith alone (Rom 3:28; 5:1; Gal 2:16; Eph 2:8-9), in Christ alone (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). And when we believe in Christ as Savior, we are forgiven all our sins (Acts 10:43; Eph 1:7), given eternal life (John 10:28), become children of God (John 1:12; Gal 3:26), are "rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred to the kingdom of His beloved Son" (Col 1:13), become citizens of

²⁶ Renald E. Showers, *There Really Is a Difference!: A Comparison of Covenant and Dispensational Theology* (Bellmawr, NJ: The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, Inc., 1990), 3–4.

²⁷ Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Faith Alone: The Condition of Our Salvation: An Exposition of the Book of Galatians and Other Relevant Topics*, ed. Christiane Jurik, Second Edition. (San Antonio, TX: Ariel Ministries, 2016), 6.

²⁸ Robert B. Thieme, Jr. "Gospel", *Thieme's Bible Doctrine Dictionary*, (Houston, TX., R. B. Thieme, Jr., Bible Ministries, 2022), 113

heaven (Phil 3:20), and are blessed “with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ” (Eph 1:3).

Sixth, during the seven-year tribulation many will be saved, both Jews and Gentiles. The apostle John described 144,000 Jewish believers, taken from the twelve tribes of Israel, who are called “bond-servants of our God” (Rev 7:3), and who will be sealed by the Lord (Rev 7:4). After describing these Jewish believers, John then saw “a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes” (Rev 7:9). When John asked, “where have they come from?” (Rev 7:13), the answer was given, “These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (Rev 7:14). The last clause that mentions “the blood of the Lamb” speaks of the work of Jesus Christ on the cross, “the blood of Christ” (1 Pet 1:19) which purchased our salvation. But what did these Tribulation saints believe that resulted in their salvation?

In the Olivet Discourse (Matthew chapters 24-25), Jesus prophesied about the future tribulation and His second coming and said, “This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come” (Matt 24:14). The gospel of the kingdom that was offered to Israel during Messiah’s first coming is similar to the gospel message preached during the time of the Tribulation. J. Dwight Pentecost notes, “Although the news at the first advent was restricted to Israel, prior to the second advent it will be announced not only to Israel but to the whole world.”²⁹ William MacDonald states, “the gospel of the kingdom is the good news that Christ is coming to set up His kingdom on earth, and that those who receive Him by faith during the Tribulation will enjoy the blessings of His Millennial Reign.”³⁰ The gospel of the kingdom offers both spiritual and national deliverance to those living during the tribulation. According to J. Dwight Pentecost. “This was the Gospel Christ proclaimed as He offered Israel the covenanted kingdom and invited them to put faith in Him. This same message will be proclaimed again during the years of the Tribulation period preceding Messiah’s second advent to the earth.”³¹ The first part of its message directs people to look to Jesus as “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29). This

²⁹ J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come: A Study in Biblical Eschatology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1958), 472.

³⁰ William MacDonald, *Believer’s Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 1294.

³¹ J. Dwight Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom Come: Tracing God’s Kingdom Program and Covenant Promises throughout History* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1995), 311.

results in spiritual and eternal salvation. The second part of the gospel of the kingdom pertains to Israel's theocratic kingdom, where God will rule over His people and the world, through Jesus, the descendant of David and rightful King of the nation. This gospel will last until the seven years are completed, and then, as Jesus said, "the end will come" (Matt 24:14b). The "end" refers to the end of the seven year tribulation, when Jesus returns and puts down all rebellion (Rev 19:11-21) and establishes His kingdom on earth for a thousand years (Rev 20:1-6). It is at that time, "when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne" (Matt 25:31), and He will reign for "a thousand years" (Rev 20:6). According to Louis A. Barbieri Jr.:

Though this will be a terrible time of persecution, the Lord will have servants who will witness and spread the good news concerning Christ and His soon-coming kingdom. This message will be similar to that preached by John the Baptist, Jesus, and the disciples at the beginning of Matthew's Gospel, but this message will clearly identify Jesus in His true character as the coming Messiah. This is not exactly the same message the church is proclaiming today. The message preached today in the Church Age and the message proclaimed in the Tribulation period calls for turning to the Savior for salvation. However, in the Tribulation the message will stress the coming kingdom, and those who then turn to the Savior for salvation will be allowed entrance into the kingdom. Apparently many will respond to that message (cf. Rev 7:9-10).³²

J. Dwight Pentecost adds:

The Gospel of the kingdom is the message that John the Baptist proclaimed to Israel. It involved first a call to repentance, then an invitation to behold or to look by faith to the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29). This is the same message that will be proclaimed in the world during that period Christ called, literally, "the tribulation, the great one" (Matt 24:21). This future period is the unfulfilled seven years of Daniel's prophecy of the seventy weeks (Dan 9:24-27). During this period the Gospel of the kingdom will be preached to Gentiles by 144,000 who will be sovereignly redeemed and commissioned to be God's servants (Rev 7:1-8). They will proclaim salvation by grace through faith based on blood so that men can have "washed

³² Louis A. Barbieri Jr., "Matthew," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 77.

their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (Rev 7:14). The same message will be proclaimed by the two witnesses (Rev 11:3), prophets God will raise up to bring a message to the nation Israel. Indeed, their message is no different than the one the prophets have always brought to a disobedient covenant people down through the ages.³³

In summary, saving faith is always a response to God and a promise He has made. Today, God the Holy Spirit draws people to Christ, convicting them of one particular sin, and that is the sin of not trusting in Jesus as Savior. Jesus specified the particular sin, saying, “because they do not believe in Me” (John 16:9). When people respond positively to the work of the Holy Spirit, they will believe in Jesus as Savior, accepting the truth “that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures” (1 Cor 15:3-4). And having accepted this good news, they will then turn to Christ as Savior, and “Believe in the Lord Jesus” (Acts 16:31), and be saved.

Long and Short Gospel Presentations

In the New Testament, the gospel that saves is presented in both long and short form. A long presentation of the gospel is found in the Gospel of John as a whole. The apostle John states, “Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name” (John 20:30-31). The gospel that saves is clearly presented in the Gospel of John.

A short form of the gospel is found in Acts 16, where Paul and Silas told the Philippian jailer, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved” (Acts 16:31). The text of Acts 16 as a whole is not evangelistic in nature, but a brief account of Paul’s missionary journey in the city of Philippi, of which the jailer was a part of that historical narrative. How much the Philippian jailer knew about God, sin, the personhood of Jesus, and the cross and resurrection is not revealed in the text. What is plain is that Paul told the jailer that if he believed in the Lord Jesus, he would be saved.

A Warning to Any Who Would Pervert the Gospel of Grace

The gospel that saves spiritually is specific in its content, and to preach any other

³³ J. Dwight Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom Come*, 121–122.

gospel will not only result in a failure for the lost to obtain that which is necessary for entrance into heaven, but it will bring great judgment upon the one who proclaims it. The apostle Paul wrote, “But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!” (Gal 1:8-9). It is noteworthy that Paul includes himself in this warning, as the gospel that was delivered to him, once it was received, could not be changed, even by one so great as the apostle Paul himself. Concerning this verse, Arnold Fruchtenbaum comments:

In verses 8–9, Paul pronounces the *anathema*, which is a rebuke against false teachers. Anyone who teaches a gospel that is different from the gospel they have received is to be *anathema*. Another gospel is any gospel other than the gospel of the grace of God. Any addition to the simple statement that salvation is by grace through faith is another gospel. Any addition to the gospel—be it baptism, tongues, ceremonies, church membership, repentance—perverts the gospel and is *anathema*.³⁴

Lewis Chafer adds:

This anathema has never been revoked, nor could it be so long as the saving grace of God is to be proclaimed to a lost world. From the human point of view, a misrepresentation of the gospel might so misguide a soul that the way of life is missed forever. It behooves the doctor of souls to know the precise remedy he is appointed to administer. A medical doctor may, by an error, terminate what at best is only a brief life on earth. The doctor of souls is dealing with eternal destiny. Having given His Son to die for lost men, God cannot but be exacting about how that great benefit is presented, nor should He be deemed unjust if He pronounces an anathema on those who pervert the one and only way of salvation which was purchased at so great a cost. A sensitive man, when realizing these eternal issues, might shrink from so great a responsibility, but God has not called His messengers to such a failure. He enjoins them to “preach the word” and assures them of His unfailing presence and enabling power.³⁵

³⁴ Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Faith Alone: The Condition of Our Salvation: An Exposition of the Book of Galatians and Other Relevant Topics*, 12–13.

³⁵ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3, p. 10.