

# Chapter 1

## God's Plan

**Because God values relationships—He offers you a restored relationship  
Close personal relationships in scripture are “covenant” relationships  
An example of a covenant relationship is the marriage covenant**

**G**od planted a garden. He gave Adam authority over this Garden of Eden. Life was magnificent; fellowship with God was routine. God walked in this garden. (Genesis 1:1-2:25) God placed two trees in the garden; one was the *tree of life* and the other the *tree of the knowledge of good and evil*. God told Adam to refrain from eating fruit from the tree that provided knowledge of what is *evil*, but he disobeyed. This sin drove humanity outside Eden into our present world to gain first-hand knowledge of not only what is *good*, but also what is *evil*. (Genesis 2:9-3:24)

Adam's transgression disrupted the relationship between God and man. Fortunately, God deeply cared about this broken fellowship and went forward with a plan to provide a Messiah. God's mighty Savior left a throne in heaven and went to earth in human form to rescue Adam, Eve, and their descendants, to include you and me. Every person on earth has disobeyed God, which resulted in a broken relationship. Every person needs a Savior.

God had a dynamic plan for providing salvation. Jesus excelled as a teacher, a healer, and as a miracle worker. However, none of those things could bridge the gap between a holy God and a rebellious 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 endure the punishment?

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Scripture tells us that before Jesus died, sin was placed upon him, so that a perfect sacrifice would pay the death penalty for sin. (2 Corinthians 5:21) Jesus took the punishment that you and I deserve, because the shedding of blood is the only payment God accepts. (Hebrews 9:22) 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 trust that the shed blood of Jesus—received as a gift—paid the penalty for that sin. It is insufficient to simply 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. 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—to anyone who believes him. Belief in God is important because to not believe what God says, is to imply that he is a liar. (1 John 1:10) 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 not to forgive the sin of unbelief.

Faith in Jesus is similar 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, forgive you, and 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. It is God's very nature to love; scripture tells us that *God is love*. (1 John 4:16)

## **Eternal Covenants**

The closest relationships are “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*, tells about three eternal covenants. Just as with God's covenants in the Old Testament, scripture depicts the covenants in Revelation with a mark on the forehead or hand. (Deuteronomy 6:6-8) This type of mark may seem odd. However, consider that a common covenant symbol today, the wedding ring, distinguishes (marks) the left hand of husbands and wives.

It will be most 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 will enter a temple on the Temple Mount of Jerusalem, and claim to be God. Paul wrote that Antichrist *sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God.* (2 Thessalonians 2:4)

Belief in a person's own religion is a second covenant option. People can place faith in religion, but not in God. Israel's teachers in the early first century, the Pharisees, made this mistake. They wore long flowing robes (Mark 12:38), prayed in an impressive manner (Mark 12:40), and routinely fasted. (Matthew 9:14) The typical Israeli citizen thought 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 the Pharisees and their congregations when he said, *"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 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."* (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 sin because *without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.* (Hebrews 9:22)

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

<b>Covenant</b>	<b>Scripture *</b>
<b>Trust in Antichrist</b>	<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> (Revelation 13:16)
<b>Trust in Religion (Babylon)</b>	<i>This title was written on her <u>forehead</u>:</i> MYSTERY BABYLON THE GREAT THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. (Revelation 17:5)
<b>Trust in God</b>	<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> (Revelation 7:3)

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

Jeremiah foretold the covenant relationship God offers; the New Testament restated this covenant centuries later. (Jeremiah 31:33-34; Hebrews 8:10-12; 10:16-17) Upon accepting this covenant, God transforms each believer’s *heart* and *mind*. Believers begin to “*know the Lord*” as if the Lord were a family member.

*“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.”*

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

God defined covenant relationships using terms familiar to Israelis. Suzerain-Vassal covenants defined relationships between a lord and a subject. The lord claimed sovereignty and demanded loyalty; the vassal was required to “love” his suzerain. Jesus is our lord; loyalty and love are central to our relationship. Royal Grant covenants involved the promise of a superior party to an inferior one. Parity covenants bind participants to friendship. Jesus epitomized loving friendship; he called believers friends, brothers, and sisters. (John 15:15; Mark 3:35)

God's covenant also is a type of marriage covenant, a sharing of eternal flesh. Paul wrote about 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 small letters that Jesus sent to seven churches in first-century provincial Asia, an area that today is part of Turkey. (Revelation 2, 3) Next, the visions depicting the end of our Age begin with a scrolled document supernaturally locked with seven seals. Some theologians describe this document as being the title or deed for planet earth. Jesus reasserts ownership of earth as he breaks open each seal.

The opening of 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 a worldwide earthquake. With the seventh seal, there is silence in heaven and seven angels are given seven 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 angles 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 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 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 brings hailstones and earthquakes that demolish the earth.

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

Colorful 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 deliver the fight on God's behalf, while millions in heaven cheer. 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. 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 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 reclined next to Jesus at the Last Supper. (John 13:23-25) However, John also had a fiery side to his personality; Jesus called him a Son of Thunder. (Mark 3:17)

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