



# “Understanding the Bible”

## Section 3: What is the Message of the Bible?



### Unit 3.4 – The New Testament: Christ Establishes a New Covenant and Builds a Church

#### I) Introduced Through an Incarnation

- Now that we have completed our study of the major checkpoints of the Old Testament, we will continue our exploration by getting a microscopic view of the New Testament to see how this biblical message draws to a close. As mentioned earlier, the entire Old Testament points to the need for a savior, so it should come as no surprise that the New Testament begins with four gospels that record the birth, life, death, and resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The first concept that we are forced to confront when we meet Jesus in the gospel accounts is that for the only time in human history, God became one of us as a human being. When we point to the miracle of God becoming a man through Jesus Christ, we are referring to this supernatural work as the “incarnation,” because the infinite, invisible God became incarnated into a finite, visible human being in the flesh. **Matthew 1:20-23** records the prophecy of this incarnation as told to Joseph by an Angel of the Lord in a dream. It reads, *“<sup>20</sup> But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. <sup>21</sup> She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” <sup>22</sup> All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: <sup>23</sup> “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us).*

#### II) The Miracles of Christ’s Ministry

- Although the incarnation was the first miracle that Jesus Christ was connected with in the flesh, as He began a three-year public ministry to proclaim His gospel of salvation He consistently performed miracles that would reveal His identity as the Son of God. These miracles vividly illustrate three areas of life that Christ has complete lordship over, including His **lordship over nature** (calming storms; walking on water; turning water into wine; feeding thousands with little); **lordship over sickness** (healed sickness, leprosy, demon-possession, palsy, dropsy, sight); and **lordship over death** (raising Jairus’ daughter, widow’s son at Nain, and Lazarus from the dead). At the conclusion of his gospel account, the Apostle John gives us a very significant reminder that these miracles were ultimately done to point to Christ as the awaited messiah who would save God’s people from their sins. **John 20:30-31** says, *<sup>30</sup> Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; <sup>31</sup> but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*

#### III) A Final Supper and a Final Sacrifice

- As Jesus’ earthly ministry draws to a close, the biblical story quickly points us to the most pivotal moment in human history: the crucifixion. Jesus was committed to taking a Roman cross and being put to death as the final blood sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins. This crucifixion and eventual resurrection would establish a new covenant between God and His people as prophesied in Jeremiah 31:33, where the law would no longer be written on cold stone tablets, but instead on the very hearts of mankind. Jesus introduced the sign of this new covenant during the Last Supper on Passover with His disciples the night before His death. **Matthew 26:26-28** states, *“<sup>26</sup> Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, “Take, eat; this is my body.”<sup>27</sup> And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, “Drink of it, all of you, <sup>28</sup> for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”*

#### **IV) The Rewards of a Resurrection**

- The crucifixion of Christ on Good Friday would still not be considered good news if there wasn't an equally significant moment three days later: the resurrection. As prophesied, Christ was buried in a tomb and on Easter Sunday morning He came out of the tomb as a resurrected human being. As He rose from the dead, Jesus accomplished two things: (1) He proved publicly that His sacrifice was acceptable to the Father; and (2) He blazed a trail from death to life that whoever would place their faith in Him would live forever in His Kingdom. Prior to Christ's death, animals had to be continually sacrificed by Levitical priests for the covering over of Israel's sins. Now, Christ was considered the final sacrifice, and through His blood mankind now had complete and total forgiveness. **Hebrews 10:12-14** states, "<sup>12</sup> But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, <sup>13</sup> waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. <sup>14</sup> For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified." Jesus Christ had lived perfectly to earn our righteousness, died sacrificially to pay the penalty for our sins, and rose supernaturally to offer us the unspeakable gift of eternal life.

#### **V) From an Ascension to an Intercessor**

- Just a few short weeks after Jesus returned in the flesh, He explained to the people that He had to leave so that God would send down the Holy Spirit to inhabit mankind and establish His redeemed Church. At the conclusion of His final earthly conversation, He ascended into heaven as recorded in **Acts 1:9**, which says, "...he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight." This ascension was important for several reasons: (1) It marked the arrival of the Holy Spirit; (2) With the Holy Spirit indwelling mankind, God was no longer just with us, but now *in* us; (3) Through the Holy Spirit, Jesus could minister to all of us and not just on an individual basis while He was on earth; and (4) As Jesus went to be seated at the right hand of God, He became our High Priest and our great intercessor.

#### **VI) The Holy Spirit Inaugurates a Holy Church**

- When the Holy Spirit arrived at the day of Pentecost, men spoke in tongues so that hundreds could hear the gospel in their native language and be saved. This event marked the beginning of the church being established, and it continued to grow rapidly throughout all of Judea. The book of Acts chronicles this growth of the church through the missionary efforts of the apostles. Acts also gives us a vivid description of what a New Testament church should be like as the living Body of Christ. **Acts 2:42-47** reveals all the ministries that took place in the Early Church, and it remains an invaluable guideline for how churches should be operating today. This passage revealed five specific areas of ministry that are crucial for any church to be a true reflection of Christ, and these ministries include the following: (1) **Teaching/Preaching**; (2) **Fellowship**; (3) **Worship**; (4) **Service**; and (5) **Evangelism & Missions**.

#### **VII) Spreading the News Before His Second Coming**

- As mentioned in Unit 3.2, just before Christ ascended to Heaven He established the Great Commission in Matthew 28 as a rally cry for us to preach the gospel to all nations before His return. We are also reminded by the Apostle Peter that we need to be prepared to do this at any time and in a manner that accurately reflects Christ. **1 Peter 3:15** says, "<sup>15</sup> But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect."

#### **VIII) A Journey That Ends in the New Jerusalem**

- Drawing our biblical journey to a close, we see at the end of the New Testament one final promise of a new city for all believers. This new city is best described as the "New Jerusalem," and although its physical beauty is described in precious stones and golden streets, its greatest reward will be the eternal presence of God. **Revelation 21:3-4** says, "<sup>3</sup> And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. <sup>4</sup> He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.'