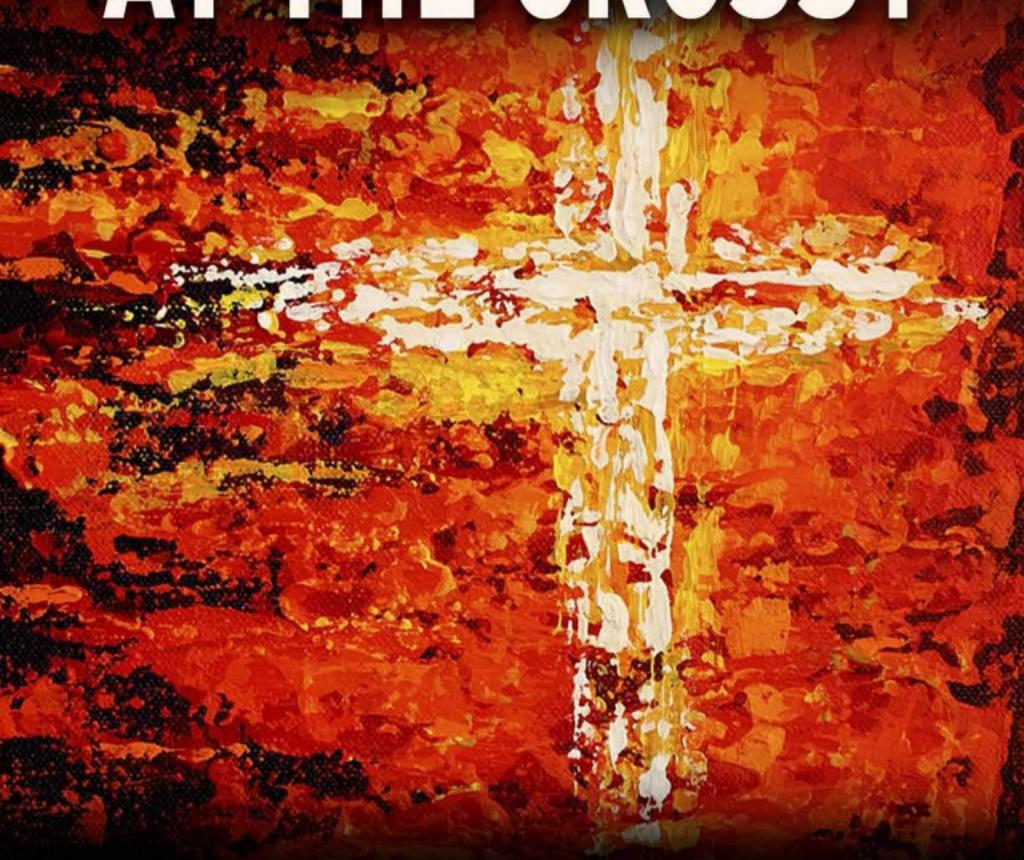


BIBLE STUDY SERIES

# WHAT CHANGED AT THE CROSS?



WAKE UP AMERICA SEMINARS  
Proclaiming the Revelation of Jesus

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On occasion, I have inserted italics and brackets in Scripture quotations to enhance understanding, not to change the meaning.

Larry Wilson

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# What Changed at the Cross?

Ever since Jesus died and was resurrected, believers have discussed the question, “What was nailed to the cross?” The simplicity of this question belies the enormity of this subject.

This question profoundly concerns Christians because the answer influences their Christian walk. Thus, it requires prayerful study and investigation. While the question of what was nailed to the cross has a simple answer, the process of arriving at the right answer is complicated.

Even the disciples struggled with this question, its answer, and the resulting consequences.<sup>1</sup> I am convinced God did not reveal an answer to this question until He gave some revelations to the apostle Paul.<sup>2</sup>

If God had revealed the truth concerning this topic sooner, I do not believe the disciples would have been able to bear it.<sup>3</sup> No matter how you answer the question, it leads to other questions: Did God change or lessen the requirements for salvation after the cross? Is it easier to be saved now than it was before the cross? Did God abandon the nation of Israel after the cross or are

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<sup>1</sup> Acts 15, Galatians 2, and 2 Corinthians 11

<sup>2</sup> 2 Corinthians 12

<sup>3</sup> John 16:12

they still God's chosen people? Are Jews still obligated to observe the "old covenant" today? If the Jews are God's chosen people, should Christians become Jews? What does God require of Christians? Does God have the same requirements for Jews and Christians after the cross?

Sooner or later, each Bible student has to address the question "what was nailed to the cross" because the covenant law of the ancient nation of Israel closely unites God's character and integrity. Most Christians agree the cross marks the time when God's commitment to humankind was confirmed. However, the question of what was nailed to the cross remains one of those fundamental questions all Christians will answer.

Notice, I wrote, "will answer." This is because all religious belief systems require a defining set of rules established by divine authority. This is true for Christians, Hindus, Jews, Moslems, and any other belief system. For this reason, all Christian churches today have an official position on what was nailed to the cross.

Most Christians regard the Old Testament as one authority and the New Testament as another. Within this context, they generally maintain the Old Testament was voided at the cross (with the exception of the covenant God gave to Noah that He would not destroy the Earth with a flood again). Because of this, they maintain we

are now under the authority of the New Testament. Consequently, they claim Christians are limited to the laws found only in the New Testament.

A minority of Christians disagree with the Old versus New Testament approach. They believe some laws in the Old Testament were “fulfilled” at the cross and the remaining laws God gave during Old Testament times are still binding on mankind. Understand that considerable diversity exists among these Christians.

On the conservative end of the spectrum, some groups insist just about everything in the Old Testament is still binding upon man except for animal sacrifices. Others pick and choose which laws they prefer to be bound, claiming all the ceremonial and civil laws given to ancient Israel were nailed to the cross.

However, they believe the laws regarding clean and unclean foods, tithing, the observance of feast days and the Ten Commandments are still binding. Usually, those who insist that the Ten Commandments are binding after the cross also advocate the observance of the seventh day of the week (Saturday) as God’s holy day.

### **A Question with Serious Ramifications**

To appreciate the seriousness of the question of what was nailed to the cross, consider this scenario as it might

have unfolded in Christ's day. Suppose that you were a devout, sincere, middle-aged Jewish man (like Nicodemus) who had listened closely to Jesus' teachings. Also suppose that you were somewhat convinced He could be the Messiah. Now suppose that you had watched as Jesus was hung on the cross and you were present when He ascended to Heaven. Finally, also suppose that you had attended the required feast of Pentecost and witnessed the manifestations of the Holy Spirit! With these suppositions in place, and as a potential believer in Jesus Christ, now consider the ramifications of the question within the context of your life in Jerusalem.

How hard would it be for you to accept the fact that animal sacrifices at the temple were no longer necessary – especially since you had personally offered many sacrificial lambs on behalf of your family and this practice had been followed ever since Adam and Eve had sinned? How hard would it be for you to accept the fact that circumcision was no longer necessary – especially since you had believed all your life this was the sign of an everlasting covenant God made with Abraham proving that your nation was God's chosen people?<sup>1</sup>

How hard would it have been for you to accept that your religion was now obsolete and the temple services meaningless, and even the exalted position of priest and

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 17:13

high priest no longer warranted?<sup>1</sup> How hard would it have been for you to face the livid hostility of your family and friends when you announced that you were no longer observing the Jewish customs because you were convinced Jesus Christ was the Lamb of God, the Messiah?

Consequently, how hard would it have been for you to have your business boycotted and destroyed because you were regarded a traitor? Finally, how hard would it have been for you to attend a Christian worship service, sitting beside Gentile believers now considered as equals in the Lord?<sup>2</sup>

From the onset of this study, understand that the correct answer (and there is one) to this profound question often produces unpleasant consequences. This is why discussion over this question may become tense. The truth is many Christians today, like the early believers in Acts 15, have a religious tradition and vested interest often preventing them from seeking and seeing the truth on this topic. Yes, the Holy Spirit will guide the honest in heart into all truth,<sup>3</sup> but the process is usually painful. Unfortunately, too many Christians quit before reaching the truth. Remember, the answer to this question is simple, but attaining the right answer is complicated. The dilemma does not stop there. Con-

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1 Hebrews 7

2 Acts 10:28

3 John 16:13

sider how distressing a transition within a religious system can be!

In December 1994, the Worldwide Church of God (founded by Herbert Armstrong) changed the official church position on the question of what was nailed to the cross. Subsequently, the church leaders made a startling declaration to its members that the Old Testament laws were nailed to the cross: that tithing, observing the seventh day, and other doctrines were no longer “required.” This destroyed the church which quickly disintegrated. Ironically, the new position taken by the leaders of Grace Communion International (formerly the Worldwide Church of God) proved to be no better than the church’s original position. It appears to me that the pendulum of religious doctrine simply swung from legalism to lawlessness.

### **The Mosaic Covenant was Nailed to the Cross**

I believe there is one correct answer to the question, “What was nailed to the cross?” The Bible teaches the special covenant between God and the biological descendants of Abraham was nailed to the cross.<sup>1</sup> In other words, Jesus’ death ended an exclusive covenant that existed between Himself and the ancient nation of Israel.

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 15:18; Exodus 24:1-8; Ephesians 2; Colossians 2:13-17

This covenant was based on the shedding of blood and it was temporary from the beginning. This is why it is called a “blood covenant,”<sup>1</sup> the “old covenant,”<sup>2</sup> the “first covenant,”<sup>3</sup> or the “law of Moses.”<sup>4</sup> This covenant includes everything conveyed through Moses to Abraham’s descendants.

The Mosaic covenant includes laws regarding food (such as clean and unclean and the use of yeast), tithing, animal sacrifices, purification ceremonies, annual feast days, new moon celebrations, sabbatical years, circumcision, the priesthood of Aaron, and many civil laws.

## **Unilateral Covenants**

I realize you may stumble over my conclusion. Therefore, I will attempt to demonstrate God established unilateral covenants in the Old Testament long before the Mosaic covenant existed and these covenants were not done away with at the cross. Here is a brief definition of the terms unilateral and bilateral covenants.

A unilateral covenant is a one-sided covenant God imposes on man. It is nonnegotiable; it is not a mutual agreement between two parties. Although a unilateral covenant implies the presence of an ongoing relationship, this one-sided perpetual covenant remains intact as long as God chooses.

1 Zechariah 9:11

2 2 Corinthians 3:14

3 Hebrews 9:1

4 Luke 2:22

A bilateral covenant is quite different. It is a mutually agreed-upon covenant between two or more parties. This type of covenant has a set of rules or laws that are binding upon its participants because a relationship exists. A bilateral covenant ends when either party is unfaithful to the agreement or when the object of the covenant is fulfilled. For example, marriage is a bilateral covenant: two people agree to vows of moral fidelity and faithfulness “until death do us part.” The exchange of vows shows mutual agreement and the marriage is ratified (publicly agreed upon) at the wedding service before witnesses.

Similarly, if a builder and a customer enter into an agreement to build a new house, the bilateral covenant between them ends when the house is built because the covenant is fulfilled. Bilateral covenants require the presence of witnesses.

In ancient times, if third-party witnesses were not available when the covenant was made, stones were stacked into a large pile as a witness to the agreement.<sup>1</sup>

Both types of covenants, unilateral and bilateral, have laws or rules within them. Both instruments are identified as covenants because both are based on a relationship. In unilateral covenants, obedience is a matter of choice. A person is not coerced to obey God; however,

<sup>1</sup> Genesis 31:44-48

a person who rebels will face the consequences of his disobedience.

In bilateral covenants, obedience is required or the covenant can be declared void by the other party. With these definitions in mind, let us consider the six covenants that were established *before* Moses went up on Mt. Sinai to receive the Mosaic covenant (the “law of Moses”):

### **1. Do Not Eat from the Tree.**

God told Adam not to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil for if he did, he would be put to death.<sup>1</sup> According to God’s divine wisdom and sovereign authority, He imposed this unilateral (one-sided) covenant on Adam and Eve before sin began and it was nonnegotiable.

Adam’s offspring would have been subject to this covenant if Adam had never sinned and had remained in the garden. When Adam and Eve chose to violate the covenant, they came under its condemnation. This condemnation remains to this day!<sup>2</sup>

A person needs to understand the purpose of this covenant was not about the fruit of a particular tree, rather it was about faith and obedience. The fruit of the tree was the vehicle for testing Adam and Eve’s faith and obedience.

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1 Genesis 2:17

2 Romans 3:23; 5:18; 6:23

## 2. Emnity Between the Offspring of the Serpent and the Offspring of the Woman.

When Adam and Eve sinned, God announced the second unilateral (one-sided) covenant for humans. God declared that He would put enmity between the offspring of the serpent and the offspring of the woman and “He,” who is Messiah, would crush the serpent’s head one day.<sup>1</sup>

Although Genesis does not say it clearly, I believe God offered a bilateral covenant (a mutual agreement) to fallen man. This covenant can be summarized with the following words: *If you will be My people and show faith in Me by obeying Me, I will be your Salvation.* I believe God himself conducted the first animal sacrifice to show Adam and Eve the price of sin. With the flawless coat of that Edenic lamb, God mercifully clothed the shame of the guilty pair. In this setting, we have a vivid illustration of God himself providing the righteousness that is necessary for our salvation!

This original bilateral covenant was based on blood and routinely required the sacrifice of animals in a proscribed manner. Abel’s obedient offering confirmed this covenant and this righteous choice resulted in his death.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 3:14-15

<sup>2</sup> Hebrews 11:4; 12:24; 1 John 3:12

In other words, Adam's offspring who desired God's salvation had to show faith in God by doing what was required by the original blood covenant, namely offering the fat portions of animal sacrifices.<sup>1</sup> Cain rebelled against God's requirements and God refused to honor Cain's offering of fruit. This made Cain angry and he killed Abel who had demonstrated his faith in God. Evidently, all of the patriarchs, from Abel to Noah, presented blood offerings (animal sacrifices) according to the requirements of this bilateral covenant.<sup>2</sup>

The Bible does not say much about the requirements of the original bilateral covenant that God offered humans, but we know from the unilateral covenant that when Messiah would die, shed blood would no longer be a requirement.<sup>3</sup>

In fact, it would be reasonable to conclude God sent the flood in Noah's day because humans violated the original bilateral covenant with God beyond recovery. The flood was not only necessary to cauterize the growth of sin, it was legally justifiable before the intelligent beings of the universe based on a violated covenant!<sup>4</sup> After the flood, the original bilateral covenant (a blood covenant) God gave to Adam and Eve continued until

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1 Genesis 4:4

2 Genesis 8:20-21

3 Romans 5:17-19; Hebrews 11:4; 12:24

4 Genesis 6:5-6

He expanded and renewed His plans with the offspring of Abraham at Mt. Sinai.<sup>1</sup>

Unfortunately, a great misunderstanding regarding these covenants has produced dispensationalism. Dispensationalism is a doctrine teaching salvation is offered to man in different ways at different times throughout history. However, the truth is, man has always been saved by grace through faith, and until the Second Coming of Jesus, salvation remains possible only through the simultaneous operation of both unilateral and bilateral covenants.<sup>2</sup>

God also gave man two additional unilateral covenants: one regarding marriage and the other regarding sexual behavior. The Bible is not clear how these covenants were delivered to the people. Perhaps it was through Enoch, since we know he was a prophet.<sup>3</sup> Others most assuredly spoke for God as well. Although these two covenants are not specifically written in the Bible, the evidence of their existence before the Mosaic covenant can be validated, because of the written record of wickedness and rebellion (broken covenants).

God's view of immoral sexual behavior is clearly revealed in Genesis 19. He destroyed the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah with fire for their sexual immorality.<sup>4</sup> He did not do this without legal basis. Even

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1 Exodus 24:7-8

2 Revelation 14:6; Hebrews 4:6; 11:1-40; Matthew 24:14

3 Jude 1:14

4 Jude 1:7

when all we can see may appear that God is not fair, by faith we believe that He is always fair. In Genesis 20:3, God threatened to take King Abimelek's life for taking Sarah as his wife because she was already married to Abraham.

Remember, Abraham lied to the king saying that Sarah was his sister. God did not threaten Abimelek without legal basis. God is always fair. Though the Bible does not explicitly express these covenants in words, we do have God's actions proving what is right and what is wrong. The evidence of right and wrong presumes the presence of covenant law or no such thing as right or wrong can exist.<sup>1</sup>

### **3. The Covenant of Capital Punishment.**

Right after the flood, God announced His third unilateral covenant to Noah. This covenant concerns murder and man's accountability to God for each other. Notice that the covenant of capital punishment is a unilateral declaration God imposed on man.<sup>2</sup> There is no wiggle room regarding this matter; God demands accountability for life and requires that murderers be put to death.

### **4. Never Another Flood.**

The fourth unilateral covenant was one explicitly mentioned in Genesis after the flood when God unilaterally

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1 Romans 4:15

2 Genesis 9:5-6; expanded in Numbers 35:33

promised that He would never destroy the world with another flood.<sup>1</sup> The “No Flood” covenant was imposed by divine authority. This timeless covenant is binding on God, not man! God has faithfully honored this covenant for more than 4,000 years.

So far, we have examined four published covenants in Genesis that predate the Mosaic covenant by several hundred years. Further, the perpetual, unchanging nature of these covenants is also reaffirmed in the New Testament. Jesus referred to some of them, as did the apostles, because they were recognized as timeless covenants based on God’s sovereign authority.<sup>2</sup>

## **5. Abraham Given All the Land He Could See and a Numberless Multitude as Descendants.**

Now, we come to the fifth unilateral covenant recorded in Genesis that predates the Mosaic covenant. The New Testament is unmistakably clear that this covenant endures beyond the time of the cross. This covenant is the unilateral covenant that God gave to Abraham.

In Genesis 12 and 13, we find a compelling story of faith. God selected a man of faith named Abram and told him to leave his home and family inheritance and go to the land (inheritance) that He would give Abram.

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1 Genesis 9:9-17

2 See Romans 2, Colossians 3:5-6 and Revelation 21:8 on sexual immorality; Matthew 5:32 and Hebrews 13:4 on marriage; and Romans 13:1-10 on respect for civil authorities.

Think about Abram's love for God. God asked him to give up his natural inheritance for what he could not see! Abraham left home, not even knowing where he was going! Every time I review the life of Abraham, I am impressed with his faith in God.

It does not surprise me that God declared a unilateral covenant to Abraham. Nor am I surprised that Abraham's humanness got the best of him at times. Incredibly, Abraham died without ever seeing what God promised him. Yet, you can be sure Abraham will live again and he will see all that still awaits fulfillment!

The unilateral covenant God gave to Abraham declares God will give Abraham all of the land he could see and that his descendants would be a numberless multitude.<sup>1</sup>

The unilateral covenant God gave Abraham is similar to the unilateral covenant He gave Adam and Eve after they sinned. The covenant found in Genesis 3:14-15 was directed toward Adam and Eve and their offspring; the same is true with the covenant God gave to Abraham. Adam was to be the forebearer of sinless beings, but he forfeited that honor because of sin.

So, God started over by honoring Abraham's faith and declared him to be the forebearer of all who live by

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 13:14-17

faith. The unilateral covenant given to Abraham still awaits fulfillment. Notice this text: “**If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise** [that still stands].”<sup>1</sup>

Notice how the text in brackets is implied. This verse, written about 30 years after Jesus died on the cross, confirmed three points. First, God reckons all people who put their faith in Christ to be sons of Abraham (heirs). Second, the time and setting of this verse confirm that the covenant given to Abraham is still valid even after the cross! Third, this text indicates that you and I can be heirs of the covenant given to Abraham, although we are not biological descendants of Abraham!<sup>2</sup>

In other words, the unilateral covenant God gave Abraham still stands and the offspring of Abraham are those who live by faith! Actually, faith in God has been the core issue from the very beginning, but the biological nation of Israel stubbornly refused to comprehend this fact.<sup>3</sup>

Even today, many Christians are similarly confused regarding what it means to be the biological offspring of Abraham. Like ancient Israel, they do not seem to understand that the core issue from the beginning of time

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1 Galatians 3:29, insertion mine

2 Ephesians 2; Romans 2:28-29; 9:6-7

3 Jeremiah 3:20; Hebrews 4:2

has been one of faith!<sup>1</sup> Abraham will of course still receive what God promised him. When God creates the new heaven and Earth, He will fulfill the unilateral covenant to Abraham. He will give the land to Abraham and his offspring, the redeemed of all ages (children of the promise), who lived by faith just as Abraham.<sup>2</sup>

## 6. The Ten Commandments

The sixth unilateral covenant, given before the Mosaic covenant, was the Ten Commandments. I know my assertion that the Ten Commandments are not part of the Mosaic covenant will distress some readers. However, I ask for your patience as I leave this point “up in the air” while making several remarks.

First, we know that God defined in His word that the Ten Commandments are clearly a covenant.<sup>3</sup> As with other unilateral covenants, God imposed the Ten Commandments upon humankind. The Ten Commandments were not an agreement; that is why they are correctly called commandments.

Although He spoke them to Israel, their scope is not limited to Israel, nor are they negotiable. Further, the Ten Commandments indicate that at the proper time God himself will enforce the necessary penalties for violation of this covenant.<sup>4</sup>

1 John 8:39-44

2 Revelation 7:9

3 Exodus 34:28; Deuteronomy 4:13

4 Exodus 20:5, 7, 20

We will come back to my assertion that the Ten Commandments are unilateral, timeless, and not part of the Mosaic covenant, but for now, consider a thought question: When you study the New Testament, does it appear that the laws expressed within its books are reiterations of perpetual covenants previously stated by God, or does it appear to you that Jesus and/or the apostles have created many new laws because the old laws were abolished?

If you maintain the latter part of this question is true, then I must ask, “What new laws are declared in the New Testament that are not found in the Old Testament?” While reflecting on this, consider the following:

### **Biological Offspring Receives First Chance**

We have examined the unilateral covenant God gave to Abraham and we know it still awaits fulfillment.<sup>1</sup> Most Christians are surprised to learn the unilateral covenant God gave Abraham is not limited to his biological offspring, although the New Testament clearly says the covenant is inclusive. In fact, the offspring of Abraham includes people from all ethnic groups – all people who live by faith.

A few years after declaring His unilateral covenant to Abraham, God presented a bilateral covenant to Abra-

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 13:15-16; Galatians 3:29

ham on behalf of his forthcoming descendants. Abraham was still childless at the time.<sup>1</sup> Notice, there is a sharp distinction between what God unilaterally promised Abraham and what God bilaterally offered his descendants.

God intended to make Abraham's biological descendants a kingdom of priests, a holy nation.<sup>2</sup> Because of God's great love for Abraham, God intended to exalt Abraham's offspring as "His finest sons" on Earth. The sons of Abraham would stand between Himself and the nations of Earth as priests.

God intended they would be men of faith who would love Him with all their hearts, and their neighbors as themselves – just as their father Abraham! God wanted Israel to serve as a shining light to all the Gentile nations. He wanted Israel to love other nations as much as they loved their own. He wanted Israel to evangelize the world with a testimony about God's love and gather in a great harvest of souls for His coming kingdom.<sup>3</sup>

### **Three Bilateral Covenants**

I am sure Abraham often wondered about his title, "father of many nations," since he was childless. One day, God came to Abraham to reveal more of His plans. God

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1 Genesis 15

2 Exodus 19:6

3 Isaiah 49:6; Acts 13:47

explained how Abraham's offspring would go into captivity for 400 years and then come back to the land He wanted them to have.

After sharing this with Abraham, God initiated a bilateral covenant with Abraham's descendants (although they were not present) by passing through the animal parts that Abraham had sacrificed.<sup>1</sup> Since no offspring was present at that time, God could only declare the covenant to Abraham. God made the covenant a "blood covenant" to assure Abraham that He would keep this covenant.

An escrow of blood made this covenant binding upon God since the people for whom this covenant would apply were not present. With this done, Abraham was satisfied. By requiring blood at this declaration, God signified that He himself, the Great I AM, the Eternal God of the Universe, would keep His promise to Abraham until His own spilled blood released Him from this covenant.

This is why this specific covenant is sometimes called "a blood covenant." The blood of the five animals served as a surety or a deposit – the only way out of this covenant was for God to shed His own blood. Read Genesis 15 and observe how these same five animals were used in the tabernacle services that would be instituted some 400 years later.

<sup>1</sup> Genesis 15

These five creatures encompass the future estate of Israel, from the rich to the poor, from the heifer to the dove.

### Ratification of the Abrahamic Covenant

Although God entered into this bilateral “blood covenant” with Abraham, it was not ratified (publicly agreed upon) for over 400 years.<sup>1</sup> In fact, this covenant was not ratified until after God gave all of the details to Moses on Mt. Sinai.<sup>2</sup> Remember, a bilateral covenant is two-sided.

Unlike a unilateral covenant, both parties must agree and both parties must be faithful to the terms and conditions set forth in a bilateral covenant. So, when the time came to ratify the bilateral covenant that God had made with Abraham, God directed Moses to come up the mountain and meet with Him.

Moses was required to write all the terms and conditions of the bilateral covenant; the covenant that would mutually bind God with the seed of Abraham. When Moses had completed this task, he went down the mountain and read the words of the bilateral covenant to all the people. Twice the people stated their agreement to abide by the Mosaic covenant.

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1 Exodus 12:41; Hebrews 9:18-21

2 Exodus 24:1-8

Notice how the story unfolds in the Bible in Exodus 24:

**“Then the Lord [God] said to Moses, ‘Come up to the Lord, you and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu and seventy of the elders of Israel. You are to worship at a distance, but Moses alone is to approach the Lord; the others must not come near. And the people may not come up with him.’ Then Moses came and recounted to the people all the words of the Lord and all the ordinances; and all the people answered with one voice and said, ‘All the words which the Lord has spoken we will do!’ Moses wrote down all the words of the Lord. Then he arose early in the morning, and built an altar at the foot of the mountain with twelve pillars for the twelve tribes of Israel. He sent young men of the sons of Israel, and they offered burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as peace offerings to the Lord. Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and the other half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar. Then he took the book of the covenant and read it in the hearing of the people; and they said, ‘All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient!’ So Moses took the blood and sprinkled it on the people, and said, ‘Behold the blood of the covenant, which the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words.’”<sup>1</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> Exodus 24:1-8

The covenant between God and the descendants of Abraham was ratified with the sprinkling of blood. After hearing the terms and conditions of the covenant, the people voiced their agreement twice. Because third party witnesses were not present, Moses stacked twelve stones, one for each tribe, as a witness of this event to signify Israel's corporate agreement.

The shedding of blood made this a blood covenant. The significance of the blood is very important. Understand that a blood covenant in ancient times was a life or death issue for both parties. For God, the only way to revoke this covenant was through His own death. For ancient Israel, the only way out was their destruction as a nation.<sup>1</sup> If one party proved to be unfaithful, then the faithful partner had the right to demand the blood (death) of the unfaithful party. Paul confirms this covenant (sometimes called the old covenant or first covenant) was put into effect with blood.<sup>2</sup>

## A Fulfilled Covenant is a Finished Covenant

Over the centuries, time and time again, Israel proved to be unfaithful.<sup>3</sup> Ultimately, God abandoned Israel as a nation because of their persistent unfaithfulness and Jesus pronounced a final benediction upon Israel, “**Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.**”<sup>4</sup>

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1 Deuteronomy 28

2 Hebrews 9:18-22

3 Jeremiah 11:10; Ezekiel 23

4 Matthew 23:38, KJV

What did He mean with these words? The Jews regarded the temple as the place where God dwelled. They believed that since God dwelt there, they were the apple of God's eye and safe from the threat of any nation.<sup>1</sup> They did have an opportunity to be the apple of God's eye, but unfortunately, they rebelled.

It is true, they could have been safe from the threat of other nations, but again they rebelled. How sad, but true, that God himself came and lived in their midst and yet they rejected Him. So, back to the initial question, what did Jesus mean when He said, "**Your house is left unto you desolate?**"

He meant that "never again" would His presence enter their Jewish temple. Their house of worship became insignificant . . . an empty shell of a structure. John says, "**He came unto His own and His own received Him not.**"<sup>2</sup>

In A.D. 70, Jesus himself sent the Romans to destroy Jerusalem and with this destruction, fulfilled the terms and conditions set forth in the blood covenant. He not only shed His blood on the cross to fulfill the covenant, He also demanded theirs for unfaithfulness.<sup>3</sup>

When the Romans burned Jerusalem, historians confirm the accuracy of Jesus' prophetic words recorded in Mat-

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1 Jeremiah 7:4

2 John 1:11, KJV

3 Deuteronomy 28:44-45 and Daniel 9:26-27

thew that no two stones of the temple were left standing together.<sup>1</sup> God decreed that an end was to come to the temple that bore His name and it would not be built again.

The blood of Jesus shed on Calvary fulfilled the blood covenant between God and the nation of Israel. A fulfilled covenant is a finished covenant. The animal offerings required under the blood covenant pointed forward to Jesus' death and when He died, shedding His blood, the covenant ended; the shadow was replaced with reality!<sup>2</sup>

From the beginning, God designed the blood (Mosaic) covenant to be a "schoolmaster" explaining the wonderful dimensions of His Plan of Salvation. With this knowledge and working illustration, Israel could share the good news of salvation with the whole world.<sup>3</sup>

Incidentally, the blood covenant was not designed to belong exclusively to Israel. They were the trustees of the covenant and the first in line to benefit from it. However, God promised to bless all nations by allowing them to partake in the provisions of this covenant.<sup>4</sup> This is why Abraham was called the father of many nations!<sup>5</sup> The blood covenant with Israel was temporary from its

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1 Matthew 24:2

2 Colossians 2:17

3 Galatians 3:24-26

4 Isaiah 2 and 56

5 Genesis 17:4

inception and it had a “sunset” or fulfillment date from its first day!<sup>1</sup>

### **Plan “A”**

Many Christians fail to understand the following point. God’s initial design was that Israel, as a nation of priests, would reach full spiritual maturity “as the light of the nations” by the time Jesus was to die on the cross.<sup>2</sup> During the time span of 70 weeks (which began when Cyrus gave the order to restore and rebuild Jerusalem and ended in A.D. 33), God intended for the whole world to hear the gospel invitation.<sup>3</sup>

Jesus was to begin reigning in Jerusalem as King of kings, ushering in the reign of Everlasting Righteousness. For lack of a better phrase, I call this “Plan A.” If Israel had been faith “full,” events would have proceeded as originally planned. God would have implemented the “new unilateral covenant;” the covenant prophesied in Ezekiel 36:26-27 and Jeremiah 31:31-34.

Remember, both Jesus and John the Baptist proclaimed that the Kingdom of God was at hand in A.D. 27. Even Daniel predicted that at the end of the 70 weeks, the Jews would bring in **“everlasting righteousness and seal up vision.”<sup>4</sup>**

1 Matthew 5:17; Galatians 4:4

2 Isaiah 60

3 Daniel 9:24

4 Daniel 9:24

This was God's original plan.<sup>1</sup> History would have been much different if Israel had cooperated with God. Consider how different history would have been if the generation that had left Egypt did not fail at Kadesh Barnea and had gone forward by faith!

## The Blood Covenant in the New Testament

The properties of a blood covenant shed light on many New Testament Bible texts. For example, Luke says, **“In the same way, after the supper He took the cup, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.’”<sup>2</sup>** The spilled blood Jesus shed on the cross ended every element found in the Mosaic blood covenant.

When Jesus said to His disciples, **“This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you,”** He initiated a much better blood covenant than what had been offered to ancient Israel.<sup>3</sup>

A second blood covenant became necessary because the Kingdom of God could not be established. Israel had failed God for the last time as His trustees of salvation. Consequently, God opened the doors of opportunity to the Gentiles. As the Bible says, “Whosoever will,” can choose to be His people.

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1 Mark 1:15; Matthew 3:1-2

2 Luke 22:20

3 2 Corinthians 3:6; Hebrews 7:22; 9:15

Therefore, Jesus offered a second blood covenant to anyone who would believe in Him as the Messiah. The essential difference between the new blood covenant and the old is not the imposition of laws, but rather, the condition of the heart. God entered into the first blood covenant with a nation of people who were carnal and rebellious. While the children of Israel were awed into submission at the display of His glory and power at Mt. Sinai,<sup>1</sup> Bible history records their hearts remained unconverted. This is precisely why God let them wander 40 years in the desert.<sup>2</sup>

However, the next blood covenant, or new covenant as it is sometimes called, is between God and those people who receive Jesus as their Savior. Both the old and new covenants are similar in one way: Both are based on faith – faith meaning a complete surrender to God's will.

However, the second covenant is based on the shed blood of Jesus which was a far superior blood than that of animals<sup>3</sup> and is offered to everyone, including Jews, on the basis of spiritual rebirth and regeneration.<sup>4</sup>

In other words, instead of entering into a blood covenant with a nation of people who really did not want to understand God or live according to His ways, God

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1 Exodus 19; Galatians 4:24-25

2 Hebrews 3:16

3 Hebrews 8:6

4 John 3:3; Romans 8:3-4; 11:19-23

offered a new blood covenant to a self-selecting group of people who will choose to live by faith. So, anyone who wants salvation on God's terms can have it!

### **Three Blood Covenants**

God has entered into three blood covenants with the human race. The original blood covenant began at Adam's fall and continued until the time of Mt. Sinai. The Mosaic covenant lasted from Mt. Sinai to the death of Jesus. The present blood covenant began at the cross and will continue until God seals the living.<sup>1</sup>

God gave the blood covenant to ancient Israel because of His love for Abraham.<sup>2</sup> This gave Israel the potential to secure an advantageous position among the nations of the world, but they failed due to their lack of faith.<sup>3</sup>

So, God turned to the Gentiles as the new trustees of His salvation message. He threw open the doors and "whosoever will" became the new Israel. Spiritual Israel is composed of believers in Christ from every tribe, language, and nation who live by faith in Christ, just as Abraham.<sup>4</sup>

Jesus' death terminated the blood covenant with ancient Israel and initiated the blood covenant which exists today with all who would believe He is the Messiah.

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1 Revelation 7:1-4

2 Deuteronomy 7:7-8

3 Romans 9:4-5; 11:21; Matthew 23:37-39

4 Romans 2:28-29; 9:8; James 1:1; 2:1; Galatians 3:28; Revelation 7:9

His death finished the covenant with Israel and started the third blood covenant with Gentiles. In fact, this is why Jesus said He would not drink of the vine until He drinks it again in His Kingdom!<sup>1</sup> In other words, we are still under a blood covenant that points back to Calvary and forward to its termination when Jesus will “toast” the redeemed with the new wine of heaven!

All three iterations of the blood covenant are temporary. We are now under the temporary provisions of the third blood covenant. However, a time is coming when God is going to elevate the current blood covenant from a temporary arrangement to a permanent conclusion. He is going to seal the living for eternity by imparting His righteousness to them during the Great Tribulation.<sup>2</sup> God will remove the sinful nature of all righteous people by sealing them during the Great Tribulation.

When He completes the sealing, the third blood covenant will be fulfilled and Hebrews 8:10-13 accomplished. **“‘This is the covenant I will establish with the people of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, ‘Know the Lord,’”**

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1 Mark 14:25

2 Hebrews 8:10-13; Revelation 7:1-4; 10:7; 1 John 3:2

**because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.’ By calling this covenant ‘new,’ he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and outdated will soon disappear.”**

## **Back to the Ten Commandments**

Now that we have examined the three blood covenants in some depth, I will attempt to explain why I believe the Ten Commandments to be unilateral, distinct, and separate from the Mosaic covenant. First, God unilaterally declared the Ten Commandments from Mt. Sinai and they are appropriately called the “Testimony” or “the Covenant” of God.<sup>1</sup>

God himself magnificently declared the Ten Commandments to Israel with accompanying demonstrations of powerful thunder, lightning, and earthquakes – the very mountain itself trembled in the presence of the Almighty. I believe God used these physical manifestations so Israel would recognize the unique importance of this unilateral covenant and have a sense of its value.

God did not limit His presentation of the Ten Commandments to that tiny nation standing at the foot of Mt. Sinai, nor did He give this unilateral covenant only

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<sup>1</sup> Exodus 32:15 and Deuteronomy 4:13

for Israel's sake. In fact, God gave His unilateral covenant, the Ten Commandments, to benefit all humanity. The Ten Commandments reveal God's wisdom.

He will bless the nation that exalts the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments do not offer salvation, nor does keeping them produce salvation. They were not agreed upon or ratified with blood; instead, God imposed them on man to benefit humanity. God himself wrote the Ten Commandments on stone with His finger and gave them to Moses before giving him the Mosaic covenant.

We have learned the Mosaic covenant was temporary, based on blood. We know Israel agreed to participate in this covenant when Moses presented it and that the blood of animals ratified the covenant.<sup>1</sup> The physical properties of these two covenants demonstrate the differences between them.

God wrote the unilateral covenant (Ten Commandments) and a man recorded the other bilateral covenant (Mosaic blood covenant). Eternal God spoke the Ten Commandments and with God's guidance a mortal man wrote the Mosaic blood covenant. God's unilateral covenant was written in stone, the bilateral covenant on parchment.

God's law was kept in a special chest expressly designed for it (the Ark of the Covenant) and the Mosaic

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<sup>1</sup> Exodus 24:1-8; Hebrews 9:18

covenant was kept in a side pocket on the outside of the Ark.<sup>1</sup>

One was unilaterally imposed, the other agreed upon. The Ten Commandments did not need to be ratified – God imposed and declared them. The Mosaic covenant, on the other hand, was agreed on and certified with the shedding of blood.

Because these two covenants are different, I have wondered about the reasoning used by many Christians. Consider the logic: If the Mosaic covenant includes the Ten Commandments (as most Christians believe) and it were nailed to the cross, then the Ten Commandments were also abolished at Christ's death. Using this logic, 90 percent of the Ten Commandments were reinstated on Resurrection Sunday. As you may know, most Christians affirm the validity of nine commandments, but deny the fourth commandment is still binding. Such logic remains a mystery to me, because Jesus himself said nothing before or after His death or resurrection about reinstating nine of the Ten Commandments.

In fact, neither did the disciples! While they referred to various commandments, their books were always written from the perspective that the Ten Commandments were permanent and unchanged. Nowhere in Scripture does it say “such and such a commandment,” which was formerly nailed to the cross, has been reinstated.

<sup>1</sup> Exodus 31:18; 40:20-21; Deuteronomy 31:26

## Obligations Under the “Old” Covenant

I am often asked whether Christians are under any obligation stemming from the Mosaic covenant such as tithing, abstaining from unclean foods, observing feast days. My answer is this: We are no longer obligated to keep the requirements of the first covenant. Of course, the Holy Spirit may give us conviction to follow certain elements of the Mosaic covenant individually.

Paul makes it very clear in Hebrews 7 that with a change of the priesthood, there is also a change of law (the blood covenant). He wrote since the descendants of Aaron cannot be high priests any longer, the Levitical laws are no longer valid.

To underscore the transition from the Mosaic covenant to the “believers’ covenant,” Paul used the illustration of tithe (verses 5-10). He wrote, **“For when the priesthood is changed, the law must be changed also. He [Jesus] of whom these things are said belonged to a different tribe, and no one from that tribe has ever served at the altar. For it is clear that our Lord descended from Judah, and in regard to that tribe Moses said nothing about priests.”<sup>1</sup>**

The significance of Paul’s statement is profound. How could the Levites demand tithe when the law that gave

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<sup>1</sup> Hebrews 7:12-14, insertion mine

them authority to do so had been abolished? How can the old blood covenant be intact if Jesus, from the tribe of Judah, is our High Priest?

Now, before you conclude that God wants us to keep all our money for personal use, you need to consider this next point. Although the Mosaic covenant and its commands have been nullified, the divine wisdom is evident in the covenant that God set before His people at Mt. Sinai.

If Israel had combined the Mosaic covenant with faith, they would have received far more blessings than they could count!<sup>1</sup> Remember, God's desire is that we mature in faith. However, it is almost impossible for naturally selfish, self-centered people to step out in faith!

In this light, the Ten Commandments represent a starting place for spiritual growth! They are simple and direct. The fourth commandment is a test commandment that helps to develop our faith. Consequently, the devil has attempted to place contempt on observing the seventh day.

Ironically, the fourth commandment is the only commandment of the ten that requires us to do nothing! We just have to do it at the right time each week to honor God.

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<sup>1</sup> Malachi 3:10-11

Consider the Mosaic covenant. Which would you rather have if you were in God's place: A hundred laws commanding religious behavior, or a people who follow the inward prompting of the Holy Spirit — motivating us to demonstrate faith through obedience? Do not forget: The standard of righteousness is not less today than yesterday.

God has not changed, but His approach is different. God has shown through Israel's failures, righteous laws do not make a people righteous. Instead, people become righteous when they follow the Spirit.<sup>1</sup>

Under the current "believers' covenant," God has not imposed the rules and obligations of the old covenant; however, the imposition of faith and the struggle to follow God's calling remain the same. This suggests to me God expects a high level of commitment from all who claim to live by faith.

### **Holy Spirit Conviction**

Corporately speaking, love is what God wants from humankind. The Ten Commandments define how the principle of love is to be expressed. The first four commandments reveal our obligations to God and the last six commandments reveal our obligations to our neighbor. If we love God with all of our heart, mind, and soul, and our neighbor as ourselves, we fulfill the intent of the law!<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> John 14:16-17; Hebrews 12:14

<sup>2</sup> Romans 13:10

God wants all of us to grow and develop as “sons of Abraham” until we reach the maturity of Christ.<sup>1</sup> While we are under the provision of the current “blood covenant,” He is trying to teach us how to love Him, love one another, and be useful and valuable in our service to others.

This process is called sanctification and it hurts. It hurts because every human being, without exception, is naturally selfish and self-seeking. We like what we have and we usually want more. Although we may be born again, this natural, selfish rebellion still wars within each of us and presents a struggle each day.<sup>2</sup> However, you must understand that unless the Holy Spirit convicts you on some matter of obedience, do not proceed to do it for whatever is not of faith is sin anyway.<sup>3</sup>

If the Holy Spirit convicts you to tithe, then you should follow the Spirit’s leading. You will be blessed; not because of the money you gave, but for the faith you exercised. I know this booklet may cause spiritual anxiety, but do not miss this profound truth: God’s eternal wisdom and limitless love is wonderfully contained within the Mosaic covenant He made with ancient Israel.

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1 Ephesians 4:13

2 Romans 7:20

3 Romans 14:23

God gave ancient Israel many principles so incredibly brilliant that few human beings can really appreciate the wisdom behind them. Surely, by reviewing and studying them, we can learn more about God's ways and blessings. As the Spirit personally leads you to a deeper understanding and application of God's principles in your life, you will be blessed. God's wisdom is always beneficial to His creatures.

I have one note of caution regarding the freedom God grants under the current "believers' covenant." *You need to know that no one has the liberty to impose his convictions upon you or judge you simply because you disagree.* The exception to this is destructive behavior that negatively affects the corporate body of Christ. In such situations, the body of Christ is required to pass judgment because of the negative impact on the mission and character of Jesus.<sup>1</sup>

In matters of diet, dress, culture, and lifestyle, some people may not be convicted as you are in these areas.<sup>2</sup> The Holy Spirit reads the heart and He tests each of us in different ways and at different times. Remember this valuable lesson: In ancient times the rules of the Mosaic covenant were externally imposed and the results were a dismal failure.

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1 See 1 Corinthians 5 and 6.

2 Romans 14:1-10

When Paul finally understood the rules had been nailed to the cross, he shared his new understanding.<sup>1</sup> At last, Paul concluded, everything is permissible, even if it is not beneficial.<sup>2</sup>

Free of guilt and condemnation! Free to listen to God's Spirit! Free to grow up in Christ rather than being watched and criticized by the Pharisees. Instead of responding to God out of fear of not being righteous enough, we are free to respond to God out of love and receive the righteousness of Christ.

It is imperative we submit to the conviction of the Holy Spirit. Failure to surrender can lead to the unpardonable sin.<sup>3</sup> Paul wrote, "**If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.**"<sup>4</sup> In fact, failure to surrender will ultimately lead you into total rebellion against God! Do not forget, when the Holy Spirit speaks to you, He speaks with the authority of God. To refuse Him is to refuse God.

I pray this study has given you new insight into the topic of "What changed at the cross?" Ultimately, we may not understand all this topic entails, but we are in

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1 Romans 8:2; 2 Corinthians 3:6

2 1 Corinthians 6:12

3 Matthew 12:31

4 Hebrews 10:26-27, italics mine

communion with our Lord and Savior when we say, “**I desire to do your will, my God; your law is within my heart.**”<sup>1</sup>

This is the attitude that pleases God, because the last unilateral covenant will be this: “**This is the covenant I will establish with the [new] people of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.**”<sup>2</sup>

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1 Psalm 40:8

2 Hebrews 8:10, insertion mine

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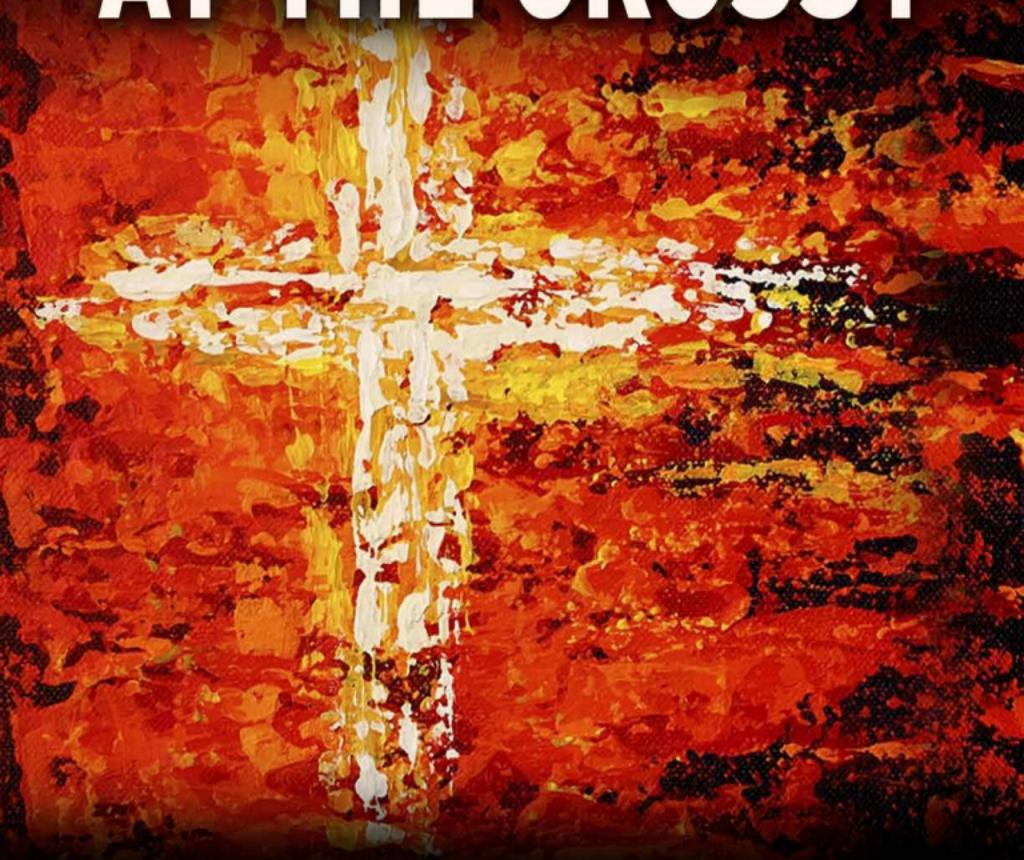
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